

### Where We Stand:

NAMI believes that all people with mental health conditions deserve access to supports that promote wellness. NAMI supports comprehensive re-entry policies and programs for people with mental illness who are returning to their community after a period of incarceration.

### Why We Care:

People with mental illness are overrepresented in our nation's criminal justice system. Of the over [2 million](#) people held in our nation's jails and prisons, nearly 2 in 5 have a history of mental illness ([37%](#) in state and federal prisons and [44%](#) held in local jails). Of those who are incarcerated, [95%](#) will one day be released and will face a variety of challenges as they re-enter their communities. Health care often takes the backburner as they deal with more pressing needs, like housing, food security, reconnecting with family members and finding employment.

Re-entry — the period of return to a community from incarceration — can be marked by heightened stress, isolation and hardship. For people with mental illness and substance use disorders (SUD), there is increased vulnerability and risk. Nationally, about [80%](#) of individuals released from prison in the U.S. each year have a chronic medical, substance use, or psychiatric condition.

Due to the lack of [timely access](#) to critical services and supports for their health or mental health condition, these individuals are at a higher risk of repeated incarceration. In fact, the risk of [death by suicide or opioid overdose](#), dramatically increases in the first days and weeks after an individual is released from jail or prison. According to one study, the risk of a fatal drug overdose is [129 times](#) higher for individuals returning to the community than for the general population.

Successful re-entry begins in the weeks and months before someone is released. Gaining access

to housing, social supports (food, employment, education) and community supports (family, friends, social networks) are all critical for successful reintegration. Access to mental and physical health care is equally important. [Research suggests](#) that those who have health care coverage upon re-entry are more likely to engage in services and supports that reduce recidivism.

**NAMI supports comprehensive re-entry policies and programs for people with mental illness who are returning to their community after a period of incarceration.**

Public policies should encourage comprehensive re-entry planning, including:

- Providing a warm handoff to community-based mental health and substance use disorder care
- Increasing access to medications
- Connecting to supports, like housing and food assistance

These policies will more effectively address mental health care needs immediately before and during re-entry — and help save lives.

To learn more about NAMI's work on this issue, visit [www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities](http://www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities)