

Breaking the Cycle: Recidivism and Reentry in Utah



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BREAKING THE CYCLE: RECIDIVISM AND REENTRY IN UTAH

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About the Utah Foundation

Since 1945, leaders, legislators, and community members have relied upon the **illuminating, independent, and nonpartisan public-policy research** produced by the Utah Foundation to support informed decision-making on topics that matter most. As a 501(c)3 with broad community support and a 60-member board, the Utah Foundation exists to empower **civic engagement as the foundation for enhanced quality of life for Utahns.**

INTRODUCTION

Policy change depends on data. Without standardized metrics and reporting, policymakers lack the insight needed to identify necessary reforms and their direction. A safe and fair criminal legal system requires a clear understanding of which policies and practices are effective.¹ Those working within the system and those striving to improve it must champion transparency and collaboration to drive meaningful change.

More than 30,000 Utahns are under some form of correctional control, from incarceration to probation and parole.² Even though Utah has one of the lowest rates of correctional control in the nation, the system still comes with a significant price tag: \$1.42 billion in state funding for fiscal year 2027 alone.³ Understanding whether that investment is working and what happens after someone leaves prison is central to building a safer and more cost-effective system.

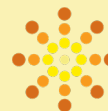
Recidivism, the tendency for someone to re-offend and end up back in prison after release, is one of the clearest ways to measure whether the criminal legal system is meeting its goals. But recidivism is tracked differently from state to state, and even Utah has used multiple definitions over time.

This report examines how Utah defines and tracks recidivism, what it costs the state, and how Utah's rates and policies compare with those of its Mountain State neighbors and leading states nationwide. It also highlights the programs, partnerships, and policy changes Utah has adopted to help people successfully reenter their communities.

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- 1 Recidiviz, "Championing Transparency and Collaboration," n.d., <https://www.recidiviz.org/public-data>.
 - 2 Prison Policy Initiative, "Punishment Beyond Prisons 2026: Incarceration and Supervision by State, Appendix," 2026, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/correctionalcontrol2026_data_appendix.html.
 - 3 Legislative Fiscal Analyst, "Budget Of The State Of Utah and Related Appropriations Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027," 2026, <https://le.utah.gov/interim/2026/pdf/00002311.pdf>.



Central Utah Correctional Facility.



KEY FINDINGS

- Utah has the lowest overall rate of people under correctional control among the Mountain States and ranks seventh-lowest nationally, at 901 per 100,000 residents.
- Utah spends more per inmate per year than most other Mountain States.
- Utah's criminal justice spending is substantial, at \$1.42 billion, which is 4.6% of the state budget.
- Utah spent an estimated \$24 million over three years on reincarceration costs for the people who left prison in 2022.
- Recidivism trends are mixed across the Mountain States, with Colorado seeing the largest decrease, Idaho and Montana among the few states nationwide where recidivism has risen rather than fallen, and Utah seeing its rate fall slightly.
- States with the largest recidivism reductions, including California, Oklahoma, Oregon, and South Carolina, share common strategies like sentencing reform, individualized risk assessments, and stronger employment support after release.
- Utah has many programs seeking to reduce recidivism, such as ongoing and new state programs, specialty courts, multi-sector collaboration, public-private partnerships, local private efforts, and a pay-for-success program.
- Utah only adopted a standardized recidivism metric in 2023 and is the only state that explicitly excludes technical parole and probation violations, making it difficult to compare rates with other states.
- Indirect social costs of incarceration, such as family instability, lost earnings, and housing disruption, may cost far more than corrections spending, justifying a focus on reducing recidivism.

TRACKING INCARCERATION

Knowing how many people are in prison and where they are located is vital to understanding who is in the criminal legal system. This is the first step toward understanding which policies could be effective in reducing recidivism rates. Understanding how many people are on probation and parole helps put pieces of this puzzle together, too.

Utah has two state prisons: one in Gunnison and one in Salt Lake City. Between the two prisons, they have the capacity to house 5,400 individuals.⁴

In the 1980s, when prison beds became short, the Utah Department of Corrections started a program to place prisoners, those with a conviction, in county jails through the Inmate Placement Program.⁵ That program is still in use today. Inmates are selected based on a variety of factors such as their security level, medical and mental health needs, crime of conviction, and gang affiliation. They can then be placed in one of the twenty county jails that help with prison overflow. As of June 2023, 1,553 men and 46 women were housed through this overflow program.⁶

4 Utah Department of Corrections, "Central Utah Correctional Facility," 2024, <https://corrections.utah.gov/central-utah-correctional-facility/>; Utah Department of Corrections, "Utah State Correctional Facility," 2024, <https://corrections.utah.gov/about-us/correctional-facilities/utah-state-correctional-facility/>.

5 Utah Department of Corrections, "Inmate Placement Program," 2024, <https://corrections.utah.gov/inmate-services/reentry-and-rehabilitation/community-correctional-centers/inmate-placement-program/>.

6 Utah Department of Corrections, "Inmate Population Profile," 2023, <https://www.utah.gov/pmn/files/991073.pdf>.

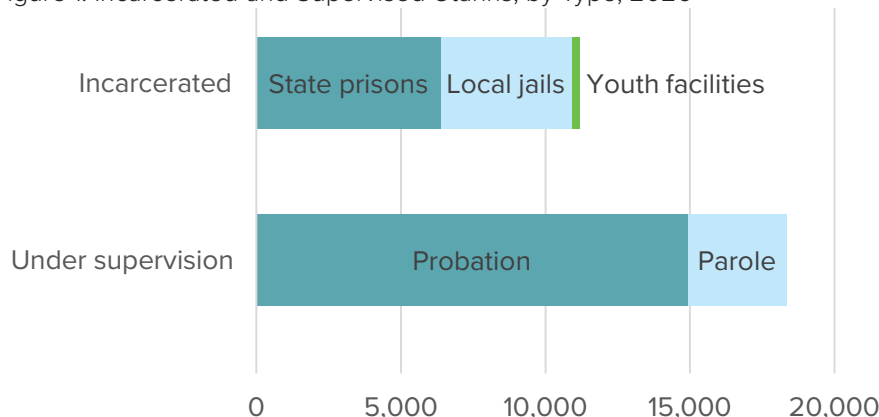


Previous Utah State Prison, Salt Lake City, 1913.

In addition, there are several thousand residents in jails and youth correctional facilities. All told, about 30,000 Utahns are under correctional control.⁷ (See Figure 1). The term “under correctional control” includes individuals in state prisons, local jails, Indian Country jails, youth facilities, and those on probation or parole.

There are over 30,000 Utahns under correctional control.

Figure 1: Incarcerated and Supervised Utahns, by Type, 2026



Source: Prison Policy Initiative.

PROBATION VS. PAROLE

Adult Probation and Parole is the division in the Utah Department of Corrections that supervises individuals who are not incarcerated and are living in the community.

Probation is a court-ordered alternative to incarceration that lets someone remain under supervision in the community rather than serving time behind bars. In some cases, the person may have already spent time in jail before being granted this arrangement. Conditions are attached to this community supervision, and its length, ranging from months to years, depends on the severity of the offense and the individual's compliance along the way.

Parole allows someone to be released from prison before finishing their full sentence, subject to certain conditions. The Utah Board of Pardons and Parole decides whether to grant this early release, typically weighing factors such as good behavior and the individual's progress while incarcerated.⁸

⁷ Prison Policy Initiative, 2023, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/correctionalcontrol2023.html>.

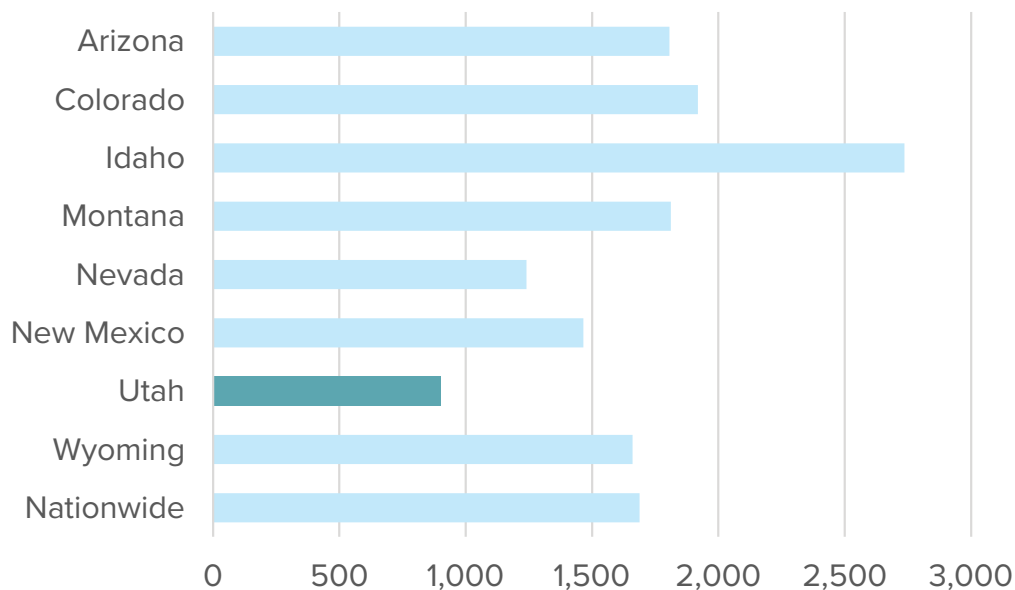
⁸ Utah Department of Corrections, “Probation and Parole,” n.d., <https://corrections.utah.gov/probation-and-parole/>.

