



## Overview

The Needs and Resources Assessment provides a snapshot of key areas that can impact prisoner reentry outcomes. The Assessment examines distinct areas, and includes transportation, drug and alcohol treatment resources, housing, employment, and cultural opportunities. The Anchorage Reentry Coalition has built and enhanced understanding of each of these areas over time.

COVID-19 emerged just over two years ago and has disrupted or had some kind of impact on nearly every aspect of day-to-day living, whether it relates to reentry in some way or not. In Anchorage some businesses temporarily shuttered their doors, while others closed entirely; social services pivoted to telephonic and digital delivery of services; community corrections had fewer face to face interaction; and schools and training programs halted in-person learning for a time. Routine movement, visitation, legal visits, classes and programs, and recreational activities inside Alaska correctional facilities were greatly restricted; programming and opportunities for outside community-engagement are still limited

There was a seismic shift in how services are accessed and delivered, and the long-term impacts are yet to be understood. The following assessment is surely incomplete given the on-going disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the constant adjustments taking place in the community in response to the pandemic. As of this writing, services are trending towards more in-person, face-to-face engagement but the lasting impacts of hunker down policies will continue to ripple in Anchorage and the reentry community.

### ***Methodology***

A variety of methods were used to inform this assessment. Primary data has been collected at various times between 2016 and 2022, primarily from inmates, reentrants, and from service providers. In 2016 the Coalition employed a telephonic survey to gather information from resource providers; resource providers included in the survey were prescribed by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and the Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC). Information was gathered directly from individuals in the community that were living at Community Residential Centers, and from currently incarcerated individuals at various correctional facilities in 2016, 2018, and 2018-19. Focus group data was gathered from inmates at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center and residents of Cordova Center, Parkview Center and Glenwood Center in 2018.

Secondary data has been provided directly to the Coalition by agencies such as Partners Reentry Center, Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD), and the Alaska DOC. In January, 2018, secondary data was collected from Partners Reentry Center regarding their agency's services, primarily focused on housing. Data was collected from the LEAP Grant implemented by the Alaska DOLWD, which focused on providing tailored pre and post-release employment services to reentrants at Goose Creek and Hiland Mountain correctional centers. Local substance use/abuse treatment programs were contacted directly to inform this assessment of the local drug and alcohol treatment programs; information was gleaned from existing directories, email correspondence, and phone conversations to supplement this information.



The Alaska DOC also shares with the Coalition Coordinator a dataset containing community-specific reentry data that. Additionally, the Alaska DOC publishes an annual Offender Profile report with characteristics about the incarcerated population in Alaska. The data in the Offender Profile does not supply Anchorage-specific reentry data but does add clarity around demographics of the incarcerated population in Alaska.

Annually since 2016, the Anchorage Reentry Coalition Coordinator and other partners gather in various settings and events. Participation in on-going, semi-regular, or one-time events offers opportunities to continue to build knowledge of local and statewide reentry efforts and criminal justice issues. All of these opportunities serve to inform this assessment, such as attendance and observation of weekly case management meetings at Partners Reentry Center, Assembly Meetings, testimonials for SB54 legislation, Community Council meetings, Alaska Criminal Justice Commission meetings, reentry conferences and trainings, AK Reentry Partnership meetings, and other relevant meetings hosted throughout the community.



## **Housing**

### ***Introduction***

Shelter is a basic human necessity that can prove difficult to access and maintain for some, whether it be due to financial issues, physical impediments, policy mandates, or any other combination of barriers and stigma. The need to identify, obtain, and maintain stable housing immediately upon release to the community post-incarceration is a common need among reentrants, and is similarly recognized as a common need among service providers that serve and work with this population. Stakeholders engaged in the criminal justice system and prisoner reentry in Alaska have also recognized the importance of housing access post-incarceration and acknowledge that it is a critical component of successful reentry.

