

How Involvement in the Criminal Justice System Affects Health

Impacts extend to education, employment, housing, and even family member well-being



Education

Individuals with more education live longer and have a lower risk of chronic disease. But youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system are less likely to attend or graduate from college than their peers who have no juvenile justice history, potentially raising their risk of negative health outcomes.

Employment

Stable jobs and livable wages improve people's ability to meet basic needs, access health insurance, and afford resources such as nutritious foods. However, formerly incarcerated individuals earn less than the general population and often face restrictive hiring policies, reducing their opportunity to receive the health benefits associated with steady, well-paid employment.

Housing

Affordable housing helps people pay for basic needs, such as utilities, food, and medical care, which can reduce negative health outcomes. But people with criminal records face barriers to securing housing, which not only can reduce their ability to afford other necessities but also can lead to difficulty maintaining employment and increase their likelihood of reoffending.

Family well-being

Families of individuals who are incarcerated may face financial hardship associated with lost income, legal fees, and travel and visiting costs. In addition, children with a parent in jail or prison are at higher risk of low educational attainment and placement in the foster care system than other youth, and those whose fathers are incarcerated have a greater chance of being homeless.

Behavioral and physical health and access to care

Incarcerated individuals have a higher prevalence of infectious diseases, substance use disorders, chronic illness, and mental health issues compared with the general population, and a history of incarceration is associated with increased risk of negative health outcomes. Incarceration can also interrupt continuity of health care coverage, which can affect people's access to treatment and medications.

Sources: He Len Chung, Edward P. Mulvey, and Laurence Steinberg, "Understanding the School Outcomes of Juvenile Offenders: An Exploration of Neighborhood Influences and Motivational Resources," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 40, no. 8 (2011): 1025-38, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9626-2>; The Pew Charitable Trusts, "Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility" (2010), http://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf; Femina P. Varghese et al., "Attitudes Toward Hiring Offenders: The Roles of Criminal History, Job Qualifications, and Race," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 54, no. 5 (2009): 769-82, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0306624X09344960>; Steven H. Woolf et al., "How Are Income and Wealth Linked to Health and Longevity?" (2015), Urban Institute and Center on Society and Health, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/49116/2000178-How-are-Income-and-Wealth-Linked-to-Health-and-Longevity.pdf>; Joan Petersilia, "Hard Time: Ex-Offenders Returning Home After Prison," *Corrections Today* (2005), <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Hard+time%3a+ex-offenders+returning+home+after+prison.-a0131858598>; Jordyn White and Esha Sinha, *Improving Collection of Indicators of Criminal Justice System Involvement in Population Health Data Programs* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2017), <https://www.nap.edu/read/24633/chapter/4,17>; The Pew Charitable Trusts, "Prison Health Care: Costs and Quality" (2017), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2017/10/prison-health-care-costs-and-quality>; Christopher Wildeman and Emily A. Wang, "Mass Incarceration, Public Health, and Widening Inequality in the USA," *The Lancet* 389, no. 10077 (2017): 1464-74, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(17\)30259-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)30259-3); National Association of Counties, "Medicaid Coverage and County Jails: Understanding Challenges and Opportunities for Improving Health Outcomes for Justice-Involved Individuals" (2017), https://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/documents/Medicaid%20and%20County%20Jails%20Report_09.12.2018.pdf.

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