

Emerging Solutions to Help Reduce Recidivism



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Introduction

The U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country in the world. There are more than 2.4 million incarcerated Americans, one in every 100 adults. In addition, more than 7 million adults, one in every 31 adults, are under federal, state or local correctional control.

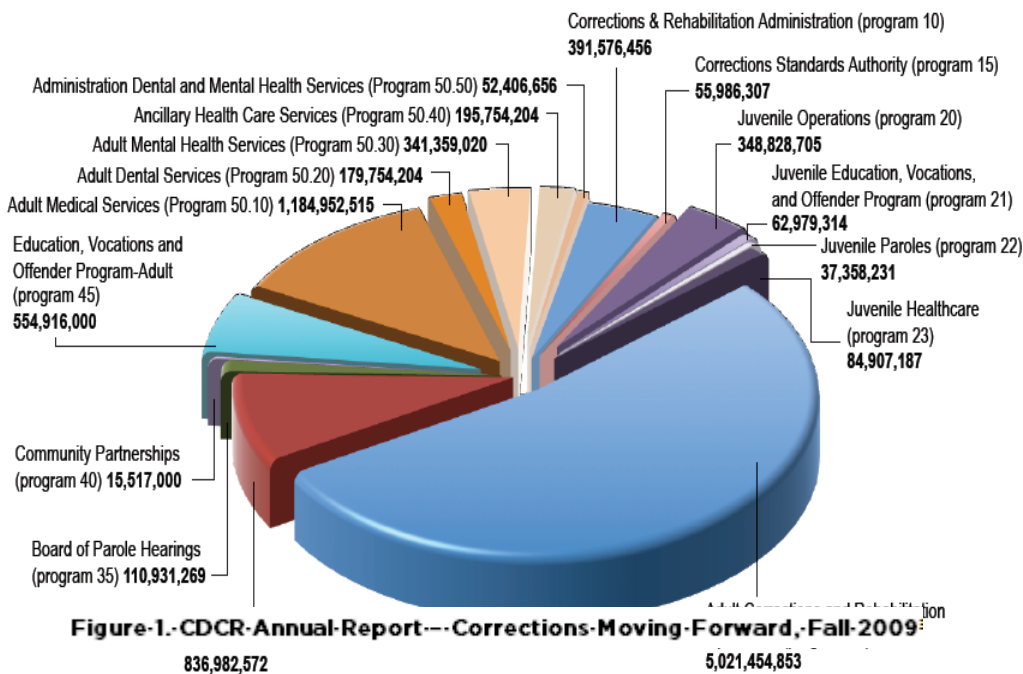
Now more than ever, the United States faces a great challenge in dealing with the booming correctional population. The problem is frustrating for many states, where the bulk of their budgets goes to corrections. In the past three decades, the population in correctional facilities has ballooned across the United States, fueled by tougher state and federal sentencing laws as well as stricter release laws.

The steady growth in the prison population has taken a heavy toll on several fronts. Increased incarceration has had a profound societal effect, particularly on minority communities. Data and analyses also show that economic prospects for prisoners—and the families they support—and

are dim if prompt assistance and planning are not provided when they are released.

2009-10 Budget and Non-Budget Act (Totals)

Total \$9.5 billion



In some areas, prisons are overcrowded, making living and security conditions increasingly difficult to maintain. For states struggling with budget deficits, prisons and jails are too costly. States have to feed, care and supervise each inmate. All of these services are expensive. The average daily cost of taking care of a prison inmate is \$79¹. In good economic

times, corrections – and everything that comes with it - take a huge bite out of state budgets. In an economic downturn, corrections can literally be a financial ball and chain. States spend more on corrections than any other expenditure. For instance, the state of California has allocated \$9.5 billion to maintain its Department of Corrections program. Today, states are seeking alternatives to expensive incarceration and reviewing programs to reduce recidivism. States such as Kansas, Michigan, Texas and California are exploring innovative programs that include transitional plans, mentoring, technology and postsecondary correctional education programs.

Jail Time Adds Up in Dollars

States have spent an estimated \$47 billion of general funds on corrections, an increase of 303 percent since 1988. According to the Pew Center on the States, the cost difference **between housing an inmate in a correctional facility compared to supervising him in the community is ten times more: \$79 per inmate per day – (\$29,000 per year) – compared to \$7.47 per day for parolees – (\$2,750 per year)-or \$3.42 per day for probationers-\$1,250 per year.**ⁱⁱ

There is increasing pressure for states to trim spending on corrections. Some states have repealed legislation on stiff mandatory sentences. For example, New York has repealed most mandatory minimum terms for drug offenses and Michigan has reduced the number of inmates who serve more than 100 percent of their minimum sentences. With more offenders returning to society, public safety and recidivism are major concerns. Without the right support and services in place, many parolees and probationers go through a revolving door back to prison. And that is equally expensive.

In his report, *What Works: Effective Recidivism Reduction and Risk-Focused Prevention Programs*, Roger Przybylski observed that Colorado's correctional costs climbed because of repeat offending and repeat imprisonment. Colorado is no different than the rest of the country.

One in 31 adults are under federal state or local correctional control.

“High rates of recidivism are a principal reason why Colorado's prison population and correctional costs are rising. A sizeable percentage of inmates released from prison today—as many as 49 out of every 100 – will be back behind bars within three years. Among adult probationers, about 20% fail due to technical violations and many of these eventually are

resentenced to prison. Of the adults who successfully complete probation, 8% commit a new crime within one year. Breaking this cycle of repeat offending is an essential first step in curbing correctional costs.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Nationwide, more than 800,000 inmates are released annually from jails and prisons back into their communities. The time period immediately following release from prison is considered the most crucial. Offenders returning to their communities face numerous challenges including unemployment, lack of health insurance, limited job skills and a history of drug and alcohol dependency. Other barriers for former inmates include reuniting with their families, finding adequate housing, obtaining their GED, and gaining access to other social service programs.

University of Washington sociologists Bruce Western and Becky Pettit have also found that “incarceration carries significant and enduring economic repercussions for the remainder of the person's working years. Former inmates work fewer weeks each year, earns less money and have limited upward mobility. These costs are borne by the offenders' families and communities, and they reverberate across generations.”^{iv} However, Western and Pettit note that returning offenders are more likely to be able to pay restitution to their victims, support their children and avoid crime if they find and keep employment.

For those former inmates who lack job skills and education, finding a job is difficult. Some released inmates face literacy challenges and are in need of structured programs and employment assistance so they do not return to criminal activities for income. “Given what the economy is now, it’s tough for anyone who is highly educated to get a job, let alone someone who cannot read or write. Some of them have been in prison half of their lives and they do not have the skills to get a job,” said Bernadine Martin, executive director of Allied Fellowship Services, a community-based organization (CBO) with more than three decades of experience in Oakland, California.

In fact, states are turning to alternative programs and community corrections to break the cycle and help inmates reenter their communities successfully.^v Some examples include:

- Missouri has increased funding available to local agencies and nonprofit organizations to support inmate reentry.
- Michigan has launched an initiative to reduce its recidivism rate by better preparing inmates for release. Correction officers tailor reentry plans that may include family reunification counseling, housing placement, mentors and substance abuse treatment.
- Connecticut has expanded its reentry furlough programs to provide support and aftercare services to released individuals.
- Texas legislation has required its Department of Criminal Justice to establish a reentry plan that includes needs assessment, transitional programs and sharing of information between agencies and private providers.

Alternative programs include post-release community supervision, mandatory drug counseling and drug courts, which handled non-violent substance abuse cases, as well as innovative technology to help monitor parolees and probationers. They are all far less expensive than correctional facilities and may prove to be just as effective as jail time.

In his 2007 report, *Evidence-based Practice to Reduce Recidivism*, for the Crime and Justice Institute in partnership with the National Institute of Corrections, Judge Roger K. Warren wrote, “Well-implemented rehabilitation and treatment programs carefully targeted with the assistance of validated risk/needs-assessment tools at the right offenders can reduce recidivism by 10 percent to 20 percent.”^{vi} Figure 2 shows programs implemented by states that have been known to reduce recidivism rates.

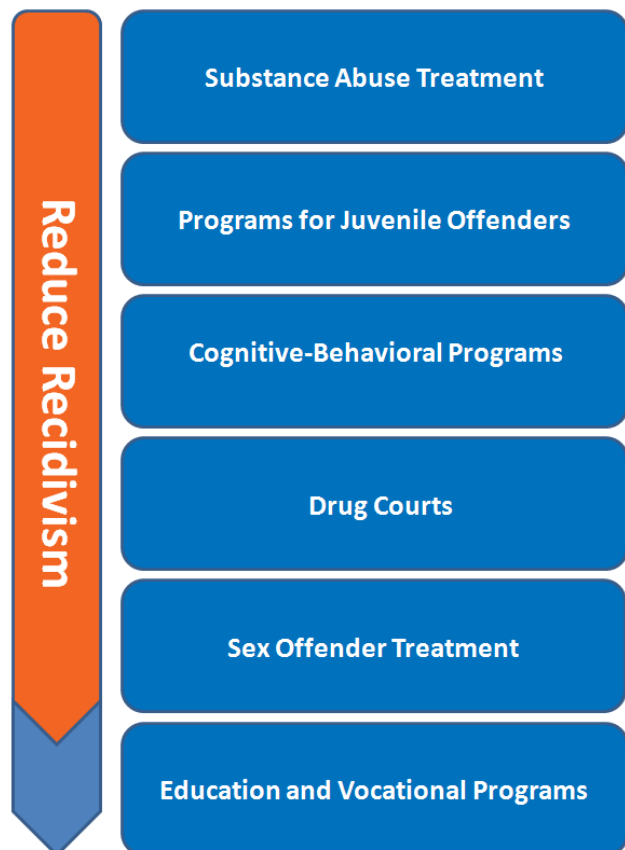


Figure 2. Programs that Reduces Recidivism

What Works and Why

Research has demonstrated that rehabilitation programs work when they take into consideration the risks and needs of parolees and probationers including healthcare, housing, education or vocational training, mental health services, substance abuse counseling and other social services. Some parolees need very basic items such as driver's license or even a copy of their social security card for employment.

The continuity of care and supervision for former inmates is crucial to reduce recidivism. According to Przybylski, "There must be a match between the treatment approach, staff characteristics and the learning style and personality of the offender. Programs must take into account and be responsive to the motivation, cognitive ability, age, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics of the offender."^{vii}

Reducing recidivism ultimately saves money for states and taxpayers. In Ohio, University of Akron researchers examined community corrections programs and found they were less expensive and maybe even more effective in preventing recidivism than incarceration. Among the findings:^{viii}

- The state of Ohio saves anywhere between \$2,000 and \$11,000 per person by using community corrections instead of prison.
- Inmates in community-based correctional programs generally stay under the control of the state for shorter periods than those in prisons and jails.
- There was a reduction in recidivism or re-incarceration for those in community-based correctional programs than for prison inmates.

Additionally, economists at the Washington State Institute for Public Policy for the Washington Department of Corrections have found that evidence-based programs could save states and taxpayers roughly \$1.9 billion by reducing recidivism and other criminal justice system costs.

Alternative programs, however, require correctional facilities and their officers to have the right tools to reduce recidivism. They must also be able to work in tandem with community-based organizations as well as internal and external partners to provide parolees and probationers necessary services even in light of budget deficits. Such collaboration is crucial in order for all parties to provide wraparound services, which have become increasingly critical to preventing recidivism.

In an interview with *What Works in Community Corrections* newsletter, published by the Pew Center on the States, Dr. Joan Petersilia, a professor at University of California in Irvine, noted, "Every agency, including probation and parole, recognizes that reducing criminal behavior is incredibly difficult and no one agency can do it alone. More and more, I see wraparound

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-Dr. Joan Petersilia, UC Irvine

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In California, for example, corrections officers have teamed up with CBOs to arrange mandatory meetings for recently released parolees. For example, every week, about 40 to 50 parolees in Alameda County, California attend these meetings with CBO staff members to learn about what services they provide. The mandatory meetings and immediate access to CBOs eliminate the sense of free-fall, which many inmates encounter once they leave prison. The CBO programs also provide inmates structure after their release to help prevent them from falling back into their former routine prior to incarceration.