Utah ranks seventh lowest in the nation for the rate of people under correctional control at 901 per 100,000 residents. The states with the lowest rates are, in order, New Hampshire, Maine, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont.⁹

Of the Mountain States, Utah has the lowest rate of residents under correctional control. (See Figure 2.) Idaho has the highest rate, at over three-times Utah's rate.

Utah has the lowest rate of residents under correctional control in the Mountain States.

Figure 2: Rate of People Under Correctional Control per 100,000 Residents, Mountain States, 2026



Source: Prison Policy Initiative.

9 Prison Policy Initiative, "Punishment Beyond Prisons 2026: Incarceration and Supervision by State, Appendix," 2026, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/correctionalcontrol2026_data_appendix.html.

Utah has a smaller proportion of individuals in almost every area of the criminal legal system than the other Mountain States.

Figure 3: People in the Criminal Legal System per 100,000 Residents, Mountain States and the Nation, 2026

Mountain State	Rate of People Under Correctional Control	Rate of People in State Prison	Rate of People on Probation	Rate of People on Parole
Arizona	1,806	464	1017	87
Colorado	1,919	297	1,262	149
Idaho	2,737	500	1,673	328
Montana	1,812	440	925	98
Nevada	1,240	328	500	163
New Mexico	1,466	264	781	101
Utah	901	187	437	100
Wyoming	1,660	379	876	135
Nationwide	1,688	328	922	194

Note: Rate is per 100,000 residents. To see the number of people in these four categories, see Appendix A.
Source: Prison Policy Initiative.

Of the Mountain States, Utah has the lowest rate of people in prison and on probation. The one area in which Utah does not have the lowest rate is its parole rate: 100 per 100,000. Arizona and Montana are just under Utah, and New Mexico is just over. (See Figure 3.)

THE COSTS OF INCARCERATION

Even with a lower rate of individuals under correctional control, Utah's criminal legal system is expensive. For fiscal year 2027, the Utah Legislature appropriated \$1.42 billion in an operating and capital budget for the criminal justice and public safety agencies.¹⁰ This accounts for 4.6% of the total \$31.6 billion state budget.

¹⁰ Legislative Fiscal Analyst, "Budget Of The State Of Utah and Related Appropriations Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027," 2026, <https://le.utah.gov/interim/2026/pdf/00002311.pdf>.

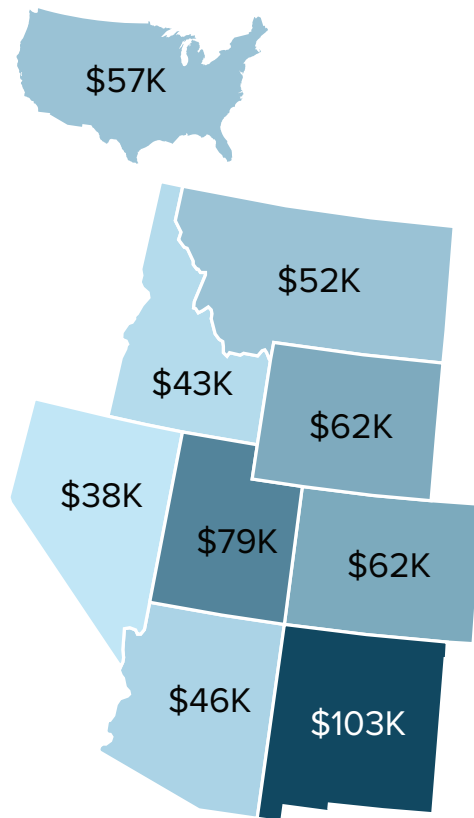
Utah spends \$78,585 per year on each prisoner.¹¹ Zooming out to the Mountain States, the average Mountain State spends much less than Utah per inmate, for a total of \$60,600 per year.¹² Only New Mexico outspends Utah in the Mountain States. (See Figure 4.)

11 USA Facts, "Massachusetts spends more than twice on each imprisoned person than does any other state," 2025, <https://usafacts.org/articles/how-much-do-states-spend-on-prisons/>.

12 Ibid.

Utah spends more than most Mountain States on per-inmate costs.

Figure 4: Incarceration Cost per Inmate, Mountain States, 2025



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics and USA Facts.

The United States spends \$115.8 billion annually on corrections.¹³ However, the true cost of incarceration is far greater when factoring in the lost economic opportunities and diminished future earnings of incarcerated individuals. Moreover, incarceration has direct and indirect social effects on children, families, and communities. These include the cost of divorce, separation, homelessness, eviction, and others.¹⁴

One estimate found that for every dollar spent on corrections, an additional ten dollars in social costs arise, bringing the total burden to an estimated one trillion dollars.¹⁵ Even if this overestimates the cost of incarceration and includes estimates that would be better classified as the costs of poverty and crime itself, it underscores the urgent need for evidence-based reforms that reduce recidivism and lessen the broader impact of incarceration on society.

TRACKING RECIDIVISM

Recidivism is a complex topic with multiple definitions and is tracked in various ways. A broad overall definition comes from the National Institute of Justice. It defines recidivism as “a person’s relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime.”¹⁶

There is no national metric for calculating recidivism rates. States often measure it by criminal acts resulting in a return to incarceration or a rearrest within a specific follow-up period after a person’s release from prison.¹⁷

Utah has used different definitions of recidivism. The Utah Department of Corrections reported a 16.9% recidivism rate for 2019.¹⁸ This was defined as an individual returning to prison for a new conviction within three years of their previous release.¹⁹ However, the Department of Corrections also released an Inmate Population Profile, in which the definition of recidivism

13 Prison Policy Initiative, “Following the Money of Mass Incarceration 2026,” February 2026, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money2026.html>.

14 Ella Baker Center, Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families, 2015, <https://static.prisonpolicy.org/scans/who-pays%20Ella%20Baker%20report.pdf>; And Worth Rises, “The Prison Industrial Complex: Mapping Private Sector Players,” 2019, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58e127cb1b10e31ed45b20f4/t/5cc7c27b9e3a8d00018649c5/1556595324791/The+Prison+Industrial+Complex+-+Mapping+Private+Sector+Players+-+2019.pdf>.

15 Institute for Justice Research and Development, “The Economic Burden of Incarceration in the United States,” 2016, https://ijrd.csw.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu1766/files/media/images/publication_pdfs/Economic_Burden_of_Incarceration_IJRD072016_O_0.pdf.

16 National Institute of Justice, “Recidivism,” n.d., <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism>.

17 Ibid.

18 Utah Department of Corrections, “Utah Department of Corrections Dashboard,” 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241105204243/https://corrections.utah.gov/operations-dashboard/>.

19 Ibid.

differs. This metric was for individuals who returned to prison at all within three years.²⁰ This put Utah’s recidivism rate at 59% for the same year.²¹

It is difficult to compare state recidivism rates since many states – including Utah at times – track and report recidivism slightly differently. As a result, it is important to understand how each state reports its recidivism rate before making comparisons. For most states, the three-year reincarceration rate is the standard recidivism metric. All of the Mountain States use the three-year period. (See Figure 5.)

There are 36 states that measure recidivism simply using the three-year reincarceration rate.²² Though most states measure recidivism over a three-year period, many have slightly different definitions of who they include in this measure. See Appendix B for definitions of recidivism for all 50 states.

Recidivism tracking metrics vary by state.

