



REENTRY In Brief

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A product of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council

The Issue

Each year, more than 700,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons.¹ Another 9 million cycle through local jails.² When reentry fails, the costs—both societal and economic—are high. Statistics indicate that more than two-thirds of state prisoners are rearrested within 3 years of their release and half are reincarcerated.³ High rates of recidivism mean more crime, more victims and more pressure on an already overburdened criminal justice system.

The costs of imprisonment and jail also wreak havoc on state and municipal budgets. In the past 20 years state, spending on corrections has grown at a faster rate than nearly any other state budget item. The U.S. now spends more than \$68 billion on federal, state and local corrections.⁴ Because reentry intersects with issues such as health and housing, education and employment, family, faith, and community well being, many federal agencies are focusing on the reentry population with initiatives that aim to improve outcomes in each of these areas.

The Facts

- Reentry is a public safety issue. Nearly 2.3 million people are incarcerated in federal, state and local prisons at any given time. More than 95 percent of these individuals will be released back to their home communities.⁵ Failure on probation and parole is a key driver of prison admissions in many states; parole failure alone accounts for about one-third of new prison admissions each year.⁶ With the high rates of recidivism noted above, evidence-based reentry strategies provide a major opportunity to increase public safety and reduce victimization.
- Reentry is a public health issue. Individuals released from prisons and jails represent a substantial share of the U.S. population carrying communicable diseases, accounting for nearly a quarter of the general population living with HIV or AIDS, almost a third of those with hepatitis C, and nearly 40 percent of people with tuberculosis.⁷ Appropriate interventions – especially upon return to the community – present a significant public health opportunity.
- Reentry is an employment issue. Being employed is an important predictor of a former prisoner's ability to stay crime free. While 2 out of every 3 men were employed before they were incarcerated, incarceration reduces their economic prospects substantially. A recent report from the Pew Charitable Trusts found that incarceration reduces annual employment by more than two months and reduces yearly earnings by 40 percent.⁸
- Reentry is a housing issue. A reciprocal relationship exists between incarceration and homelessness. Homelessness is associated with a higher risk for incarceration, and

incarceration contributes to an increased risk of homelessness. A summary of studies on the homeless population showed that, on average, 18% had served time behind bars, with some studies showing a prior incarceration rate of almost 50%.⁹

- Reentry is an education issue. Of the 20 fastest growing occupations, 13 require postsecondary education, with those occupations requiring an associate degree growing the fastest.¹⁰ Yet almost twice as many adult prisoners (37%) had less than a high school diploma (or its recognized equivalent), when compared to the general population (19%).¹¹ Only 22% of adult prisoners have had any postsecondary experience, compared to over half (51%) of the general population.¹²
- Reentry is a behavioral health issue. Approximately two thirds of people in prison meet criteria for substance abuse or dependence, but less than 15 percent of these individuals receive treatment after admission.¹³ 24 percent of individuals in State prisons have a recent history of mental illness, but only 34 percent of inmates with mental health problems report receiving any treatment after admission.¹⁴ This lack of needed behavioral health treatment continues and actually gets worse as individuals reenter the community.¹⁵ The lack of community treatment capacity is reflected by the reality that, in some large cities, jails house more people with mental illness than local hospitals.
- Reentry is a juvenile justice issue. About 100,000 juveniles are released from custody facilities each year. Youth often return to struggling families and disadvantaged neighborhoods. More than half of these youth have not completed the eighth grade and 66% do not return to school after release. Juvenile recidivism rates are estimated at about 50% to 70%.¹⁶
- Reentry is a veterans issue. More than 200,000 veterans are incarcerated in the nation's prisons and jails. Among state prisoners, veterans had less extensive criminal histories than nonveterans (30% of veterans were first-time offenders, compared to 23% of other state prisoners).¹⁷ Access to health care, including mental health care, for newly released inmates is an important factor in keeping people from becoming homeless or returning to prison and jail.
- Reentry is an Indian Country issue. American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people are incarcerated at higher rates than the general population; at midyear 2009, tribal, federal, and state prison or jail authorities held 932 AI/AN individuals per 100,000 AI/AN residents—25% higher than the overall national incarceration rate of 747 per 100,000 people.¹⁸ In addition, Indian Country unemployment rates average 49 percent¹⁹ with a high of up to 80 percent,²⁰ depending on the reservation. High unemployment compounded with a lack affordable and adequate housing magnifies challenges for returning individuals due to their criminal history.

