

Reducing Recidivism through Treatment and Reentry Supports

Promote rehabilitation practices and improved supervision to increase public safety

With 65% of Alaska's inmate population having a diagnosable mental health disorder,¹ the Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) is, by default, the largest provider of mental health and substance use disorder services in the state.

According to an Alaska Mental Health Trust report published in 2014, Trust beneficiaries² are at increased risk for involvement with the criminal justice system and account for more than 40% of Alaska's incarcerations each year. Additionally, their median length (or mid-point) of stay is significantly longer than for other offenders. For beneficiaries who commit felonies, the length of stay is double that of a non-beneficiary, and for misdemeanors, it is 150% longer.³

The Trust and partner advisory boards believe that justice-involved beneficiaries are best served with access to treatment, housing, employment assistance, education, and training, so they are more likely to experience rehabilitation and less likely to commit new crimes.

Since about 95% of incarcerated Alaskans will serve their time and return to our communities,⁴ funding for in-custody programs and community-based supports is a wise investment for improving public safety, reducing criminal recidivism, and creating safer, healthier communities.

Improved Practices Underway in Alaska

All Alaskans benefit when returning citizens have access to services and programs that help address the root causes of criminal behavior. Below are some of the improved efforts currently underway in Alaska:

Reentry Coalitions. Community coalitions have formed in Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Dillingham, Ketchikan, and Nome, to support individuals returning to the community after incarceration. Coalition efforts are helping to reduce barriers and improve community education and outreach. Alaska's reentry coalitions partner with profit and non-profit organizations, state agencies, and tribal, faith-based, and business organizations, to address barriers and promote practices that increase successful reentry and reduce recidivism.

Reentry Case Managers. Both DOC institutional probation officers and community case managers are partnering to provide early release planning 90-days before release for individuals at high-risk of recidivating. Reentry case managers provide transitional support for accessing housing, employment, training and education, healthcare, including behavioral health treatment, peer support, family reunification, and more, to increase the likelihood of stability and success after release.

Treatment inside prisons and halfway houses. Funding remains in place for mental health and addiction treatment inside prisons and halfway houses, with efforts to expand programming statewide. Treatment services can be the foundation of success after release from incarceration.

Improved prison population management practices. DOC prioritizes, when appropriate, separating low-level offenders from serious violent offenders, to prevent exposure to more serious anti-social and criminal behaviors. A large body of research shows that mixing low-level misdemeanants with high-level criminal offenders results in the low-level offenders returning to the community at higher risk for committing new crimes.

Strengthened community supervision during pretrial phase. DOC's Pretrial Enforcement Division provides improved supervision to defendants awaiting resolution of their criminal case, including connecting them to community resources that provide tools for long-term change and success, and increased likelihood of compliance with conditions of release.

Therapeutic Courts. Therapeutic courts offer court-supervised probation and rehabilitation support for people with mental illness, addiction, and other disorders. Specially-trained probation officers offer intensive case management and assistance for maintaining housing, employment, treatment, and recovery, while carrying out the obligations of their probation.

Access to limited driver's licenses. People convicted of a first felony DUI offense may receive a provisional driver's license if they: 1) participate in a therapeutic court program, or, if living where there isn't a therapeutic court, participate in a treatment program similar to a therapeutic court program, and 2) can prove he or she has been sober for 18 months.

Recidivism Reduction Fund. 50% of the revenue collected from the state's marijuana taxes has been invested into services and programs serving justice-involved individuals that include: 1) reentry services funded through DHSS for case managers who offer transitional planning and support; 2) substance use disorder treatment within DOC facilities; and 3) violence prevention programs through the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

The Trust and partner advisory boards support maintaining current efforts to enhance and expand services and programs that promote treatment and rehabilitation, improved public safety, and reduced criminal recidivism for justice-involved beneficiaries. ❖

¹Trust Beneficiaries in Alaska's Department of Corrections, Hornby Zeller Associates (May 2014), pii). <http://mhtrust.org/mhtawp/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ADOC-Trust-Beneficiaries-May-2014-FINAL-PRINT.pdf>

² Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries include people with mental illness, substance use disorders (SUD), intellectual-developmental disabilities (IDD), including fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ADRD), and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

³ Trust Beneficiaries in Alaska's Department of Corrections, Hornby Zeller Associates (May 2014), pii). <http://mhtrust.org/mhtawp/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ADOC-Trust-Beneficiaries-May-2014-FINAL-PRINT.pdf>

⁴ Alaska Department of Corrections presentation to Alaska State Legislature, 2018.

⁵ Division of Public Health, Alaska Bureau of Health Analytics & Vital Records.

For more information, go to: www.alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/jointadvocacy