Figure 5: Recidivism Definition, by Mountain State, 2024

Mountain State	Recidivism Tracking Metric
Arizona	3-year reincarceration rate
Colorado	3-year reincarceration rate
Idaho	3-year reincarceration rate, includes supervision of populations and both reincarceration and return to supervision
Montana	3-year reincarceration rate
Nevada	3-year reincarceration rate
New Mexico	3-year reincarceration rate
Utah	3-year new conviction rate only (excludes technical violations)
Wyoming	3-year reincarceration rate

Source: Justice Center: The Council of State Governments.

20 Utah Department of Corrections, “Inmate Population Profile,” 2023, <https://www.utah.gov/pmn/files/991073.pdf>.

21 Ibid.

22 Justice Center: The Council of State Governments, “50 States, 1 Goal: Recidivism Rate Trends Over the Past Decade,” 2026, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/state-recidivism-rates-2006-2022/>.

Many historical data sources in Utah use the three-year reincarceration rate only for parolees.²³ There was no standard Utah metric to measure recidivism until the 2023 legislative session.²⁴ Before this, recidivism definitions varied by source or even among reports from the same agency. However, the Department of Corrections and the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice decided that they needed to get on the same page when reporting recidivism metrics to the legislature.²⁵ So, they started the work to get one metric in Utah code.

In 2023, House Bill 352 defined Utah's recidivism standard metric as the three-year reincarceration rate for a new conviction.²⁶ This wording intentionally excludes technical violations for those on probation or parole, as they are not considered to be the same level of risk as a new offense.²⁷

The Commission released a report in November 2024 that identified the standard metric as an effective way to measure recidivism because it relies only on data readily available to the Utah Department of Corrections.²⁸ The report goes on to say that, regardless of which specific metric is in place, having a metric helps track trends over time and enables monitoring of changes in the system. The standard metric is designed to be measurable, consistent, and easily comparable across states.²⁹

This metric is limited to convictions that result in a return to prison. However, some Commission stakeholders and policymakers would prefer to use a broader recidivism metric that measures all new convictions within three years of release from prison, rather than only those that result in a return to prison.³⁰ This means that the current recidivism rate does not include those arrested for more minor offenses and released.

This limitation is due to an inability to link court data (the new conviction) with the corrections and Board of Pardons & Parole data (release from prison).³¹ Linking these two data sources would make a broader recidivism metric more feasible, although it may also make comparing recidivism across states more difficult.

23 Justice Center: The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal," 2024, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/50-states-1-goal/>.

24 Utah State Legislature, "H.B. 352 Law Enforcement Data Amendments," 2023, <https://le.utah.gov/~2023/bills/static/HB0352.html>.

25 Utah Foundation talks with Utah Commission on Criminal & Juvenile Justice's Director Daniel Strong, November 2024.

26 Utah State Legislature, "Utah Code 63M-7-101.5," 2024, https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title63M/Chapter7/63M-7-S101.5.html?v=C63M-7-S101.5_2024050120240501.

27 Utah Foundation talks with Utah Commission on Criminal & Juvenile Justice's Director Daniel Strong, November 2024.

28 Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, "Recidivism Metric Report," November 1, 2024.

29 Utah Foundation talks with Utah Commission on Criminal & Juvenile Justice's Director Daniel Strong, November 2024.

30 Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, "Recidivism Metric Report," November 1, 2024.

31 Ibid.

RECIDIVISM DATA

Nationwide, an estimated \$8 billion was spent on reincarceration costs for individuals within three years of their release from prison in 2022.³² An estimated \$24 million was spent in Utah during this time. (See Figure 6.) Utah’s cost per resident over those three years is less than a third of the national cost and the lowest of the Mountain States..

States’ costs obviously vary with population, incarceration rates, and recidivism rates. However, these costs highlight the significant financial burden of reincarceration and emphasize the importance of effective reentry programs and policies that reduce recidivism, ultimately saving states money and improving public safety.

Reincarceration is expensive, but Utah has the lowest per-resident rate of the Mountain States.

Figure 6: Anticipated Cost of Reincarceration for the 2022 Prison Cohort, by Mountain State, 2024

Mountain State	Anticipated Cost	Cost per Resident
Arizona	\$183 million	\$24.14
Colorado	\$73 million	\$12.26
Idaho	\$66 million	\$32.97
Montana	\$27 million	\$23.74
Nevada	\$28 million	\$8.59
New Mexico	\$102 million	\$47.89
Utah	\$24 million	\$6.85
Wyoming	\$11 million	\$18.72
Nationwide	\$8 billion	\$24.52

Source: Justice Center: The Council of State Governments.

32 Justice Center: The Council of State Governments, “50 States, 1 Goal,” 2024, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/50-states-1-goal/>.

EXPLORING RECIDIVISM PREVENTION PROGRAMS

While states measure recidivism differently, policy effectiveness can be assessed by examining which states achieve the largest percentage reductions in recidivism over time and which maintain the lowest recidivism rates nationwide.

Since the passage of the Second Chance Act in 2008, which invested \$1.2 billion nationwide in efforts to improve reentry outcomes, reincarceration rates have decreased by 23%.³³ This act, specifically funded by the National Reentry Resource Center, has helped federal, state, local, and tribal reentry initiatives work with state criminal justice agencies. In addition, state agencies responsible for education, housing, and transportation all recognize that they, too, have a role to play in recidivism prevention.³⁴

The Council of State Governments Justice Center analyzed the most recent recidivism numbers, finding large returns on the recidivism prevention measures. Nationwide, of the inmates who exited prison in 2008, 35% were reincarcerated within three years. Of the 2019 prison cohort, only 27% of those exiting prison recidivated within three years.³⁵

33 The Council of State Governments, “50 States, 1 Goal,” 2024, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/50-States-1-Goal_For-PDF_with508report.pdf.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.



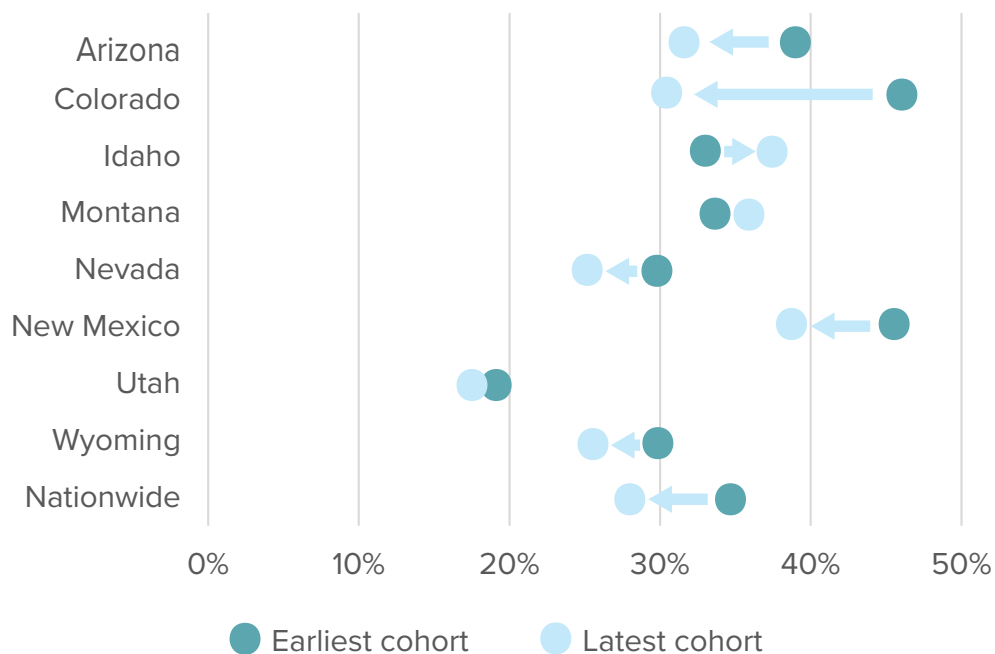
Previous Utah State Prison, Draper.

Of the Mountain State, Utah had the lowest rate and saw the smallest change over the comparison period, with a one-percentage-point reduction in its recidivism rate. Colorado has the largest decrease at 15 percentage points, followed by New Mexico and Arizona, each at seven percentage points. Idaho and Montana actually increased over the period, two of only a few states to do so. (See Figure 7.)

Please note that differences in how recidivism events are reported, the length of monitoring, and who is included make recidivism rates difficult to compare. (See Appendix B for recidivism rates across the nation.)

Although national recidivism rates are decreasing, some Mountain States saw an increase.