- Reentry is a family/fatherhood issue. On any given day, one in 28 children has a parent behind bars. Communities of color are most broadly impacted; 1 in 9 African American children has a parent incarcerated.²¹ One recent study estimates that 25% of African Americans born after 1990 will witness their father being sent to prison by their 14th birthday.²² Studies show that children of incarcerated parents often struggle with anxiety, depression, learning problems, and aggression – undermining their own chances to succeed.
- Reentry is a community issue. A large number of prisoners come from – and return to – a relatively small number of already disadvantaged neighborhoods. In many neighborhoods around the country, incarceration is no longer an unusual occurrence, but a commonplace experience – especially for young men of color.

In summary, reentry issues are complex and overlapping. An effective response to reentry challenges must therefore be multifaceted and involve multiple service delivery systems working together.

About the Federal Interagency Reentry Council

Reentry is a priority for many of the Cabinet agencies in President Obama's Administration. Federal agencies are funding reentry efforts in communities all around the country, through the Second Chance Act and many other funding streams. In addition, the Administration is working across agencies to coordinate and advance efforts through a Cabinet-level Reentry Council. First convened by Attorney General Eric Holder in January 2011, the Reentry Council represents a significant federal commitment to coordinate efforts and develop effective policies to address reentry challenges. The Reentry Council includes Departments of Education Secretary Arne Duncan; Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius; Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack; Interior Secretary Ken Salazar; Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan; Labor Secretary Hilda Solis; and Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki. Members also include Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, R. Gil Kerlikowske; Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, Michael Astrue; Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, Melody Barnes; Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Jacqueline Berrien; and Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Joshua DuBois.

At the January 2011 meeting, the Council adopted a mission statement to (1) make communities safer by reducing recidivism and victimization, (2) assist those returning from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and (3) save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration. Substantial commitments were made as result of the meeting. The Council also empowered staff – now representing 18 federal Departments and agencies – to work towards a number of goals. The Council agreed to meet every 6 months, with its next meeting to occur in July.

The specific goals of the Reentry Council are:

- **To identify research and evidence-based practices**, policies, and programs that advance the Reentry Council’s mission around prisoner reentry and community safety.
- **To identify Federal policy opportunities and barriers** to improve outcomes for the reentry population.
- **To promote Federal statutory, policy, and practice changes** that focus on reducing crime and improving the well-being of formerly incarcerated individuals, their families and communities.
- **To identify and support initiatives** in the areas of education, employment, health, housing, faith, behavioral health treatment, and family and community well-being that can contribute to successful outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- **To leverage resources** across agencies that support this population in becoming productive citizens, and reducing recidivism and victimization.
- **To coordinate messaging and communications** about prisoner reentry and the Administration’s response to it.

In the short term, Reentry Council agencies are working together to:

- Leverage existing resources for reentry. They have identified key reentry investments supported by the various federal agencies. An interactive map at <http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/national-criminal-justice-initiatives-map> describes the major federal reentry initiatives and identifies active reentry grants in each state. The working group will also enhance knowledge-transfer across agencies around reentry research, both to better coordinate efforts and to ensure that the research can inform federal policies, programs and solicitations. The interagency group will also address juvenile reentry issues, which carry their own distinct opportunities and challenges.
- Remove barriers to reentry. The working group is focusing on barriers to employment and access to benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food assistance, Social Security, and others that can help stabilize this population after release. They are also addressing child support relief, to identify state and local child support collaborations with corrections, disseminate those models, and promote ways of sharing information that protect privacy and help resolve child support issues.
- Advance bullypulpit opportunities to dispel myths, clarify federal policies, and signal to the field the importance of the issue and actions that can be taken to improve outcomes. For example, the Attorney General sent a letter to every state Attorney

General, encouraging them to review the collateral consequences in their states to determine whether those that impose burdens on individuals convicted of crimes without increasing public safety should be eliminated. Leaders in other Departments are taking similar administrative actions. The working group has also developed a set of “Reentry MythBusters” to clarify federal policy on a number of issues, such as access to public housing and federal benefits, federal bonding for employers, parental rights, and many others. These materials are available at <http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council-meeting>, and more will be available soon.

***For More Information**

Reentry Council website

<http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council-meeting>

The National Reentry Resource Center

www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org

Transition from Prison and Jail to the Community Initiative (NIC)

<http://nicic.gov/TPJC>

Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (DOL)

www.doleta.gov/RExO/

Incarceration and Reentry (HHS)

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/11/Incarceration&Reentry/>

Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA)

<http://media.csosa.gov>

*** Additional federal reentry-related websites will be coming on-line soon.**

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- ⁸ The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010. *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*. Washington, DC.
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- ¹¹ 41% of the adult prison population has a high school diploma, GED, or high school equivalency as their highest level of educational attainment (compared to 31% in the general population).
- ¹² 2007 U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics: [Literacy Behind Bars: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy Prison Survey](http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/2007/2007_national_assessment_of_adult_literacy_prison_survey).
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