

August 14, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The undersigned organizations urge Congress to include the *Medicaid Reentry Act* in its next COVID-19 response package. This bipartisan legislation would permit Medicaid to support essential health care for 30 days prior to release and upon reentry, providing for more coordinated care for people in carceral settings and who are reentering. Access to and coordination of physical, mental health and substance use disorder care is especially important during this pandemic.

It is estimated that over 100,000 people in carceral settings nationwide have become infected with COVID-19. Thousands of people cycle in and out of jails, including many who are detained prior to adjudication and conviction, and many have become ill. A recent [analysis](#) published in *JAMA* found that, from March 31st through June 6th, COVID-19 cases in U.S. federal and state prisons were 5.5 times higher—and death rates three times higher—than in the general population.

The COVID-19 public health emergency has underscored the close relationship between the health of people in prisons and jails, and the health of families and communities. A recent [Health Affairs research article](#) found that people cycling through Cook County Jail was associated with 15.7 percent of all documented COVID-19 cases in Illinois and 15.9 percent of all documented cases in Chicago. Public health experts have acknowledged that COVID-19 clusters place communities at greater risk for higher rates of transmission and death. Currently all of the country's [fourteen largest known clusters of COVID-19 cases](#) are correctional facilities.

Allowing for Medicaid coverage just prior to release would lead to reduced use of emergency departments, hospitalizations, and other medical expenses connected to health care needs upon reentry and result in health care cost savings. As we face a pandemic of infectious disease, the *Medicaid Reentry Act* would not only improve the health of reentering individuals but also would protect the health of the community.

The *Medicaid Reentry Act* also would promote greater racial justice and equity in access to health care. Due to systemic racism, Black and Brown people face disparities in health care coverage and access. As a result, they experience poorer health outcomes, including higher rates of COVID-19 infection and mortality. Untreated mental health and substance use

disorders, coupled with racism in the criminal justice system, have driven the overrepresentation of Black and Brown people in jails and prisons. Strengthening people's access to quality community-based health care upon reentry would foster racial justice and equity by improving Black and Brown people's health outcomes and reducing rates of re-involvement with the criminal justice system.

Finally, the *Medicaid Reentry Act* would continue Congress's important bipartisan work to reduce mortality as a result of increasing numbers of drug overdoses and suicides, especially since the onset of COVID-19. People with mental health and substance use disorders who are reentering the community from incarceration are particularly vulnerable; in the first two weeks of reentry, people are 129 percent more likely to die from a drug overdose and are at significantly higher risk to die by suicide. In this time of heightened stress, isolation, and hardship, rates of mental health and substance use disorder-related crises are increasing. As people transition from incarceration to the community, the *Medicaid Reentry Act* would reduce care disruptions and provide a warm handoff to community-based mental health and substance use disorder services, medications, and supports. More effectively addressing mental health and substance use disorder care needs immediately before and during reentry would also reduce recidivism.

As Congress crafts legislation to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, passage of the *Medicaid Reentry Act* is a crucial step to improving the health of individuals reentering the community from incarceration and promoting the community's public health and safety. We urge you to take action to ensure that the Medicaid Reentry Act is included in the next response package. Thank you for your attention to these important issues; please contact Gabrielle de la Guéronnière ([gdelagueronniere@lac-dc.org](mailto:gdelagueronniere@lac-dc.org)) with any questions.

National Organizations:

Addiction Policy Forum  
AIDS United  
American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry  
American Academy of HIV Medicine  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Society of Addiction Medicine  
The Ammon Foundation  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Balonick & Associates  
C4 Recovery Solutions INC.  
Campaign for Youth Justice  
The Carter Center Mental Health Program  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Child Welfare League of America  
Community Access National Network

Community Catalyst  
Community Oriented Correctional Health Services  
CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Faces & Voices of Recovery  
From Prison Cells to PhD  
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality  
Health in Justice Action Lab, Northeastern University  
Hep B United  
Hepatitis B Foundation  
Hepatitis C Association  
Hepatitis C Mentor and Support Group-HCMSG  
HIV Medicine Association  
Hondurans Against AIDS  
Infectious Diseases Society of America  
Inseparable  
International Community Corrections Association  
Justice Optimization Technical Associates  
The Kennedy Forum  
Lakeshore Foundation  
Law Enforcement Action Partnership  
Legal Action Center  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)  
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals  
NACBHDD (National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors)  
NARMH (National Association for Rural Mental Health)  
NASTAD  
National Alliance to End Homelessness  
National Alliance for Medication Assisted (NAMA) Recovery  
National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare  
National Association for Children of Addiction  
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers  
National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists  
National Association of Counties  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Commission on Correctional Health Care  
National Criminal Justice Association  
National Crittenton  
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)  
National HIRE Network  
National Juvenile Justice Network  
National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable  
National Youth Employment Coalition  
A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing)  
Opioid Crisis Response Fund  
Police, Treatment, and, Community Collaborative (PTACC)  
Positive Women's Network-USA  
Ryan White Medical Providers Coalition  
Safer Foundation

Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America (SARDAA)  
Shatterproof  
SMART Recovery  
Southern AIDS Coalition  
StopStigmaNow  
Treatment Action Group  
Treatment Advocacy Center  
Treatment Communities of America  
Trust for America's Health  
Well Being Trust  
The Well Project  
Woodhull Freedom Foundation

Local and State Organizations:

AIDS Foundation Chicago  
Any Positive Change Inc. (California)  
APLA Health (California)  
Aquila Recovery Clinic LLC (Washington, DC)  
Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare (Oregon)  
Central City Concern (Oregon)  
CODA, Inc (Oregon)  
Desert AIDS Project (California)  
Equality North Carolina  
Equality Ohio  
A Family Affair Living Our Best Life (South Carolina)  
Friends of Guest House (Virginia)  
Georgians for a Healthy Future  
Harm Reduction Sisters (Minnesota)  
Interfaith Action for Human Rights (Washington, DC)  
Live4Lali (Illinois)  
Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association  
Mommieactivist and Sons (Washington, DC)  
Motherhood Beyond Bars (Georgia)  
New Jersey Citizen Action  
New York Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers  
North Carolina AIDS Action Network  
Oregon Council for Behavioral Health  
Positive People Network, Inc (Florida)  
Reproductive Justice Inside (Maryland)  
Salvation and Social Justice (New Jersey)  
San Francisco AIDS Foundation  
Sonoran Prevention Works (Arizona)  
Suncoast Harm Reduction Project  
TASC, Inc. (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities) (Illinois)  
University of Maryland School of Medicine  
Utah Health Policy Project  
VOCAL-NY  
Voices for a Second Chance (Washington, DC)  
Women on the Rise GA  
WV FREE