Figure 7: Recidivism Rates Between the Earliest and Latest Reported Release Cohorts, Mountain States, 2026



Note: The year ranges are different for each state as each state has tracked recidivism differently. The year ranges are as follows: Arizona 2012-2022, Colorado 2011-2021, Idaho 2011-2021, Montana 2009-2019, Nevada 2010-2020, New Mexico 2011-2021, Utah 2012-2022, and Wyoming 2012-2022.

Source: Justice Center: The Council of State Governments.

RECIDIVISM PREVENTION MEASURES IN UTAH

Ongoing and New State Programs

Reentry planning begins on day one of incarceration, according to the Reentry & Rehabilitation Division of the Utah Department of Corrections.³⁶ The office helps inmates learn the skills needed to successfully reenter their communities and the workforce. Topics such as housing, health care, and employment are discussed in transition classes. Inmates learn skills from writing resumes to making doctor's appointments.³⁷ Important documents, such as birth certificates and Social Security cards, are even provided for free to inmates upon release.³⁸

Teaching job skills has been a traditional way of lowering recidivism. The Utah Correctional Industries (UCI) has been around since Utah's territorial prison in the late 1800s and became a separate division of the Utah Department of Corrections in 1985. UCI offers training in various trades, providing inmates with skills in areas such as data entry, furniture manufacturing, sewing, and printing. UCI seeks to provide meaningful work opportunities that mirror the real-world business environment and help inmates succeed in securing and keeping a job after release.³⁹

36 Utah Department of Corrections, "Reentry Planning," n.d., <https://corrections.utah.gov/reentry-planning/>.

37 Employment & Reentry Luncheon at the Utah State Correctional Facility, December 2025.

38 Utah Department of Corrections, "Reentry Planning," n.d., <https://corrections.utah.gov/inmate-services/reentry-and-rehabilitation/>.

39 Utah Correctional Industries, "About UCI," n.d., <https://uci.utah.gov/about-uci/>.



Recidivism is an ongoing topic of conversation and exploration in Utah. The Utah Department of Corrections recently introduced a new role: the Peer Support Specialist. This position is designed to guide and support formerly incarcerated individuals as they navigate the reentry process. By drawing on their lived experience, Peer Support Specialists can offer practical advice, mentorship, and resources to help individuals successfully reintegrate into society, thereby reducing recidivism.⁴⁰

Another pilot program is the High-Frequency Offender Program, also known as the Frequent Flyer Felon Program. This program was part of a 2024 bill on criminal justice reforms.⁴¹ This program examines those who cycle through the criminal legal system most often and how to intervene differently to reduce recidivism. This program includes a couple hundred people with six or more felony convictions over a five-year period, often involving lower-level offenses that keep them coming back. This group receives pre-sentencing reports and special attention from Adult Probation & Parole to better understand which issues lead these individuals to recidivate.⁴² Results on the efficacy of this program will not be known for several years.

The 2025 General Session showed that legislators are working to create more successful reentries for Utahns. Amendments were made to a bill that would ensure the continuity of mental health services for those on probation and parole. This bill also created the Rehabilitation and Reentry Services Special Revenue Fund to offset the cost of reentry programs for inmates. These programs provide educational services, job and life skills training, job placement assistance, and access to caseworkers.⁴³

Specialty Court Systems

Utah has established “specialty courts,” also known as problem-solving courts, as a nontraditional approach to reduce the need to see people in general courts repeatedly.⁴⁴ Utah has a variety of specialty courts, such as drug courts, mental health courts, DUI courts, veterans’ drug courts, juvenile drug courts, and dependency drug courts, the latter of which deals with cases where the offender could potentially lose their parental rights due to their substance use.⁴⁵

40 Employment & Reentry Luncheon at the Utah State Correctional Facility, December 2025.

41 Utah’s Commission on Criminal & Juvenile Justice, “General Session Summary,” 2024, <https://justice.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024-Session-Summary-Report.pdf>.

42 Utah Foundation talks with Utah Commission on Criminal & Juvenile Justice’s Director Daniel Strong, November 2024.

43 Utah State Legislature, “H.B. 167 Offender Reintegration Amendments,” 2025, <https://le.utah.gov/~2025/bills/static/HB0167.html>.

44 Utah State Courts, “Problem Solving Courts,” n.d., <https://www.utcourts.gov/en/about/courts/problem-solving-courts.html>.

45 Utah State Legislature, “Drug Courts,” 2024, <https://cobi.utah.gov/2024/1175/background>.

Utah introduced drug courts in Salt Lake County in 1996 and has since expanded to 50 drug courts statewide.⁴⁶ The focus on rehabilitation and progress rather than punishment can go a long way in reducing recidivism for high-risk and high-need people.⁴⁷

Recognizing the link between mental health issues and recidivism, Utah's mental health courts were established in 2001 as a specialized venue providing support and treatment for individuals with mental health issues.⁴⁸ This court expects the offender to attend treatment and counseling, be compliant with medication requirements, and submit to random drug testing. This approach tends to be less expensive than supervised probation and is especially cheaper than reincarceration.⁴⁹

Multi-Sector Collaboration

Organizations across Utah are committed to ensuring that the criminal legal system operates efficiently and incorporates data-driven practices. Working together, different agencies, institutions, and nonprofits can find creative solutions to reduce the number of Utahns returning to prison.

Many nonprofit organizations in Utah work alongside the state to provide support services, job training, and mentorship for individuals exiting the prison system. This multi-sector collaboration is key to successful reentry for inmates. However, part of the difficulty is that no one agency takes ownership of the problem.⁵⁰ Reentry support should start at the beginning of a prison sentence and continue after release.⁵¹ Working together, agencies implement evidence-based practices more effectively than on their own.⁵²

One example is the Utah Sentencing Commission, which was established in 1993 within the Utah Commission on Criminal & Juvenile Justice. The Utah Sentencing Commission promotes evidence-based practices in sentencing and corrections, and its guidelines for both adult and juvenile offenders aim to reduce the state's reliance on incarceration for non-violent offenses, potentially leading to cost savings.⁵³

46 Utah State Legislature, "Drug Courts," 2024, <https://cobi.utah.gov/2024/1175/background>.

47 United State Probation and Pretrial Services: District of Utah, "Drug Court," n.d., <https://www.utp.uscourts.gov/rise-drug-court>.

48 Super Lawyers, "A Better Way," 2021, <https://www.superlawyers.com/articles/utah/a-better-way-2/>.

49 Salt Lake Legal Defenders Association, "Program & Specialty Courts," n.d., <https://www.sllda.com/mental-health-court/>.

50 Utah Criminal Justice Center, "Prisoner Reentry Initiatives," 2013, https://socialwork.utah.edu/_resources/documents/PrisonerReentry_final_090913.pdf

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Utah Commission on Criminal & Juvenile Justice, "Utah Sentencing Commission," n.d., <https://justice.utah.gov/sentencing/>; And The University of Utah, "Utah Criminal Justice Center," n.d., <https://socialwork.utah.edu/research/ucjc/>.

Since 2006, the University of Utah's Criminal Justice Center has conducted ongoing research on criminal and juvenile justice issues in collaboration with the Utah Commission on Criminal & Juvenile Justice.⁵⁴

This research helps inform policy decisions and the development of programs aimed at reducing recidivism over time. The Center fosters interdisciplinary collaboration through the University of Utah's College of Social Work, the College of Law, and the College of Social and Behavioral Science. It is overseen by a board of directors that includes representatives from key state agencies and organizations, such as the Utah Department of Corrections, Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services, Utah Administrative Office of the Courts, Utah Department of Public Safety, Utah Sentencing Commission, Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, and Clean Slate Utah. By bringing together expertise from multiple disciplines, the Center provides research, training, and technical assistance to prevent and reduce crime and victimization while tailoring evidence-based approaches to the unique needs of organizations and the communities they serve.⁵⁵

Public-Private Partnerships

Employment is a key component to successful reentry. One initiative that the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce and the Utah Department of Corrections are investigating is connecting businesses that need employees with formerly incarcerated individuals. This includes empowering former inmates to advocate for themselves and to apply to companies that do not just market themselves as "felon-friendly."⁵⁶

54 The University of Utah, "Utah Criminal Justice Center Announced," 2006, https://archive.unews.utah.edu/news_releases/utah-criminal-justice-center-announced/.

55 The University of Utah, "Utah Criminal Justice Center," n.d., <https://socialwork.utah.edu/research/ucjc/>.

56 Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce's Employment and Reentry Luncheon at the Utah State Correctional Facility, December 2025.



