

Reducing recidivism and preventing drug overdoses by improving health care for people leaving prisons and jails

Addressing people's underlying health needs will increase their chances of success when they re-enter the community.

Challenge

People who have recently been released from correctional settings are up to 40 times more likely to die from an opioid overdose than other Minnesotans.

Many people also become homeless when they leave correctional facilities. In 2021, almost 20% of inmates released from Minnesota correctional facilities experienced homelessness. More than half were Black, Indigenous or People of Color.

Under federal policy, Minnesota suspends Medical Assistance coverage for eligible people who are incarcerated, and their health care becomes the responsibility of correctional facilities or jails. Eligible inmates can experience gaps in health care coverage upon release. Inconsistent access to care can have grave consequences, particularly for people with mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

Temporary funding for Minnesota's successful Bridging Benefits project will soon end. The project links people at high risk of recidivism with cash, emergency aid, food and housing as they reenter the community.

Proposal

Transformative strategies will support Minnesotans to reenter the community successfully after incarceration and help to ensure public safety, racial justice and equitable behavioral health outcomes.

The state will begin a Medicaid demonstration project that will cover physical and behavioral health services in prisons and jails in the 90 days before a person reenters the community.

Ongoing funding will build on the success of Bridging Benefits.

If the Legislature approves, the state will seek a Medicaid demonstration waiver to provide health care services to people who are preparing to reenter the community. The first phase of the demonstration will take place in three state correctional facilities and seven local facilities. Services will include care coordination, prescription drug coverage, substance use disorder assessments and treatment, mental health assessments and treatment, family planning and physical health care. The demonstration will start in January 2026, or upon federal approval.

Why It's Important

Minnesota's criminal justice system has some of the nation's largest racial disparities, particularly in juvenile detention. Improving health care transitions and addressing the social determinants of health for incarcerated people after release will support their treatment for behavioral health conditions and other needs without disruption. Addressing underlying health needs will improve the chances of success when people reenter the community after incarceration, lowering the risk of recidivism and making communities safer.

Ripple effects on families and communities

Incarceration breaks up families and creates ripple effects in communities. An estimated 13% of Minnesota youth have a parent who is or has been incarcerated. And an estimated two-thirds of adults in Minnesota jails are parents with minor children. Preventing recidivism and supporting people as they reenter the community could have generational impacts on children and families.

Building on Bridging Benefits' successful track record

In three years, Bridging Benefits reduced recidivism by 49% and homelessness by 26%. Care coordination provided through Bridging Benefits can help people establish parenting supports, family psychotherapy, housing and other supportive services. In addition to helping people access supports when they are released, the program also connects them to resources to help apply for federal disability benefits.

Improving transitions for youth experiencing trauma

Incarcerated youth have a high incidence of adverse childhood experiences and trauma. Black and Native American youth experience a disproportionate rate of incarceration. And as many as half the youth in the juvenile justice system are also involved with the child protection system. Screening incarcerated youth for physical and behavioral health needs and connecting them to care in the community will support better transitions when they leave correctional settings.

For More Information

Governor's budget page: [Reducing Recidivism and Preventing Overdoses \(PDF\)](#)