

Re-Entry Statistics

General

- Each year, nearly 650,000 people are released from U.S. prisons, and over 7 million are released from jails.^{1, 2}
- Approximately 2 out of every 3 people released from prison in the US are re-arrested within 3 years of their release.³
- The number of people released from prison has increased 350 percent over the last 20 years.⁴
- People released from prison return to just a few communities that are particularly ill-equipped to receive them. In Chicago, only 24 percent of identified organizations that provide services to re-entering individuals were located in any of the six communities to which the highest numbers of people returned from prison in 2001. No services were located in two of those six neighborhoods.⁵

Corrections

- American taxpayers went from spending approximately \$9 billion a year on corrections in 1982 to \$60 billion in 2002.⁶
- About 1 in 32 adults in this country was in jail or prison, or on parole or probation, in 2002.⁷
- In Connecticut, almost half of the prison and jail population is from just a handful of neighborhoods in five cities, which have the most concentrated levels of poverty and nonwhite populations in the state.⁸
- In California in 2000, returns to prison for technical violations of parole accounted for 57 percent of total admissions, up from 11 percent in 1980.⁹
- Fewer than half of all state corrections agencies have one or more program planners on staff.¹⁰ In 2001, there were 1,899 caseworkers for the 1.4 million individuals in prison.¹¹
- If other nonclinical, nonsecurity staff, such as social workers, are included in this figure, the counts broaden to just under 10,000—still translating to only one staff member for every 685 prisoners.¹²
- Availability, rather than a needs assessment, often guides program placement, even though the research community has widely adopted the idea that “appropriate” treatment—services that target needs and are administered correctly—is more effective than “any” treatment.¹³
- An analysis of treatment effectiveness in 154 controlled studies revealed that programs that delivered appropriate treatment had the largest reduction in recidivism rates (30 percent), compared to programs that delivered inappropriate

treatment, which actually increased the recidivism rate of participants by six percent.¹⁴

Public Safety / Law Enforcement

- About 1 out of 5 prisoners is released from prison without community supervision.¹⁵
- In 1976, 65 percent of released prisoners were released by a discretionary authority, such as a parole board.¹⁶ By 2002, 16 states had abolished the discretionary parole function altogether.¹⁷
- In Massachusetts, only about 25 percent of people released from state prisons in 1999 were supervised by the paroling agency; 58 percent completed their sentences while incarcerated.¹⁸
- Analysis of high-risk probation caseloads in neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York, found that 218 high-risk probationers in a single police precinct were spread across 43 probation officers, even though the average caseload for probation officers was 76 probationers, and three officers could have covered all 218 cases.¹⁹
- The Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole (“the Board”) issues people under supervision color-coded cards (coded by type of crime) with special instructions on the back. Individuals must present the card to officers when they are stopped or questioned, and officers download all such contacts at the end of their shifts. The supervising corrections officer is notified when someone on the caseload has been in contact with the police. All offenders under supervision are also mapped by the Police Department and the information is shared with the Board. By 2003, a 44 percent recidivism rate reduction was obtained from the targeted group.

Community Corrections

- In the 1970s, the average parole officer supervised a caseload of 45 parolees. Today, most officers are responsible for about 70 parolees—about twice as many as is considered an ideal caseload.
- Caseloads for probation officers approach 200 people per officer in many large urban areas.²⁰ In Los Angeles County, probation officers supervising felons, many of whom have been recently released from jail, typically have caseloads of 300 people; caseloads of officers supervising less serious offenders can reach 1,000.
- The overwhelming workloads of community corrections officers translates into a minimal level of supervision: the vast majority of probationers and parolees are supervised on “regular” caseloads, meaning that they each meet with a community corrections officer, on average, for 15 minutes, once or twice a month.
- In 1984, 70 percent of parolees successfully completed their parole term. By 2002, that number had dropped to 45 percent. Put another way, in 2002, 45 percent of parolees—more than 200,000 individuals—returned to prison for parole violations or for committing new crimes. Of the parole violators returning to prison, only one-third return for committing a new crime—the remainder return for a technical parole violation.²¹

- Nine percent of parolees—more than 40,000—are classified as on “abscond” status at any given time, meaning they cannot be found and have lost contact with their parole officers.²²
- In California, a study found significant gaps between the needs of parolees released in the state and available services: there are only 200 shelter beds for more than 10,000 homeless parolees, 4 mental health clinics for 18,000 psychiatric cases, and 750 treatment beds for 85,000 released substance abusers.
- Assessment instruments can effectively guide decisions about the level of supervision to assign to an individual by identifying risks such as drug and alcohol abuse and gang involvement that, if addressed adequately, can reduce recidivism.²³
- Both theoretical and empirical research suggest that the explicit communication of rules and the consequences of adhering to or breaking those rules—including the certainty that sanctions will be applied—shows promise in reducing criminal behavior among probationers and parolees.²⁴