In Alaska it is unknown how many individuals release from incarceration into homeless or are marginally housed after releasing, as the Alaska DOC does not systematically collect such data nor is that information captured by any other programs or data systems in a systematic, comprehensive way. The Inmate Reentry Survey conducted by the Coalition Coordinator in 2018-19 substantiated the need for safe and reliable housing among reentrants, as 73% of respondents stated that they would need or seek out assistance with obtaining housing upon their release from incarceration.<sup>1</sup> Anecdotal evidence and focus group data from inmates and reentrants gathered in 2016 and early 2018 also supported the notion that housing is a priority area of need for both men and women returning to the community in Anchorage. While many individuals are aware that housing support exists in Anchorage, there is an on-going need to provide updated information and educate individuals about new services and housing options. Without a significant paradigm shift, access to, placement in, and on-going support to keep reentrants in stable and safe housing will continue to be a significant area of need among those exiting incarceration in Alaska.

Despite all the challenges and barriers that impede access to housing for reentrants in Anchorage, there are numerous resources that can help support those in need of housing. These include sustained funding sources to help pay for short-term transitional housing, a network of housing providers that span a range of modalities and approaches, and a network of service providers that facilitate access to housing for eligible clients. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the transitional housing landscape and how housing providers, reentrants, law enforcement, and social service providers work together. The impacts are still being unwound and will be touched upon throughout this analysis.

### ***Housing Assets/Strengths in Anchorage***

#### ***Partners Reentry Center***

The primary resource hub for facilitating access to short-term, transitional housing for reentrants in Anchorage is Partners Reentry Center (PRC). PRC receives funding through the State of Alaska to facilitate the placement of reentrants into transitional housing. As a result, PRC is a vital resource in that it currently (as of early 2022) maintains a network of about 15 independent housing providers and sites that actively provide short-term housing for reentrants. This network of providers has changed over time, as new housing providers occasionally emerge while others may halt operations or go in different directions. Despite this, Anchorage has a modest number of short-term beds for individuals immediately upon release from incarceration.



Reportedly, PRC has placed more than 3,700 people into temporary or transitional housing since 2013.<sup>2</sup> A process has been established by which individuals may apply for a bed in a transitional living location through PRC and (pending availability and eligibility) have a bed arranged for them upon release. The application process is aided by DOC staff who transmit applications or communicate with PRC about individuals releasing to Anchorage.

For those individuals that successfully remain in the community after their initial release there may be additional support through PRC in transitioning into long-term housing. Support could include referral to potential landlords, assistance with the security deposit, or payment of first month's rent. PRC has established contacts with landlords that are willing to rent to individuals that may have a criminal background. It is not uncommon for landlords to inquire about criminal history on a housing application and deny housing to those that have a prior conviction regardless of their efforts to integrate into the community<sup>14</sup>; PRC's support in obtaining long-term housing may help to mitigate some barriers people may experience as part of their reentry process:

PRC is an important community-based agency in Anchorage that links reentrants to transitional housing providers immediately upon release. PRC holds a weekly case management meeting that allows service providers the opportunity to come together to discuss mutually served clients, resolve issues, and share information and network. Prior to the pandemic, PRC and some of the housing providers also made visits to correctional institutions to educate and inform inmates about options available in the community prior to release. While the COVID-19 pandemic forced PRC to close their doors to walk-in clients for much of 2021, PRC has continued to serve clients and facilitate access to reentry housing and has reopened the doors to walk-in clients again.

### *Reentry Housing Options*

Anchorage is fortunate in that there are housing options for individuals that have been incarcerated. There is a known network of roughly 15 locations in Anchorage that house reentrants or are willing to house people with a criminal background immediately upon their release to the community. In Anchorage, there are housing options for people with a mental health diagnosis; those with a sex offense; women/male-only options; sober living homes; and faith-based programs. For those individuals that are willing to abide by program and house rules, there are generally short-term housing options available for reentrants in Anchorage. There are also a limited number of residential SUD treatment beds in Anchorage, which are a short-term option for some.

Locations vary in terms of the degree of support a program participant, resident or tenant will receive while they are there. Some locations simply offer a simple apartment or bedroom with no additional supportive services, while others strive to build a sense of community and offer on-site programming, medication management, social support, and group activities. The majority of the options compel individuals to share rooms or live in multi-unit complexes, but many are centrally located or easily accessible by public transportation. The majority of these housing options are in the Mountain View, Downtown, Russian Jack, and Fairview neighborhoods

For those that return to the community and are able to afford their own housing, there are long-term rental options through landlords that are willing to rent to those that may have prior justice involvement.



It is unknown how many such landlords exist in Anchorage that are “felon friendly” but they do exist. PRC and transitional housing providers can sometimes assist with making referrals to these private landlords. Success in finding a long-term housing may sometimes be contingent on “right-place, right-time” circumstances, and if no rental options or permanent supportive housing programs are available, they may be pressed to find other options that are less ideal. The Landlord Housing Partnership, being developed through the United Way, is geared towards providing long-term housing opportunities and has explicit rules that applicants will not be screened out due solely to prior convictions. Despite potential challenges with finding locations to live long-term, there are housing opportunities for reentrants in Anchorage that exceed other communities in Alaska.

### *Funding Sources for Housing*

In Anchorage, PRC is the primary gatekeeper for accessing subsidized transitional housing opportunities immediately after release for reentrants. Through grant funding PRC is able pay for housing costs for clients that remain in compliance with their program for six months. There are, however, other programs and funding streams currently operating that are also intended to help cover the cost of housing for reentrants. The DBH Reducing Recidivism Grant (also administered through PRC in collaboration with NeighborWorks Alaska) has a small amount of housing funds for enrolled clients. The Alaska DOC has the ability to cover transitional costs through Second Chance Act Grant for clients, and can cover costs associated with obtaining housing by applying for direct service funding through the Reentry Unit. The Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (“Returning Home”) program offered through the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation is available for those under DOC supervision and can pay up to 12 months of rental assistance for eligible individuals.<sup>3</sup> The adult reentry program at the Alaska Native Justice Center has, at times, also had funding to cover the cost of transitional housing for clients.

The APIC Program is a support program administered by Alaska DOC and funded by the Alaska Mental Health Trust. Individuals releasing from Alaska DOC custody that have a diagnosed mental health condition may be eligible for APIC, which is able to pay housing costs in Anchorage for enrolled clients.<sup>4</sup> The Home For Good supportive housing program is open to those who have a history of incarceration and aims to house 190 people in the first three years of the program.<sup>5</sup> There are also other social service providers and programs that may be able to assist with housing reentrants in Anchorage, however, eligibility may be narrower in scope and or have very limited capacity. Such resources include the 811 Program, programs available for individuals that fit the definition of homeless or chronically homeless, programs for those with mental health diagnoses and more limited justice involvement, and other supportive programs geared towards low-income individuals.

It is presumed that the pandemic has not directly impacted funding sources negatively that support housing for reentrants. In some respects, there may have been enhanced opportunities to receive funding for housing support through rental assistance opportunities that were the result of federal aid spurred by the pandemic.



### *Other Organizational Supports & Advocacy*

Organizations within the Anchorage Reentry Coalition have continued to advocate on behalf of reentrants for access to housing and have continued to work together to bolster resources in this area. In 2017, Code for America, a non-profit agency based in California, partnered with the Municipality of Anchorage, the Anchorage Economic Development Council, and the Anchorage Reentry Coalition for the purposes of strengthening access to information regarding housing and employment opportunities. The result of the partnership was the creation of the Start Here Anchorage website, which has since gone unmaintained.

In 2017 and 2018 the Anchorage Reentry Coalition's Housing Committee (key contributors included NeighborWorks Alaska, Partners Reentry Center, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, GeoGroup, Front Range Apartments, and Southcentral Foundation) created standards for transitional and supportive housing. These standards were shared with housing providers and coalition agencies to create a standard for health and safety of housing options and provide streamlined pricing for reentrant housing.

Members of the Coalition Steering Team have continued to raise issues regarding access to housing, advocate for individuals in-need of housing, and support the expansion of programs and partnerships. In mid-2020, the Coordinator of the Anchorage Reentry Coalition joined the Advisory Council on the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness. The hope is that this engagement between coalitions will help to boost understanding of the relationship between criminal justice system involvement and homelessness, and enhance relationships between organizations that operate within each coalition. While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruption within the community, the Anchorage Reentry Coalition continues to promote access to housing and leverage existing assets that benefit those in need of housing support.

In early 2022, the Coalition Coordinator sent an advocacy letter to the Anchorage Mayor, Anchorage Assembly, and advisory boards regarding the impacts of incarceration, reentry, and housing with the intent of raising awareness and increasing engagement at the Municipality.

