



Rethinking Rehabilitation: Improving Outcomes for Drug-Addicted Offenders in Utah

DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAMS for criminal offenders can provide significant cost savings to the criminal justice system and reduce recidivism rates. Treatment programs have also been shown to reduce overdose deaths after release from prison. One recent federal study found a five-fold return to the public on investments in drug rehabilitation programs for offenders. However, treatment programs vary widely in intensity and approach.

In *Rethinking Rehabilitation*, Utah Foundation explains efforts to address addiction within the context of the justice system in Utah and explores alternative approaches for people struggling with substance use disorders. It also sets forth policy guidance for future action. The full report is available at utahfoundation.org.



KEY FINDINGS

- Investments in drug rehabilitation for offenders can yield significant savings to taxpayers in the long run.
- In 2016, Utah's state prison population rate of 201 per 100,000 state residents was seventh lowest in the nation. However, Utah's local jail incarceration rate of 357 per 100,000 was the 15th highest in the nation.
- From 2014 (the year before Utah's criminal justice reform) to 2016 (most recent year available), Utah's prison population decreased by 12%. At the same time, the jail population increased by 6%.
- The shift from state prisons to local jails appears to be due at least in part to efforts to downgrade drug offenses from felonies to misdemeanors.
- The increasing ratio of jail inmates to state prison inmates raises concerns about drug rehabilitation. Of the 26 county jails in Utah, only 14 have substance abuse programs, and those vary in content and structure.
- The implementation of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative increased state support for substance abuse treatment centers across Utah. As a result, between 2016 to 2017 alone, there was a 21% increase in admissions to substance use treatment for criminal offenders.
- Currently, the only pre-arrest diversion programs in Utah are specifically designed for individuals with mental health disorders. In other words, there are no pre-arrest diversion programs for individuals with substance use disorders.
- Drug courts are the most commonly used post-arrest diversion tool that provide an alternative to incarceration for individuals that demonstrate a high need for substance treatment. There are drug courts in all eight judicial districts in Utah.
- There are two substance abuse treatment programs for men at Utah's state prisons and one for women, all of which use therapeutic communities – an approach shown to reduce recidivism and drug relapse.
- From 2015 to 2017, a statewide recidivism risk and mental health needs screening process implemented in county jails showed that half of inmates required further assessment for a substance use disorder. As of 2018, however, only two counties have continued to use the screening process due to a lack of funding.

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