Educating employers about the federal protections available for risk mitigation is another key selling point for hiring someone with a record. The U.S. Department of Labor's Federal Bonding Program provides employer protection for six months against theft, forgery, larceny, and embezzlement at no cost to the employer.⁵⁷ Another selling point is that employers can also qualify for the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit for hiring a felon.⁵⁸

Local Private Organizations

There are private organizations in Utah that are working to open doors for felons. Through hard work, skill-building, and relationship-building, felons can build a better life for themselves.

TRUreligion Pancake and Steakhouse in Orem, Utah, is a great example of a business that believes in second chances. TRUreligion not only hires felons, but they also have a 501(c)3 charity that assists individuals with reentry.⁵⁹ When dining, customers can round their check up to the nearest dollar to support the charity, which funds various causes, including housing and car repairs for those in the TRUreligion program, helping them maintain stability.⁶⁰

The Other Side Academy is a program that provides wraparound services to men and women aged 18 to 64, either as an alternative to incarceration or because they simply want to make a change in their lives. This voluntary program is a training school that teaches pro-social, vocational, and life skills both pre- and post-sentencing.⁶¹ "Students" commit to a minimum of two years of residential living at the Other Side Academy, followed by six months of structured transitional living.⁶² The Other Side Academy runs a moving company, a thrift store, and a general contractor company focused on interior remodels. Students have the option to work at one of these businesses while they learn to be self-sufficient and live in a community.

Another local nonprofit that has a similar mission is the John Volken Academy, formerly the Red Barn Academy, which focuses on men who seek a change due to substance use, a criminal record, or homelessness. This two-year (minimum) program not only focuses on traditional drug treatment,

57 Department of Workforce Services, "Federal Bonding Program," n.d., https://jobs.utah.gov/employer/business/07_70.pdf; And UNICOR, "Federal Bonding Program," n.d., https://www.unicor.gov/inmate_bonding.aspx.

58 Employment and Training Administration, "Work Opportunity Tax Credit," 2024, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/wotc/pdfs/WOTC-Fact-Sheet-2024.pdf>.

59 TRUreligion Pancake and Steakhouse, "About," n.d., <https://trureligionpancakeandsteakhouse.com/about/>.

60 The Daily Universe, "Orem restaurant gives a second chance to those in need," 2025, <https://universe.byu.edu/metro/trureligion-pancake-and-steakhouse-gives-a-second-chance-to-those-in-need>.

61 The Other Side Academy, "Who is this for?" n.d., <https://www.theothersideacademy.com/>.

62 The Other Side Academy, "How it Works," n.d., <https://www.theothersideacademy.com/how-it-works>.

but also on character building. The Academy has a moving company and a thrift store for the men to work at and build vocational skills while in residence.⁶³ The Academy is not only a potential alternative to incarceration but also offers educational opportunities, including obtaining a high school diploma and attending college courses through Davis Technical College and Weber State University. This is all in the pursuit of helping residents live successful, sober lives.⁶⁴

These organizations demonstrate the power of second chances and the importance of community support in breaking the cycle of recidivism. By providing job opportunities, life skills training, and access to essential resources, they help individuals rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to society. Through their work, businesses and nonprofits in Utah are proving that with the right support, people can overcome their past and create a brighter future.

Pay for Success

Pay-for-success programs, or social impact bonds, are investments designed to encourage private funding for public social programs. The private financier receives a return on their investment only if the cost-saving outcomes are achieved.⁶⁵ The idea is to transfer the risk of funding pilot programs to private organizations.

63 John Volken Academy, "Who We Are," n.d., <https://redbarnfarms.org/who-we-are/>.

64 John Volken Academy, "What is a Life-skills Academy," n.d., <https://redbarnfarms.org/what-is-a-tc/>.

65 The City of New York, "Bringing Pay for Success programs to New York City," 2012, https://www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2012/sib_media_presentation_080212.pdf.



Pay-for-success programs emerged in the United States as New York City sought to reduce recidivism rates among young men in 2012.⁶⁶ The idea spread to Boston, Los Angeles, and Chicago as they explored pay-for-success programs to fund initiatives in homelessness prevention, early childhood education, and mental health services.⁶⁷

A pay-for-success program is currently seeking solutions to homelessness and recidivism in Salt Lake County. This program has targeted about 550 vulnerable residents, and they are receiving services through the Road Home and the First Step House. Then-Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams said of the program:

“Every year, [the] government spends millions of dollars on programs designed to help our neediest citizens. In most cases, whether these programs work is anyone’s guess. We can do better for the people we’re trying to help while also being careful stewards of scarce tax dollars. Pay for Success is an innovative approach to achieving better outcomes and holding ourselves accountable for achieving those results.”⁶⁸

First Step House provided the REACH (Recovery, Engagement, Assessment, Career, and Housing) Program to 225 offenders over a six-year time period. This included short-term housing support, evidence-based therapies, and case management.⁶⁹ These offenders were then compared to over 400 high-risk offenders who received normal treatment when leaving prison. Researchers found a 22% decrease in arrest rates in the test group compared to the control.⁷⁰

Despite initial enthusiasm, pay-for-success programs have faced criticism regarding their complexity, the sometimes vague nature of their goals and objectives, and the need for more rigorous evaluation frameworks.⁷¹ Pay-for-success programs are also criticized for addressing only the symptoms rather than getting to the heart of the societal problem.⁷² While some

66 The City of New York, “Brining Pay for Success programs to New York City,” 2012, https://www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2012/sib_media_presentation_080212.pdf.

67 Adler & Colvin, “California May Introduce Pay for Success programs,” 2013, <https://www.adlercolvin.com/blog/2013/05/02/california-may-introduce-social-impact-bonds/>; Stanford, “Pay for Success programs: More than One Approach,” 2018, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/social_impact_bonds_more_than_one_approach#; Harvard, “Fact Sheet: The Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Pay for Success Initiative,” 2014, https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/massachusetts_roca_pfs_project_fact_sheet.pdf; And Chicago Tribune, “The Promise and Risk of Pay for Success programs,” 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2015/11/08/the-promise-and-risk-of-social-impact-bonds/>.

68 Salt Lake County, “Salt Lake County launches two Pay for Success projects,” 2016, <https://www.thirdsectorcap.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SLCo-Press-Release.pdf>.

69 Premiums4Good, “Salt Lake County ‘Pay For Success’ Initiative,” 2021, <https://www.qbe.com/-/media/group/premiums4good/salt-lake-county-pay-for-success-pfs/salt%20lake%20county%20pay%20for%20success%20initiative.pdf>.

70 Utah Criminal Justice Center, “Pay for Success: Large-Scale Study Shows Reduction in Recidivism for High-Risk Population in Salt Lake County,” 2024, https://socialwork.utah.edu/_resources/documents/research/ucjc/pay-success-reach-brief.pdf.

71 Journal of Economic Policy Reform, “Widening Perspectives on Pay for Success programs,” 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17487870.2019.1568249#abstract>.

72 Stanford, “The Downside of Pay for Success programs,” 2019, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_downside_of_social_impact_bonds.

programs have demonstrated positive outcomes, others have struggled to deliver measurable results or have faced long-term methodological challenges in evaluation.⁷³ They are still considered a new intervention and are constantly being improved upon as early programs highlight successes and failures.

MOUNTAIN STATE RECIDIVISM PREVENTION POLICIES

Each Mountain State has adopted a variety of recidivism prevention policies designed to cater to data-driven conclusions relating to contributors to recidivism for a variety of different demographic groups within the inmate population.

73 Journal of Economic Policy Reform, "Widening Perspectives on Pay for Success programs," 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17487870.2019.1568249#abstract>.

Mountain States pursue a range of recidivism prevention strategies.

Figure 8: Common Recidivism Prevention Strategies, with Examples from the Mountain States

Strategy	Example
Specialty Courts	Colorado's Justice Reinvestment Initiative expanded specialty court programs, bringing together judges, police, mental health and shelter providers, and attorneys to address gaps in the system.
Substance Abuse Treatment	Arizona expanded access to in-prison and community-based substance abuse treatment programs to proactively reduce recidivism.
Mental Health Services	Idaho's Correctional Mental Health Care Services provides care to inmates with mental health needs and continues that care after release.
Employment / Job Training	Wyoming offers work release programs and vocational training to help inmates gain employment experience before and after release.
Community Supervision Reform	Nevada modified probation and parole supervision to require risk-and-needs assessments, limit incarceration for technical violations, and establish graduated sanctions.
Data & Metrics Investment	New Mexico received state funding to upgrade its central data-tracking system, which will let policymakers compare program completion with recidivism outcomes.