### ***Barriers Impeding Effective Coordination, Access, and Delivery of Housing Services in Anchorage***

#### *General Housing Availability*

In order to understand challenges reentrants face when accessing and maintaining housing, it is also necessary to examine larger, macro issues regarding housing in Anchorage. Across the state there is a shortage of thousands of units of affordable housing and this impacts the poorest people in Alaska, particularly extremely low-income people and households.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, there is a lack of affordable and available rental units in Anchorage for low-income renters.<sup>7</sup>

While it is important to examine access to affordable housing options, particularly for low-income individuals and families, it is also important to have an understanding of the overall housing landscape in Anchorage and Alaska. According to an assessment by the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, the Cook Inlet Region (CIRI, which includes Anchorage) is projected to have a deficit of 4,000 housing units by 2025 across all income levels, suggesting that there will continue to be a lack of general housing availability in the area compared to projected growth.<sup>6</sup>



One way to alleviate growing demand within a housing market is to build and make available more housing units. Based on current estimates, however, new housing construction in Alaska is not projected to meet population growth.<sup>6</sup> One reason for the lack of new housing units is that construction costs for new housing in Alaska are high, particularly when compared to other states. According to a presentation prepared by Agnew::Beck, the per square foot cost of new construction in Anchorage is \$240, whereas the cost in the Lower 48 is \$120. For housing developers, creating new housing options is expensive, requires a great deal of start-up capital, and may not yield a large return on investment.<sup>8</sup>

Availability of affordable housing options, overcrowding in existing housing, and a supply of old, inadequate housing stock are some of the challenges in the general housing market.<sup>6</sup> Vacancy rates for rental units in Anchorage are lower than the statewide average according to a 2020 data from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.<sup>9</sup> When housing is available, it can be quite expensive. In order to afford renting a one-bedroom apartment in Anchorage, one must have an hourly income of \$19.90.<sup>7</sup>

Generally speaking, affordable housing options in Anchorage can be more difficult to obtain for low-income individuals and families. And while there are programs and services available for certain qualified individuals to help aid access to, and placement into affordable housing options, the fact remains that housing stock is relatively low compared to the total population. Until there is greater availability of affordable housing options for the general population in Anchorage that match the need (e.g. single occupancy apartments, single-family homes, multi-generational homes, etc.) reentrants will likely continue to also be challenged with finding and maintaining non-subsidized, stable housing upon their release into the community.

### *Federal Funding Sources & Collateral Consequences*

Many local and state housing agencies and programs that offer housing opportunities for low-income individuals receive federal funding originating from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). There are several consequences to reliance on HUD funding. Firstly, there are certain limitations regarding the use of federal dollars for housing individuals with particular criminal offenses such as arson, some sex offenses, and those convicted of manufacturing methamphetamines. HUD also has established definitions that define who is deemed “homeless” and “chronically homeless” that do not always align with the realities of individuals being released from long periods of incarceration.<sup>10</sup> For example, an individual released from incarceration after 10 years in prison would not be defined as homeless upon release from incarceration, even if that individual has no place to live upon release, and would therefore not necessarily be eligible for HUD-funded programs designed to house homeless individuals.

Lastly, HUD imposes certain housing standards (safety, occupancy, etc.) and has reporting requirements for programs and housing providers in order to qualify for funding and reimbursement. Consequently, some housing providers choose not to engage or seek out HUD funding and are therefore not necessarily beholden to the same quality and safety standards. The result is that short-term reentry housing options in Anchorage tend to be double or triple occupancy rooms, and rooms that may be old and unmaintained. Housing providers may also forgo engagements using HUD funding due to onerous reporting



requirements; some housing providers in Anchorage have few staff and may be unable to properly meet necessary reporting requirements associated with receiving federal funding.

### *Transitional Living Facilities*

Most transitional and supportive housing providers in Anchorage that house reentrants typically have a “head in the bed” arrangement, meaning they do not request reimbursement based on occupied rooms, but rather by individual occupancy and nights spent at a facility. As a result, many reentrants living in short-term and transitional living facilities have roommates. There are instances when roommates may be incompatible; exposure to drugs, alcohol, other detrimental or illegal behaviors can occur which can further lead to volatile housing situations and instability for some individuals.

