REENTRY 2030

Beyond Recidivism: Redefining Measures to Understand Reentry Success

To measure reentry success, states must look beyond recidivism, the traditional metric of re-arrest, conviction, or incarceration within a defined time period following justice system involvement.[1] Measuring recidivism is valuable, but it offers a limited view of the complex challenges faced by people reentering communities from incarceration.

Measuring recidivism alone overlooks critical aspects of reintegration that directly impact public safety and individual well-being. Recidivism rates don't capture whether people are stably housed, employed, or participating in substance use treatment—all factors that are essential indicators of successful reintegration.

Tracking and reporting on a broader set of measures allows states, particularly corrections systems and community-based organizations, to assess the effectiveness of reentry services and initiatives holistically, make more informed decisions, improve individual outcomes, and optimize resource allocation.[2] To see examples of how some states are applying these measures beyond recidivism, explore the goals that **Reentry 2030** states are setting to redefine successful reentry.

Collaboration Across State Agencies

Tracking meaningful reentry outcome categories requires a coordinated, multi-agency approach. Collaboration among corrections, education, health care, housing, social services, and workforce development systems and agencies ensures access to integrated resources. It also reduces service silos and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the reentry process. In addition, leveraging shared data systems or establishing data-sharing agreements enhances accountability, streamlines referrals, and supports informed decision-making.

Critical Elements to Measure

Recidivism progression

Employment and financial stability

Housing security

Health and wellbeing

Social reintegration

Reentry Outcomes to Measure Besides Recidivism

Recidivism Progression

As noted, reporting recidivism rates alone provides a limited snapshot of reentry outcomes. Tracking recidivism *progression* offers a more nuanced understanding of behavioral change, desistance patterns, and the effectiveness of reentry supports. Recidivism progression refers to the pattern or trajectory of an individual's repeated involvement in the criminal justice system and examines how recidivism evolves over time.

This approach allows agencies to differentiate between individuals who return to prison on a violation of supervision conditions or commit minor, infrequent offenses from those with more serious or persistent patterns. The approach enables more targeted and responsive interventions as well as an opportunity to assess the impact of interventions over time.

Measuring Recidivism Progression

Example Measures	Purpose of Measure	Example Metrics
Community Supervision Violations and Revocations	Important for identifying risk factors for noncompliance, assessing supervision effectiveness, and reducing unnecessary incarceration	• Percentage of population reentering community supervision who violate (by type: technical; new offense) within 6 months, 1 year, 2 years of supervision start • Percentage of population reentering community supervision revoked within 1 year, 2 years, 3 years of supervision start • Average time (days/months) to reincarceration on revocation due to technical violation • Average time (days/months) to reincarceration due to re-offense
Time to re-offense	Helps pinpoint critical intervention periods and allow for targeted support services during high-risk time frames	• Average time (days/months) to re-offense • Average time (days/months) to re-offense by criminogenic risk and need level

Example Measures	Purpose of Measure	Example Metrics
Severity of re-offense	Helps tailor interventions and measure desistence progression	• Felony vs. misdemeanor • Violent vs. non-violent • Comparison by offense degree/level • Percentage of individuals with a felony conviction who re-offend with a misdemeanor • Percentage of individuals with a conviction for a violent crime who re-offend with a non-violent crime
Frequency of re-offense	Helps guide resource allocation and target supervision strategies and interventions to reduce persistent reoffending behaviors	• Average number of re-offenses in 1 year and 3 years following release • Annualized re-offense rate (total number of re-offenses divided by number of years tracked)

Employment and Financial Stability

Employment and financial stability refer to a person's ability to find and maintain employment. This category encompasses gainful, stable employment; income adequacy; educational opportunities for career advancement; and financial independence. Measuring financial stability is essential because it is closely linked to reduced recidivism, improved well-being, and successful long-term reintegration into the community.[3]

Measuring Employment and Financial Stability

Example Measures	Purpose of Measure	Example Metrics
Employment status	Helps identify barriers to workforce entry, inform policies that reduce obstacles, and expand access to job opportunities	• Employment rates within 6 months and 1 year post-release • Employment rates within 6 months and 1 year of release by criminogenic risk and need level • Full-time vs. part-time employment status • Industry or job sector of employment
Duration of employment	Can illustrate the need for ongoing job readiness support, more tailored job matching, and other post-employment services, such as transportation, to improve job retention	• Average length of employment 1 year post-release • Average hours of employment (part time/full time employment) • Average length of employment with the same employer (job retention)

Example Measures	Purpose of Measure	Example Metrics
Income	Informs efforts to connect individuals with higher-paying jobs, wage subsidies, or financial assistance programs	• Monthly or yearly income • Average income proportional to the poverty line within 6 months, 1 year, and 3 years post-release
Workforce development, education, and credential attainment	Ensures alignment with in-demand jobs, helps refine program accessibility and effectiveness, and informs the need for additional supports or employer partnerships to improve job placement outcomes	• Percentage of individuals enrolled in workforce development, skill-building, or certification programs • Percentage of individuals enrolled in high school equivalency or post-secondary education programs • Completion rate for credential, certification, or workforce training programs • Retention rate in workforce training programs • Percentage of participants employed in a field related to their training

Housing Security

Housing security refers to the stability, safety, and sustainability of an individual's housing after release from incarceration. It serves as a foundation for employment, community reintegration, and access to essential support services. Measuring housing security is critical because unstable housing increases the risk of recidivism and can disrupt engagement with supervision, treatment, and employment opportunities.

