



Criminal Justice Brief Executive Summary

This summary of the brief, *Criminal Justice-Involved Populations*, offers a high-level overview of the health care policy trends that impact those who are either currently in the criminal justice system or who have exited it.

An average of 2.3 million people were in prison or jail in the U.S. during 2020. While the rate of chronic illness among those who are incarcerated mirrors that of the general U.S. population, the rate of mental health challenges and substance abuse is markedly higher (see chart on page 2).

Because individuals in the justice-involved population are six times more likely to be Black and are disproportionately low-income, these policy issues discussed in the brief represent a significant opportunity to address health disparities.

There are several ways in which health care policy changes can make an impact on population health and the lives of those who are incarcerated both while in prison or jail and as they return to their communities, including:

-  **Medicaid suspension and delayed action:** Rather than terminating Medicaid upon incarceration, temporarily suspending these benefits can lead to better health outcomes. One state has delayed actions on individual Medicaid eligibility for up to 29 days after incarceration. This makes a difference for those with short jail stays.
-  **Transition care after release:** Reentry services that begin up to 30 days before release and post-release MCO-coordinated care can help people transition more smoothly.
-  **Information exchange:** Nearly half the states enable data exchange between corrections facilities, helping with health care transition during facility transfers as well as Medicaid reinstatement upon release.
-  **Reducing mental illness rates:** States and counties are joining Stepping Up, a national project to develop strategies to help reduce mental illness in jails and prisons.

Most states have expanded Medicaid eligibility to those who have been released from the criminal justice system. Supporting expanded Medicaid eligibility and transition services can improve the health and overall quality of life for the justice-involved population and their families.

Health Challenge	Incidence in U.S. Population	
	All Citizens	Incarcerated Citizens
Substance abuse disorder	3.8% ¹	70% ²
Mental health problem history	26% ³	≥ 37% ⁴
Chronic medical condition	40% ⁵	40% ⁴

To read the full brief on Criminal Justice-Involved Populations, visit: [UHCCS.com/criminaljusticebrief](https://uhccs.com/criminaljusticebrief)



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Sources:

¹ <https://drugabusestatistics.org>

² <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/pep19-screen-codjs.pdf>

³ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/mental-health-disorder-statistics>

⁴ <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/imhprj1112.pdf>

⁵ https://nationalhealthcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NHC_Files/Pdf_Files/AboutChronicDisease.pdf