Unfortunately, many the past, CBOs would correctional facilities. However, many CBOs meetings at correctional shortfalls. Instead, the parolee and corrections their parole help them find services.

“Discharge planners say they strive for “Exit upon Entry”, the strategy in which they prepare for an inmate’s release as soon as he enters the correctional facility.”

CBOs cannot do more. In meet inmates at the before they were released. have trimmed these facilities because of funding inmates have to rely on teams (PACT) meetings and agents/probation officers to

Corrections officials ensure that inmates are the right CBOs when

increasingly turning to technology to help supervise parolees and probationers to assess their risks and needs before they are released. Probation officers and parole agents can now supervise offenders with electronic monitoring devices equipped with Global Positioning Satellite technology. They can also require drug offenders to take random alcohol breathalyzer and drug tests. And they can use software solutions to assess the risks and needs of inmates before their reentry into communities.

recognize the need to matched and then linked to they are released. They are

Bigger workloads and smaller workforces have increased the burden on corrections, particularly for those who assess inmates and connect them with CBOs for successful reentry into society. The average parole agent handles approximately 70 offenders. The average probation officer has nearly 100. Some probation officers have additional responsibilities and are tasked with providing assistance to recently incarcerated inmates who need to be screened and assessed. That can add an additional 25 inmates to their workload daily. For many officers, a difficult job has become even more so because of increased caseloads.

Most parole agents and probation officers rely on antiquated systems to manually keep track of eligibility requirements, where CBOs are located and whether organizations have the bandwidth to take on more participants. Some CBOs have restrictions. Allied Fellowship in Oakland, for example, cannot accept sex offenders because the organization is near an elementary school which would violate California's Jessica's Law, prohibiting sex offenders from residing within 2,000ft of a K-12 school. Discharge planners also have to be mindful of parole/probation requirements. Some inmates may have curfews or may be restricted from certain locations. If they attend night classes at a CBO for instance, they may violate the terms of their probation.

Discharge planners say they strive for “Exit upon Entry,” the strategy in which they prepare for inmates' release as soon as they enter the correctional facility. In the best-case scenario, correctional facilities assess all inmates for risks and needs. Corrections officials then match

them up with appropriate CBOs and coordinate their schedules and appointments while they are still incarcerated.

However, the “Exit upon Entry” strategy takes more time and effort than discharge planners can often spare even though such programs can reduce recidivism. Discharge planners not only profile inmates for risks and needs, they research and evaluate each CBO to determine which one might be able to provide support and services. They then contact the CBOs to determine whether there is a fit and whether they are able to provide assistance to the inmates. The discharge planners also set up appointments for the offenders. After inmates are released, discharge planners/case managers then monitor and supervise him to make sure he is following his discharge plan. Probation officers say most inmates have immediate basic needs such as finding permanent housing, which is required to fulfill the terms of their probation.

Solutions Addressing the Revolving Door: Michigan, Texas and California

Programs and solutions in Michigan, Texas and California have already demonstrated promising results to curb recidivism. The primary goal for Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI) is to promote public safety by successfully transitioning prisoners back into their community. Relying on the cooperation and collaboration of state agencies and community organizations, MPRI sets clear expectations for its parolees and holds them accountable for their behavior. It also sets expectations for participating agencies, which collaborate on employment assistance, housing and healthcare.

The state creates a specific re-entry plan for each inmate and matches them to mentors, who range from business leaders, clergy and even law enforcement officers. There has been clear success in Michigan. In its first two years, nearly 500 fewer people returned to prison because of MPRI. The initiative has decreased the rate of parolees going back to prison from 55 percent to 38 percent. Compared that to national figures, where nearly 70% of all offenders are re-arrested within three years of release, and 50 percent return to prison over the same period, according to the Justice Department.^x

Investing in educational programs for prisoners can also save states money. In Texas, corrections officials are reviewing post-secondary education programs for their inmates to reduce recidivism. Data collected by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice show that Texas prisoners who earn an associate’s degree while incarcerated return to prison at a rate of 27 percent, compared to a 43 percent recidivism rate for the state prison system as a whole.

In 2004, the state of Texas spent \$2.4 billion on corrections, averaging \$14,300 per prisoner. However, the state’s postsecondary correctional education program cost just under \$4 million, at a cost of \$382 per prisoner, according to the Windham School District 2004, which operates within the Texas prison system.^{xi}

California released the 2009 Annual Report of the Office of Substance Abuse Treatment Services (formerly the Division of Addiction and Recovery Service) which includes return-to-custody data on offenders who paroled in fiscal year 2005-06 for a one and two-year period. The return to custody rate after one year for offenders completing both in-prison and community-based treatment in FY 2005-06 was 22 percent compared to 40 percent for all offenders. The return to custody rate after two years for offenders completing both in-prison and community-based treatment in FY 2005-06 was 35 percent compared to 54 percent for all offenders.

States and private companies that handle corrections are also turning more often to technology for assistance in coordinating reentry plans for prisoners. Software, extended databases and online portals can help discharge officers keep their workloads manageable so they can keep track of former prisoners. For example, in California, the Ramsell Correctional Application (RCA), a new web-based solution created by Ramsell, is designed specifically to help discharge planners before and after an inmate is released.

RCA provides discharge planners a cost-effective technology, which seamlessly transitions an inmate from prison to release by matching each inmate with resources tailored to their specific needs and effectively coordinates discharge with CBOs. It also allows discharge planners to supervise and monitor parolees and probationers after their release. There is continuity of care from the time inmates enter the prison to the time they are released back into society. The exchange of information eliminates duplicate care and creates a more efficient coordination system and helps to reduce recidivism.

In cases where a risk and needs assessment has not been completed, the RCA program walks a discharge planner through a series of questions about the inmate. Once an inmate has been profiled, RCA provides the discharge planner with appropriate programs and services that match the inmate's needs.

Discharge planners can also use RCA to determine if a community-based organization and its program matches an inmate before making a referral. By using RCA, discharge planners assess the inmate's needs long before release. When inmates are released, they will receive a printout listing all of the available programs with specific instructions, detailing when to report, where the programs are located as well as what documents that they need to bring.

Program plans often change for offenders after they are released and their parole agents or probation officers spend an enormous amount of time identifying alternative program resources. This is often done on short notice and sometimes on an emergency basis. RCA can assist corrections with this process as soon as they are made aware of the problem. Instead of parole agents/probation officers/case managers making numerous phone calls or going through countless resource program material, they can log into RCA, answer a few questions and immediately be given a program that matches the parolee's needs.

The ability to track probationers would be particularly helpful for officers who already have heavy loads. The technology enables them to have their own updated resource directory. This efficiency gives parole agents, probation officers and case managers more time to spend on other tasks related to supervising the offender. The automated workflow minimizes the administrative burden for corrections. Additionally, RCA can immediately inform case managers if an offender fails to attend a program as instructed. With this notification feature, a case manager can immediately respond to determine if there is a problem.

Additionally RCA offers the following advantages for corrections:

- Expands access to a network of available services and resources
- Reduces county and state costs by coordinating across all available community programs
- Helps promote public safety by allowing correctional officers to closely monitor parolees
- Cross references locations of participants to determine geographical needs and services
- Measures identified program outcomes
- Integrates with existing IT infrastructure or additional software applications

Conclusion – Simple Solutions to Reduce Recidivism and Costs

Clearly, states need to look beyond locking people up so that the public feels safe. There are viable, successful alternatives to incarceration. States must explore these less costly, but effective solutions and allow these initiatives to work so that recidivism and costs are ultimately reduced.

As demonstrated in Michigan and Texas, former inmates can, indeed, find jobs to pay restitution back to their victims and make a living for themselves and their families; they can also attend school while in prison and lower the chances of returning to prison.

With the help of technology, corrections officials can collaborate with CBOs and coordinate assistance and services – ranging from housing and vocational training to drug counseling –for inmates while they are still incarcerated and even after they are released. Case managers can even monitor whether they are attending programs to determine whether an alternative plan is needed.

As states pull back on corrections spending, public safety remains a key issue. But building prisons is not the answer. Alternative programs provide immediate assistance to corrections officials, keep the public safe and reduce recidivism, which, in turn, lower state spending on corrections.

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