All transitional living facilities have program and house rules, and some offer programming and support services that foster a sense of community and further establishes boundaries for residents. While certain facilities are a good fit for some, they may not be a good fit for others depending on the circumstances and needs of the individual. An impediment to successfully abiding by the rules of a facility may sometimes be rooted in the lack of compatibility between the facility and the individual. Matching individuals to the appropriate services is universal, but this is a particularly salient factor when discussing those under correctional supervision; in many instances, reentrants are released under certain stipulations that could include maintaining a stable residence and abiding by programmatic rules so as to stay in compliance with conditions of their release. An inability to abide by house rules could lead to expulsion, which could be a factor that leads to re-incarceration. The need for behavioral health supports is common among this population,<sup>11</sup> but it is probable that available in-house behavioral health support does not meet total demand among the reentry population in Anchorage.

### *Other Barriers & Stigmas*

Frequently, financial sustainability is a barrier to maintaining safe and stable housing among reentrants. Many reentrants are eager to enter the workforce immediately upon release and begin earning money; it is common that obtaining employment will be a condition of parole. For the average, able-bodied person, entry-level and marginal employment can be obtained fairly quickly. Even though employment may be available, such jobs may not pay a living wage nor be in proximity to where one lives (or intends to live). Without outside assistance and support, it may be difficult for reentrants to smoothly transition from short-term transitional living to a long-term housing option. This situation may have been further exacerbated by the local hunker down orders during the pandemic and business closures that may have resulted in decreased wages and subsequently less money to be put towards rent.

Stigma relating to incarceration can make obtaining housing difficult. Pushback against the establishment of housing for reentrants in particular neighborhoods is one reason it may be difficult for private landlords to establish more housing options. Supportive housing options for those convicted of a felony can be difficult to obtain compared to other average or low-income individuals, but options for those specifically convicted of arson or sex offenses are very limited in Anchorage. There are places one can live if they have a sex offense charge, but such places can be hard to find and are sometimes located through word-of-mouth.



## ***Policy, Network, or Funding Gaps***

### *Screening & Background Checks*

The use of screening tools and background checks are common practices among housing providers to screen applicants and prospective tenants. This practice is legal and necessary, as it ensures housing providers are offering safe and stable housing to tenants. As stated previously, federal law bars specific individuals from accessing certain subsidized housing and the use of background checks ensures housing providers are in compliance with all necessary laws. Additionally, prior criminal history can be used as a determining factor in one's housing application and can legitimately be used as rationale for denying housing to an applicant.<sup>12</sup>

The Fair Housing Act established that housing cannot, however, be denied based on race, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, or disability status.<sup>13</sup> In 2016, then HUD Secretary Julian Castro went a step further to clarify that landlords were also not allowed to summarily discriminate against potential renters that had a prior criminal history or arrest record. In practice, landlords and housing providers can screen and use criminal background checks to inform decisions about applicants, but they may not employ blanket policies that exclude all those with a criminal history.<sup>14</sup> It is possible, however, for supportive housing programs, agencies, and landlords to continue to deny individuals housing based on any criminal history so long as they have not enacted a broad policy to explicitly discriminate against such individuals. These conditions may perpetuate the gap in housing availability for people with criminal justice system involvement.

### *Social Networks, Stigma, and Housing Locations*

Transitional living facilities, supportive housing, and affordable housing tend to be centrally located in Anchorage. While location and proximity to employment opportunities, public transportation access points, and social service providers is important, central locations may further expose reentrants to individuals and social networks that could increase one's exposure to risks that could put them in jeopardy of returning to incarceration. Further analysis is warranted to examine the location of properties that actively provide housing to reentrants and long-term affordable housing options and compare public safety and quality of life factors in those same neighborhoods. The purpose of such an analysis would be to understand the opportunities (or lack of) that reentrants have for breaking out of the cycle of poverty and accessing housing options in safe and stable neighborhoods.