Substance Abuse

- Eighty percent of state prisoners report a history of drug or alcohol use.²⁵ In fact, more than half (55 percent) of state prisoners report using drugs or alcohol during the commission of the crime that resulted in their incarceration.
- Two-thirds of convicted jail inmates were “actively involved in drugs” prior to their admission, and 36 percent were using drugs or alcohol at the time of their offense.²⁶
- Today, the percentage of people released from prison following a conviction for a drug offense is twenty percent higher than it was in 1984, totaling about one-third of all released prisoners.²⁷
- Nationally, only ten percent of state prisoners in 1997 reported receiving formal substance abuse treatment during their incarceration, down from 25 percent in 1991.²⁸
- Only three percent of jail inmates participate in formal treatment while incarcerated.²⁹
- Inmates who participate in residential treatment programs while incarcerated have 9 to 18 percent lower recidivism rates and 15 to 35 percent lower drug relapse rates than their counterparts who receive no treatment in prison.³⁰
- In-prison drug treatment has been associated with positive outcomes, including reduced use of injection drugs, fewer hospital stays for drug and alcohol problems, and decreased recidivism rates.³¹ The most successful outcomes are found for those who participate in both in-prison treatment and postrelease treatment in the community.³²
- A study conducted in California reported that treating offenders for \$209 million saved taxpayers more than \$1.5 billion 18 months later, with the largest savings due to reductions in crime.³³ The study estimated that for every \$1 spent on treatment, approximately \$7 could be gained in future savings.

Mental Health

- An estimated 8 to 16 percent of the prison population and 10 percent of the jail population has at least one identified serious mental disorder and is in need of treatment.^{34, 35}
- The incidence of serious mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder, is two to four times higher among prisoners than it is among those in the general population.³⁶
- Among prisoners with serious mental disorders, over 70 percent also have a substance abuse problem.³⁷
- Whereas people with mental illnesses are no more likely to be violent than people in the general population, untreated mental illness (or mental illness and a co-occurring substance abuse disorder) is a strong predictor of recidivism.³⁸
- People in prison who have a mental illness, in comparison to the general population, tend to have longer criminal histories involving violent offenses and are more likely to have histories of homelessness and sexual and physical abuse.³⁹
- Sixty percent of state prisoners with mental illness have received some form of mental health treatment while in prison.⁴⁰ Of these, half reported taking prescription medication and 44 percent reported receiving counseling services.
- A national survey of parole administrators found that less than one quarter of respondents indicated that they provide special programs for parolees with mental illness.⁴¹

Education/Vocational Training/Employment

- The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that only 46 percent of incarcerated individuals have a high school diploma or its equivalent, as compared to 82 percent of men aged 18 to 34.^{42,43}
- Significantly, one in six jail inmates reports that he or she dropped out of school because he or she was convicted of a crime, was sent to a correctional facility, or was involved in illegal activities.⁴⁴
- About two-thirds of people in prison and jail were employed—either full- or part-time—during the month before they were arrested for their current offense.⁴⁵
- Nearly half of those leaving jail were earning less than \$600 per month immediately prior to their incarceration.⁴⁶
- Just over half of all state prisoners participate in educational programs at some point during their incarceration, a proportion that has been decreasing over time.⁴⁷ About one-third of prisoners participate in vocational programs at some point during their incarceration.
- Vocational program availability is very limited for jail inmates, with only five percent of jail jurisdictions offering vocational training. Many jail jurisdictions (33 percent) offer no educational or vocational training at all.⁴⁸
- Incarcerated parents owe average of more than \$20,000 when they are released from prison.⁴⁹
- Recent studies have found that participation in prison education, job training, and placement programs is associated with improved outcomes, including reduced recidivism.⁵⁰

- Recidivism rates of participants in prison education, vocation, and work programs have been found to be 20 to 60 percent lower than those of nonparticipants.⁵¹
- Participants in work programs are more likely to be employed following release and have higher earnings than nonparticipants.⁵²

Housing

- More than 10 percent of those coming in and out of prisons and jail are homeless in the months before and after their incarceration.⁵³ For those with mental illness, the rates are even higher—about 20 percent.⁵⁴
- A California study, for example, reported that while 10 percent of the state’s parolees were homeless, an estimated 30 to 50 percent of parolees in metropolitan areas such as San Francisco and Los Angeles were homeless.⁵⁵
- 49 percent of homeless adults have reportedly spent five or more days in a city or county jail over their lifetimes, and 18 percent have been incarcerated in a state or federal prison.⁵⁶
- Recent studies in New York City reveal that more than 30 percent of single adults entering shelters under the Department of Homeless Services are persons recently released from city and state correctional institutions. Many of these individuals are those that continually cycle between incarceration and shelters.⁵⁷
- Shelter use, both before incarceration and after release, is associated with an increased risk of return to prison: in a study of 50,000 individuals who were released from New York State prisons and returned to New York City between 1995 and 1998, risk of re-incarceration increased 23 percent with pre-release shelter stay, and 17 percent with post-release shelter stay.
- A qualitative study by the Vera Institute of Justice found that parolees who entered homeless shelters in New York City after leaving state prisons were seven times more likely to abscond during the first month after release than those who had some form of housing.⁵⁸

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