Measuring Housing Security

Example Measures	Purpose of Measure	Example Metrics
Duration of housing	Helps identify risks of instability and the need for ongoing housing supports	• Percentage of individuals remaining in housing for less than 6 months, 6 months–1 year, and more than 1 year • Average length of time individuals remains in stable housing during a defined time period • Rate of housing transitions (number of times individuals move within a given period) • Percentage of individuals experiencing housing disruptions or evictions within the first year post-release

Example Measures	Purpose of Measure	Example Metrics
Housing type	Guides resource allocation and support services to create pathways toward permanent, independent housing	• Percentage of individuals living in transitional housing, shelters, permanent housing within 6 months, 1 year, and 3 years post-release • Percentage of individuals who have accessed public housing within 6 months, 1 year, and 3 years post-release
Housing status	Helps identify individuals at risk of homelessness and target interventions where most needed	• Percentage of individuals in stable vs. unstable housing at different checkpoints post-release (30 days, 6 months, 1 year)
Duration of housing instability (shelter stays and unsheltered) episodes	Helps identify gaps in services and informs improvements to rapid rehousing efforts	• Average number of unstable housing episodes within 6 months and 1 year of release • Average number of days of housing instability within 6 months, 1 year, and 3 years post-release
Rent burden (percentage of income spent on housing)	Helps identify affordability challenges, and supports efforts to identify and increase access to affordable housing	• Percentage of income spent on rent/utilities (unstable if >30%; severe if >50%)
Time to stable housing	Helps improve pre-release planning and streamline housing placements	• Average time to secure permanent housing • Percentage of individuals in permanent housing within 30 days, 6 months, and 1 year post-release

Health and Wellbeing

Health refers to physical, mental, and behavioral well-being. To get a full picture of health, it is critical not only to know an individual's mental and physical health status as assessed by a qualified provider—it is also important to know about their access to care, including health insurance and access to health providers, and whether they are receiving needed treatment. An individual's health directly impacts their ability to secure employment, maintain relationships, process trauma, and avoid re-incarceration.

Measuring Health and Wellbeing

Example Measures	Purpose of Measure	Example Metrics
Substance use treatment (enrollment and completion rates)	Helps identify gaps and barriers to access and informs efforts to strengthen continuity of care	• Percentage of individuals referred to treatment who enroll • Percentage of individuals who complete a treatment program • Average length of time (days/weeks) individuals remain in treatment
Mental health service utilization	Highlights whether individuals are accessing needed care and informs strategies to reduce barriers and expand availability	• Percentage of individuals referred to treatment who enroll • Percentage of individuals who complete a treatment program • Average length of time (days/weeks) individuals remain in treatment
Mental health status	Guides individualized treatment adjustments and informs resource allocation for higher-need populations	• Percentage of individuals with a diagnosed mental health condition, including level of functional impairment, post-release • Self-reported mental health status (e.g., standardized surveys or screening tools measuring well-being, stress, depression, or anxiety levels) • Change in mental health status over time based on clinical assessments or self-reports
Medicaid enrollment	Reveals whether returning individuals have timely access to healthcare coverage and may highlight a policy/practice need to address enrollment delays	• Percentage of individuals enrolled in Medicaid within 1 month, 6 months, 1 year post-release
Health care system utilization	Helps detect overreliance on emergency services or underuse of preventive care and can inform targeted improvements in care coordination	• Percentage of individuals who establish a primary care provider within 6 months and 1 year post-release • Average number of doctor visits, emergency room visits, hospitalizations within 1 year of release

Social Reintegration

Social integration refers to the process of people reconnecting with their families, social networks, and local communities after justice system involvement. Successful social reintegration involves rebuilding relationships, fostering social support, and actively participating in community life to promote stability and engagement in prosocial behaviors. Measuring social integration is important because strong social connections are associated with reduced isolation, lower rates of recidivism, and greater long-term success in reentry.

Measuring Social Reintegration

Example Measures	Purpose of Measure	Example Metrics
Civic engagement	Reveals barriers to public involvement and supports efforts to promote community belonging and active citizenship	• Percentage of individuals registered to vote • Percentage of individuals engaged in community organizations or community service • Frequency of engagement with community organizations
Pro-social network engagement	Identifies individuals engaged in protective factors or at risk of isolation and guides interventions to build healthy, pro-social networks	• Participation rate in community organizations, support groups, or mentoring programs • Percentage of individuals with stable, supportive social networks (e.g., identified mentors, family members, peer support systems) • Types of supportive relationships (family, mentors, peers, community)

Measuring the Full Picture of Reentry Success

By expanding reentry measurement beyond recidivism, states can use gathered data to develop more comprehensive strategies to support successful reentry and improve public safety. **This approach—tracking measures of employment, housing, health, and social integration alongside recidivism progression—provides a fuller picture of reentry success and helps target resources where they are most needed.** In several of these domains, validated assessments (such as for substance use) and standard scales (such as for social reintegration) are available to capture metrics in these areas.

Through Reentry 2030, states across the country are already setting ambitious goals using these broader measures and demonstrating that success after incarceration encompasses many dimensions of stability and wellbeing. By adopting these comprehensive metrics, stakeholders and practitioners can better understand what works, address service gaps, and ultimately create stronger, safer communities while supporting people returning from incarceration.

Endnotes

1. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *The Limits of Recidivism: Measuring Success After Prison* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2022): https://doi.org/10.17226/26459.

2. J. Buck Willison, *Measuring Reentry Success Beyond Recidivism* (Washington,DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2023): https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Look%20Beyond%20Recidivism_March%2029%202023.pdf.

3. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *The Limits of Recidivism: Measuring Success After Prison* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2022): https://doi.org/10.17226/26459.

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