Note: Examples are illustrative, not exhaustive. Many Mountain States pursue multiple or all of these strategies.

Arizona

Arizona has enhanced its community supervision practices to better support individuals on probation or parole. In this way, the system reduces technical violations and can reduce recidivism.⁷⁴

Arizona simultaneously has enhanced access to in-prison and community-based substance abuse treatment programs and addressed addiction issues to proactively reduce recidivism.⁷⁵ Increasing the availability of mental health services within the prison system and upon release helps address mental health issues contributing to criminal behavior once inmates are released.⁷⁶

In the interest of employment stability, Arizona has embraced job training and placement programs to equip inmates with job skills and connect them with employment opportunities, fostering their future economic and social stability.⁷⁷

Colorado

Colorado stood out as a state to watch due to its impressive reduction in recidivism over the past decade. Colorado experienced a 40% reduction in its three-year return-to-prison rate, falling from 52% in 2008 to 31% in 2021.⁷⁸ This was in part due to a 68% decrease in marijuana arrests from 2012, when recreational marijuana was legalized for adults over 21, to 2019.⁷⁹

Colorado embraced the Justice Reinvestment Initiative as early as 2011 and aimed to reduce recidivism through specialty court programs. This solution emerged as the state partnered with judges, police officers, mental health and shelter providers, attorneys, and other community-based stakeholders to address gaps they saw in the criminal legal system.⁸⁰

74 Arizona Department of Corrections, "Community Reentry," 2024, <https://corrections.az.gov/office-deputy-director/education-programs-and-community-reentry/community-reentry>.

75 Arizona Department of Corrections, "Counseling and Treatment Services," 2024, <https://corrections.az.gov/office-deputy-director/programs-and-reentry/counseling-treatment-services>.

76 Springhills, "Understanding Rehabilitation Programs for Inmates in Arizona," 2024, <https://www.springhills.com/resources/rehabilitation-programs-for-inmates-in-arizona>.

77 Arizona Department of Economic Security, "Reentry Services," 2024, <https://des.az.gov/services/employment/reentry-services>.

78 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal," 2024, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/50-States-1-Goal_For-PDF_with508report.pdf; And The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal: Recidivism Rate Trends Over the Past Decade," 2026, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/state-recidivism-rates-2006-2022/>.

79 Colorado Division of Criminal Justice, "Colorado Division of Criminal Justice Publishes Report on Impacts of Marijuana Legalization in Colorado," 2021, <https://dcj.colorado.gov/news-article/colorado-division-of-criminal-justice-publishes-report-on-impacts-of-marijuana>.

80 The Center for Effective Public Policy, "Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the Local Level," 2016, <https://cepp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Denver-Site-Summary-2016.pdf>.

Similar to Utah’s specialty court system, this system also follows evidence-based protocols for therapeutic interventions. However, Colorado found that wrap-around services were not sufficient for some of the most likely to go back to prison. In response, they expanded the capacity of residential treatment programs for those who require intensive substance use treatment, and additional transitional housing was provided for those in the specialty courts program. However, this program was initially unable to keep its Native American clients engaged enough to remain in the program, and solutions are currently being developed with Native tribes to mitigate this gap.⁸¹

Additionally, Community Reentry Specialists provide individualized case management and support services to Colorado’s recently released individuals. Reentry services include assistance with housing, clothing, transportation, work tools, job placement, and employment training.⁸² Even before release, Pre-Release Specialists and Release Case Managers meet with inmates to help identify potential barriers to successful reentry and offer classes on these barriers, such as money management, family relationships, and navigating life under supervision.⁸³

81 The Center for Effective Public Policy, “Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the Local Level,” 2016, <https://cepp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Denver-Site-Summary-2016.pdf>.

82 Colorado Department of Corrections, “Community Re-Entry Specialists,” n.d., <https://cdoc.colorado.gov/parole-and-re-entry-services/community-based-services/community-re-entry-specialists>.

83 Colorado Department of Corrections, “RESTORE: Reformative, Engaging System of Transitional Opportunities for Re-Entry,” n.d., <https://cdoc.colorado.gov/parole-and-re-entry-services/transition-planning/restore>.



Idaho

Idaho utilizes evidence-based risk assessments to identify individuals at high risk of recidivism and provides interventions targeting these populations.⁸⁴ The state then develops individualized reentry plans that involve collaboration across state agencies and local community organizations. Correctional Mental Health Care Services provides services to all inmates with mental health needs and continues care after release.⁸⁵ Finally, the state works to build job readiness through placement programs and apprenticeships that connect inmates with employers willing to hire them.⁸⁶

Montana

In 2017, the Montana State Legislature passed several bills to assist individuals with housing, employment, mental health care, and other services upon release to reduce recidivism.⁸⁷ While substance use treatment facilities existed before, their implementation and integration with in-prison and community-based programs became more closely tied to the state.⁸⁸ Programs offering GED and vocational training also became more streamlined and accessible to inmates.⁸⁹

Montana's community supervision structure is based on individual case management instead of uniform goals and consequences.⁹⁰ This assesses individual risks of re-offending, focuses supervision on the highest-risk offenders, and identifies the stressors that increase their risk of re-offending. This can include criminal history, antisocial attitudes, values and beliefs, and substance use. This program also evaluates offenders' potential responsiveness to anti-recidivism programs based on their learning style and level of motivation.⁹¹

84 Idaho Statistical Analysis Center, "Recidivism Rates Among the Idaho Department of Corrections Supervised Population," 2024, <https://isp.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/PGR/ISAC-Library/Recidivism/Recidivism-Rates-Among-IDOC-Supervised-Population.pdf>.

85 Idaho Department of Corrections, "Mental Health," 2024, <https://www.idoc.idaho.gov/content/prisons/treatment-programs/mental-health>.

86 Idaho Reentry Services, "Career Training," 2024, <https://reentry.idaho.gov/education-training/career-training/>.

87 Montana Department of Corrections, "Justice Reinvestment Initiative," 2024, <https://cor.mt.gov/JusticeReinvestment/JusticeReinvestmentInitiative>.

88 Montana Department of Corrections, "Residential Substance Use Disorder Treatment Centers," 2024, <https://cor.mt.gov/Facilities/ResidentialSubstanceUseDisorderTreatmentCenters>.

89 Montana Department of Corrections, "Montana Department of Corrections: Education Facts," 2024, <https://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2021-2022/Education/Meetings/July-2021/Montana-Department-of-Corrections.pdf>.

90 Montana Department of Corrections, "Community Supervision," n.d., <https://cor.mt.gov/ProbationandParole/CommunitySupervision>.

91 Ibid.

Nevada

Nevada has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the Mountain States at 26%.⁹² In 2007, Nevada found that behavioral health treatment was difficult to attain or even inaccessible to people who are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole. In response, policymakers worked with the CSG Justice Center to develop data-driven policies to address resource constraints that can lead to recidivism.⁹³ The Nevada Justice Reinvestment legislation of 2007 increased incentives for inmates to complete educational, vocational, and substance use treatment programs while incarcerated. This legislation also expanded eligibility for alternatives to incarceration. Legislators observed a decrease in recidivism.⁹⁴

Nevada did not stop there. In 2019, the Advisory Commission of the Administration of Justice analyzed how resources could be best used within the criminal legal system. It was found that as the prison population grew, more money was being spent on incarceration and less on recidivism and reentry. This led to new legislation that expanded data collection and analysis, allowing policymakers to better understand the efficacy of their programs. The legislation also lessened drug offenses and some non-violent crime sentencing and encouraged treatment programs over incarceration. Finally, probation and parole supervision were modified to require a risk-and-needs assessment to determine the level of supervision, limit incarceration time for technical violations, and establish graduated sanctions. The state saw a 25% decrease in its prison population from 2018 to 2022.⁹⁵

92 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal: Recidivism Rate Trends Over the Past Decade," 2026, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/state-recidivism-rates-2006-2022/>; The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal," 2024, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/50-States-1-Goal_For-PDF_with508report.pdf.

93 Justice Reinvestment Initiative, "Nevada," 2019, <https://justicereinvestmentinitiative.org/jri-states/nevada/>.

94 The Council of State Governments, "Justice Reinvestment in Nevada," n.d., <https://csgjusticecenter.org/projects/justice-reinvestment/past-states/nevada/>.