Sustained access to medium and long-term housing remains a barrier for many reentrants. Transitional housing services and locations provide short-term housing but are generally intended to support long-term, independent housing. Data collected in previous years by the Anchorage Reentry Coalition suggests that many reentrants are unaware of long-term housing options available to those with felony convictions and would benefit from increased awareness and knowledge of housing options after short-term housing services have been exhausted. Stigma towards landlords that are willing to rent to prospective tenants with a prior criminal history means that obtaining information about potential housing options may prove difficult as such information is kept discrete, and not widely shared.



## Case Management Standards

A core component of supportive housing includes case management, however, there is a lack of adherence to case management standards when it comes to providing supportive housing in Anchorage. Some housing providers do not formally train staff serving special client needs that they may be housing. The lack of standardization in this area is a likely policy gap.

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## **Employment and Meaningful Engagement Services**

When asked about what one may need most immediately after releasing back into the community, very often an incarcerated person will state the need to obtain employment. In 2018 the Coalition Coordinator created a short Inmate Reentry Survey and conducted it with a small sample of currently incarcerated people in Alaska correctional institutions. Among the results, 78% of respondents reported that employment was one of the primary resources that would help keep them from returning to prison. Additionally, 73% of respondents indicated that employment or work training would be an area of need upon release to the community and 57% indicated they would seek out job preparation assistance upon their release. The results substantiated the on-going need for employment and job opportunities upon release.

Among the incarcerated and reentry populations are a range of job histories and employment experiences: a portion may have never held steady employment in the community while others may have extensive employment history working in skilled or un-skilled jobs. Some people will have obtained skills and training while incarcerated but lack prior employment. For many prior histories of drug and alcohol use, or other mental health or physical impairments can complicate job opportunities. This is all to say that there can be a high degree of variability of employment needs among those reentering the community,

While it can be challenging to obtain employment after incarceration, there are opportunities. In Anchorage, there are employers that are willing to hire and retain reentrants that demonstrate they are reliable and can do the job they are asked to do.

Although the response to COVID-19 forced many businesses to halt their operations and close their doors to customers (temporarily in some instances and permanently in others), the extent and true impact on the job market for new reentrants is still evolving. Disruptions in routine business operations had negative short-term impacts on employment opportunities, especially for those working in restaurants and hospitality industries as many low-wage, low-skill jobs during the height of the pandemic. Anecdotally, many low-barrier, low-skill jobs are increasingly returning, however employment can still be a challenge.

### ***Assets/Strengths Regarding Employment Opportunities in Anchorage***

There are numerous partnerships and programs that have existed in Anchorage that have strengthened employment opportunities for reentrants. Some partnerships and collaborative processes include:

- The DOLWD implemented the LEAP (Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release) grant which provided career development services before and after release from incarceration to increase and maintain employment. It was reported that 135 people enrolled in job center programming over a 1.5 year period in 2017-18 at Hiland Mountain and Goose Creek prisons; Hiland had 91 enrollees and Goose Creek had 44 enrollees. 81 of the 83 pre-release participants received an employability pre-and post-assessment and demonstrated higher scores after receiving job services. Additionally, 23 post-release re-entering citizens shared that they obtained employment after release. The LEAP Grant has concluded and is no longer operational. The DOLWD was in the



process of planning to re-enter Hiland to engage with the women and do pre-employment activities, but that process was halted in early March, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent community lockdown. It has been reported that progress is being made to again have DOLWD staff provide pre-release services again in some form inside correctional institutions.