95 Justice Reinvestment Initiative, "Nevada," 2019, <https://justicereinvestmentinitiative.org/jri-states/nevada/>.



New Mexico

New Mexico has the highest recidivism rate of the Mountain States at 39%.⁹⁶ Its spending on recidivism is also the highest in the Mountain States, ranking 9th nationally.⁹⁷ Legislators attribute the high recidivism rate to substance abuse, specifically opioid use. New Mexico inmates who were released after serving time for a drug-related offense were more likely to recidivate than their counterparts. The New Mexico Corrections Department has recently received state funding to upgrade the central data-tracking system, but it has yet to go online. This new system will be able to compare inmate program completion and recidivism rates, allowing policymakers to better understand which programs are working.⁹⁸

Wyoming

Wyoming also offers comprehensive substance abuse and mental health services.⁹⁹ Work release programs are offered to Wyoming inmates to provide opportunities to gain employment experience and earn income while serving their sentences.¹⁰⁰ Also, to facilitate post-release employment, the state provides educational and vocational training, offering access to a variety of academic courses and more applied training programs to support successful societal reintegration.¹⁰¹ Wyoming also collaborates with local community organizations to create individually suited reentry plans and support systems for released individuals.¹⁰²

96 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal: Recidivism Rate Trends Over the Past Decade," 2026, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/state-recidivism-rates-2006-2022/>.

97 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal," 2024, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/50-States-1-Goal_For-PDF_with508report.pdf.

98 Corrections 1, "N.M. inmate recidivism rate climbs to 40% after years of decline," 2024, <https://www.corrections1.com/re-entry-and-recidivism/n-m-inmate-recidivism-rate-climbs-to-40-after-years-of-decline>.

99 Gateway Foundation, 2024, <https://corrections.gatewayfoundation.org/locations/wyoming/>; And Wyoming Department of Corrections, "Mental Health Resources," 2024, <https://corrections.wyo.gov/inmate-crisis-line-mental-health-resources>.

100 Sheridan County Wyoming, "Detentions," 2024, https://www.sheridancountywy.gov/county-government/elected_offices/sheriff/detentions/index.php.

101 University of Wyoming, "Pathways from Prison," 2024, <https://www.uwyo.edu/wfp/what-we-do.html>.

102 Wyoming Department of Corrections, "Reentry and Community Resources," 2024, <https://corrections.wyo.gov/services-and-programs/reentry-and-offender-resources>; And Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, "Wyoming awarded federal grant to support adults reentering the workforce from incarceration," 2024, <https://dws.wyo.gov/wyoming-awarded-federal-grant-to-support-adults-reentering-the-workforce-from-incarceration/>.

NATIONWIDE RECIDIVISM PREVENTION POLICIES

When zooming out to look at the nation as a whole, several states stand out for their percentage decreases in recidivism and in recidivism prevention measures: California, Oklahoma, Oregon, and South Carolina. Given this, it is valuable to explore policies that each of these states embraces.

Leading states pursue a range of recidivism prevention strategies.

Figure 9: Common Recidivism Prevention Topics, with Examples from Leading States Nationwide

Strategy	Example
Sentencing / Offense Reclassification	California's Proposition 47 reclassified several non-violent felonies, such as drug possession and petty theft, as misdemeanors, helping reduce the prison population.
Individualized Risk & Needs Assessment	Oklahoma began requiring risk and needs assessments and individualized case plans for every inmate, allowing treatment and programming to be personalized.
Substance Use Treatment	Oregon funded county drug court programs and later passed the Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act, decriminalizing possession of most controlled substances, though the state later rolled back parts of that act.
Reentry Case Management & Employment Support	South Carolina's SC Works program assigns former inmates a caseworker who builds an individualized plan connecting them to employment resources and job-search support.
Data & Metrics Investment	Oregon codified a statewide recidivism definition and metric in 2013, expanding its Statistical Analysis Center's capacity to merge data across systems.
Youth-Focused Reform	South Carolina's Youthful Offender Act focuses on conviction expungement for first-time offenders aged 17 to 25, aiming to reduce the long-term impact of incarceration on young people.

Note: Examples are illustrative, not exhaustive. Many states pursue multiple or all of these strategies.

California

From 2008 to 2020, California witnessed a 47-percentage-point decrease in the three-year reincarceration rate, from 64% to 17%.¹⁰³ California implemented a range of strategies to address recidivism, focusing on rehabilitation and support for individuals reentering society. Some key initiatives include the Public Safety Realignment Bill of 2011, which shifted the responsibility for certain low-level offenders from state prisons to county jails and probation officers. This transition allowed for more localized rehabilitation programs.¹⁰⁴

Not long after this, Proposition 47 was passed in 2014 and reclassified several non-violent felonies, such as drug possession and petty theft, as mere misdemeanors.¹⁰⁵ This helped reduce the prison population and allowed many individuals to avoid harsh sentences that might have been costly to the state. In 2016, the passage of Proposition 57 allowed parole consideration for non-violent offenders and expanded rehabilitation programs in prisons by emphasizing education and vocational training.¹⁰⁶

Oklahoma

Oklahoma's three-year reincarceration rate fell by five percentage points between 2008 and 2019, from 23% to 18%.¹⁰⁷ The state implemented a policy evaluation in 2016 alongside several strategies, including redefining certain offenses and individualized case planning to reduce recidivism.¹⁰⁸

In 2016, a state referendum changed non-violent property crimes and some drug offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. The savings from this change then went to mental health and substance abuse treatment programs.¹⁰⁹

In 2017, risk and needs assessments and individualized case plans became required for every inmate to ensure they received the treatment they needed. Physical and psychological examinations were also expanded at this time.

103 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal," 2024, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/50-States-1-Goal_For-PDF_with508report.pdf; And The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal: Recidivism Rate Trends Over the Past Decade," 2026, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/state-recidivism-rates-2006-2022/>.

104 Sacramento County, "AB 109 Plan: 2022 Update," 2022, <https://www.bscc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/Sacramento-Updated-Annual-Plan-22-23.pdf>.

105 California Courts, "Proposition 47 FAQs," 2024, <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/Prop47FAQs.pdf>.

106 The Attorney General, "Proposition 57," n.d., <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/BTB24-5H-1.pdf>.

107 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal," 2024, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/50-States-1-Goal_For-PDF_with508report.pdf.

108 Pew Trusts, "Public Safety in Oklahoma," 2016, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2016/07/public-safety-in-oklahoma>

109 Oklahoma Policy Institute, "SQ 780 and SQ 781," 2017, <https://okpolicy.org/sq-780-sq-781/>.

Programming and treatment could then be personalized to the inmate.¹¹⁰ This high-touch level of care ensures that no inmate gets left behind.

It is important to note that between 2008 and 2017, parole releases in Oklahoma declined by 77%. This is in part due to the extensive hurdles parolees face and the financial burden of paying for drug testing, GPS ankle bracelets, therapy, and/or classes that might be mandated for parolees. Only one in three Oklahoman inmates applied for parole, as this does not incentivize motivation for early release. Major parole reforms occurred in 2019, so future studies will be able to see the impact of Oklahoma loosening the reins on its inmates.¹¹¹

Oregon

Oregon exhibited one of the lowest recidivism rates in the country. The rate of adults released on parole who were sentenced to prison for a new crime within three years of release was 16% in 2008.¹¹² This was then reduced to 12% in 2021.¹¹³

In 2008, a ballot measure was put in place that required certain offenders to be provided with substance use treatment and services. Four counties received funding to start drug court programs and found a reduction in recidivism for those who were able to be part of the drug court experiment compared to those who were on traditional parole. The test group had 28% fewer new charges and 37% fewer new drug-related charges.¹¹⁴

In 2013, a statewide recidivism definition and metric was codified. Before this, the Department of Corrections and the Oregon Youth Authority did not even have access to the data systems they needed to track recidivism. The Oregon Statistical Analysis Center housed the statewide data systems and expanded its capacity after 2013 to merge data across different systems.¹¹⁵ Data limitations persist, but expanding data availability can make a huge difference in policymaking.

110 The Urbanic Law Firm, "Risk And Needs Assessment For Prisoners – 2017 Oklahoma Laws," 2018, <https://www.urbanic.law/risk-and-needs-assessment-for-prisoners-2017-oklahoma-laws-17/>.

111 Oklahoma Policy Institute, "Parole is Broken in Oklahoma. Here's how we fix it." 2019, <https://okpolicy.org/parole-is-broken-in-oklahoma-heres-how-we-fix-it/>.

112 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal," 2024, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/50-States-1-Goal_For-PDF_with508report.pdf.

113 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal: Recidivism Rate Trends Over the Past Decade," 2026, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/state-recidivism-rates-2006-2022/>.

114 Oregon Knowledge Bank, "Measure 57 Drug Courts," n.d., <https://okb.oregon.gov/Pages/measure-57-drug-courts>.

115 Criminal Justice Commission, "Oregon Recidivism Analysis," 2018, <https://www.oregon.gov/cjc/CJC%20Document%20Library/May2018RecidivismReport-Final.pdf>.

In 2020, Oregon passed the Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act, which decriminalized the possession of most controlled substances. This has been attributed to Oregon's continuous decrease in recidivism, though the state rolled back parts of that act in 2024.¹¹⁶

South Carolina

South Carolina's three-year reincarceration rate fell from 31% in 2008 to 20% in 2022.¹¹⁷ The state employs a holistic approach to reentry. Former inmates receive a caseworker at SC Works who prepares an individualized plan to help them connect with resources and services, develop employment skills, and receive job-search support. SC Works also connects employers to the formerly incarcerated.¹¹⁸

In response to a growing prison population, the South Carolina Legislature charged a bipartisan group of state officials, the Sentencing Reform Commission, with examining sentencing and corrections policies to enhance public safety, reduce recidivism, and save on correctional costs. After a year of technical review, the legislature passed a major reform bill in 2010. These reforms included reduced penalties for less serious property and drug offenses, strengthened community supervision, expanded release options, and legislative oversight and accountability. Since the reforms, the state has saved nearly \$500 million, closed six prisons, and seen a decline in the crime rate.¹¹⁹

The state also passed the Youthful Offender Act, which focused on conviction expungement for first-time offenders aged 17 to 25.¹²⁰ The aim was to reduce the long-term impact of incarceration on young people and improve their chances of staying out of prison.

116 Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, "Oregon Recidivism Analysis," 2022, <https://www.oregon.gov/cjc/CJC%20Document%20Library/Recidivism%20Report%20November%202022.pdf>; And Oregon State Legislature, HB 4002, <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2024R1/Measures/Overview/HB4002>.

117 The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal," 2024, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/50-States-1-Goal_For-PDF_with508report.pdf; And The Council of State Governments, "50 States, 1 Goal: Recidivism Rate Trends Over the Past Decade," 2026, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/state-recidivism-rates-2006-2022/>.

118 The State, "This partnership is helping drive down the recidivism rate in SC - and helping employers," 2024, <https://www.thestate.com/opinion/article287971875.html>.

119 Pew Trusts, "Data Trends: South Carolina Criminal Justice Reform," 2017, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2017/09/data-trends-south-carolina-criminal-justice-reform#:~:text=Enacted%20in%202010%2C%20the%20legislation,the%20performance%20of%20the%20reforms.>

120 Loinnon Law Firm, "Can You Get a Conviction Off Your Record? It's possible, using the Youthful Offender Act," n.d., <https://www.loignonlawfirm.com/can-you-get-a-conviction-off-your-record-its-possible-using-the-youthful-offender-act/>.

CONCLUSION

Reducing recidivism is not just a matter of public safety. It is also a matter of cost, community stability, and the futures of the more than 30,000 Utahns currently under correctional control. Utah has made real progress, from establishing a standardized recidivism metric to launching specialty courts and peer support programs to securing new funding for reentry services. Utah also has the lowest per-resident anticipated reincarceration cost among Mountain States, though differences in definitions make comparisons difficult. This could be a sign that its current approach is delivering results.

It is worth being clear about what effective recidivism reduction does and does not mean. Some states that saw large drops in recidivism, including California, reclassified certain low-level felonies as misdemeanors as part of their reforms. But reclassification alone is not a solution and does not drive results on its own. The states with the steepest declines paired any sentencing changes with real investment in accountability and support: individualized risk and needs assessments, expanded substance use and mental health treatment, stronger community supervision, and employment support after release. Lowering the classification of an offense without those supports in place does not reduce reoffending. It simply changes how an offense is labeled, while leaving the underlying behavior unaddressed. Meaningful reform requires both accountability and the tools that help people actually change course.

Utah's own approach reflects this balance. Its recidivism metric intentionally excludes technical violations, not because those violations do not matter, but because the state has chosen to focus its core measure on the more serious risk of a new conviction. Continued investment in programs like specialty courts, the High-Frequency Offender Program, and employment-focused reentry initiatives should proceed alongside clear expectations and consequences, not in place of them.

Expanding data sharing between the courts and the Department of Corrections would enable a more complete recidivism metric and stronger comparisons with other states. Looking to states like South Carolina and Colorado, which paired sentencing reform with substantial investment in supervision and treatment, may offer useful lessons for Utah's continued efforts.

Ultimately, reducing recidivism requires sustained collaboration between state agencies, community organizations, employers, and policymakers. As Utah continues to refine its approach, maintaining transparency and a shared commitment to data-driven policy will be essential to building a criminal legal system that supports lasting change for individuals and communities alike.

APPENDIX A:

People in the Criminal Legal System, Mountain States and the Nation, 2026

Mountain State	Number of People Under Correctional Control	Number of People in State Prison	Number of People on Probation	Number of People on Parole
Arizona	134,260	34,473	75,564	6,471
Colorado	112,787	17,459	74,117	8,749
Idaho	53,791	9,829	32,875	6,452
Montana	20,522	4,985	10,477	1,115
Nevada	39,588	10,463	15,964	5,203
New Mexico	31,028	5,586	16,521	2,125
Utah	30,809	6,402	14,919	3,431
Wyoming	9,700	2,212	5,116	791
Nationwide	5,508,481	1,097,597	3,088,019	535,591

Source: Prison Policy Initiative.

APPENDIX B: RECIDIVISM RATES ACROSS THE NATION

This table identifies the states that use the three-year reincarceration rate as their “primary definition” of recidivism, along with any adjustments made to that baseline definition.

Recidivism rate and definition, nationwide.

State	Most Recent Exit Cohort Available	Recidivism Rate	Definition
Alabama	2018	29%	Primary definition
Alaska	2020	57%	Includes jail population
Arizona	2022	32%	Primary definition
Arkansas	2019	45%	Primary definition
California	2020	17%	Primary definition
Colorado	2021	31%	Primary definition
Connecticut	2021	50%	Includes jail population
Delaware	2020	50%	Primary definition
Florida	2020	21%	Primary definition
Georgia	2021	32%	Only includes felony reconviction
Hawaii	2016	53%	Only includes arrest or reconviction
Idaho	2021	38%	Includes supervision of populations and both reincarceration and return to supervision
Illinois	2019	37%	Primary definition
Indiana	2021	37%	Primary definition
Iowa	2022	33%	Primary definition
Kansas	2020	25%	Primary definition
Kentucky	2022	31%	2-year follow-up only
Louisiana	2020	32%	Primary definition
Maine	2021	21%	Primary definition

Source: The Council of State Governments.

Recidivism rate and definition, nationwide, continued.

State	Most Recent Exit Cohort Available	Recidivism Rate	Definition
Maryland	2019	32%	Includes reincarceration in federal prison
Massachusetts	2021	22%	Primary definition
Michigan	2021	21%	Primary definition
Minnesota	2020	20%	Only includes reconviction
Mississippi	2021	39%	Primary definition
Missouri	2021	29%	Primary definition
Montana	2019	37%	Primary definition
Nebraska	2021	28%	Primary definition
Nevada	2020	26%	Primary definition
New Hampshire	2020	41%	Primary definition
New Jersey	2020	22%	Primary definition
New Mexico	2021	39%	Primary definition
New York	2020	19%	Primary definition
North Carolina	2021	33%	2-year follow-up only
North Dakota	2021	40%	Primary definition
Ohio	2016	33%	Primary definition
Oklahoma	2019	18%	Primary definition
Oregon	2021	12%	Includes reincarceration for a new felony
	2016	47%	Includes reincarceration or new arrest
Rhode Island	2021	46%	Primary definition
South Carolina	2022	20%	Primary definition
South Dakota	2021	50%	Primary definition
Tennessee	2021	35%	Includes reincarceration in a prison or a jail

Source: The Council of State Governments.

Recidivism rate and definition, nationwide, continued.

State	Most Recent Exit Cohort Available	Recidivism Rate	Definition
Texas	2021	17%	Primary definition
Utah	2022	18%	Only includes reincarceration for a new crime
Vermont	2021	42%	Only includes reincarceration for over 90 days
Virginia	2020	18%	Primary definition
Washington	2021	25%	Primary definition
West Virginia	2016	29%	Primary definition
Wisconsin	2021	35%	Primary definition
Wyoming	2022	26%	Primary definition

Source: The Council of State Governments.



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