- There have been opportunities for obtaining training and certifications while incarcerated in Alaska. Many of these training and skill building opportunities are related to construction and trades, training opportunities vary by institution. It is presumed that during the pandemic these training opportunities were inaccessible.
- The Alaska Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) operationalized the Barriers to Reentry Workgroup. The goal is to advise on legislation that will address reentry barriers, some of which are employment related. Recommendations are made to the larger body and submitted to the Legislature for consideration.
- Over the past four years it has been observed by the Employment Work Group that reentry providers have successfully recruited Anchorage employers in hiring Returning Citizens; there is a wide network of employers providing employment opportunities. Anecdotally, there are word of mouth opportunities and known employers that are willing to give people a chance. Reportedly, during the pandemic some employers were in such need of employees that they began considering applications from people that had prior justice involvement. It is unknown whether this trend will continue or whether there will be long lasting impacts to hiring policies at these companies.
- There are several programs and services available that provide job seekers opportunities to find employment, apply for jobs, write/enhance resumes, and work on interviewing skills. Such programs and services can be found at the DOLWD Midtown Job Center, Partners Reentry Center, ANJC, the Loussac Library, and CITC. DVR will work with qualified reentrants that have cognitive deficits. During the pandemic most of these services were accessible via phone or through a computer but have now largely returned to pre-pandemic approaches.
- The Reentry Coalition has worked with the Midtown Job Center to host a job fair specifically for reentrants. In 2019 there was an estimated +75 job seekers in attendance. Pre-employment preparation activities and services were made available in the lead-up to the job fair. The 2020 job fair was scheduled for April to coincide with National Reentry month; however, it was canceled. There have been online hiring events periodically over the last two years hosted through the DOLWD.
- Feed Me Hope has a culinary arts and baking program that is intensive and tailored to meet the needs of some reentrants; they have developed strong partnerships with community agencies, including Partners Reentry Center, who will pay for reentrant housing while they participate in the program.
- Pre-pandemic, the Ironworkers Union has been afforded the opportunity to go into several of the correctional institutions to offer training opportunities to the inmates. Although these opportunities are limited inside the institutions, employment in the community in a skilled trade



such as welding can lead to living wage and employment opportunities around the state. Other similar skills training and apprenticeship programs exist in Anchorage.

- ANJC offers assistance to eligible clients with obtaining a variance.
- The ONE2ONE Mentorship Program provides support and advocacy for justice-involved women. This is a unique program in Anchorage, in that it is entirely geared towards assisting women reintegrate back into the community and can aid women through professional development and mentorship.
- Alaska DOC is in the process of implementing the CAREERRS grant which may serve to strengthen connections between incarcerated people and employment opportunities, and better prepare individuals to return to the community and obtain gainful employment. The Second Chance Act Grant through DOC has funding available for post-incarceration employment support and training opportunities.

### ***Barriers to Accessing Employment Opportunities***

There are numerous practical barriers that can impede one's ability to find, obtain, and keep employment post-incarceration. There are tangible resources that are necessary to become employed which can become barriers to employment for some. Listed below are some examples.

- In the past, both reentrants and service providers have stated that a barrier to obtaining employment sometimes stems from a lack of access to a personal phone or cell phone. Employers and job placement agencies need to be able to contact applicants, but if someone does not have access to a personal phone then employment opportunities may be missed. In previous years, there has been anecdotal feedback regarding employers being unable to reach or follow-up with applicants.
- Computer access has also been cited as a barrier to finding employment. Depending on the situation, computer access can be problematic for some. It may be that there are no computers where they are residing or that programmatic policies limit one's ability to use a computer and the internet; similarly, some people have rules imposed upon them that state they may not use a smart phone that has the ability to access the internet. There are computer labs available to clients of various programs that can be used to search for employment and public computers at Anchorage libraries, however it requires that one travel to these locations and limits use to working-hours only. During the pandemic transitional housing providers were given computer setups to aid communication between PRC staff and clients; this served to enhance computer access at the housing providers to a degree.
- Reliable transportation is also a barrier to accessing and maintaining employment; public transportation options can be limited with particularly limited service late at night, early in the morning, and on weekends. Public bus services were halted in Anchorage for almost two and half months, severely limiting the ability of some people from moving about the city. Reentry



programs can typically help supply bus passes for clients, but affordability of transportation services can be a barrier for many throughout the reentry process.

- Locating and connecting with employers that are willing to accept and seriously consider those with a conviction can be a challenge. The stigma associated with hiring formerly justice-involved people has resulted in some employers asking that they not be identified as second-chance hirers. By working through a reentry program some of these barriers can be overcome, but for someone that may have a prior conviction but do not need additional wrap-around supports, it can be difficult to find such employers. The Coalition Coordinator has been contacted by individuals that have expressed frustration with beginning their careers and moving beyond entry-level or non-skilled employment.

### ***Policy, Network or Funding Gaps and Barriers***

Despite wide-spread acknowledgement regarding the need for employment and training opportunities policy or funding gaps persist. Policy, funding gaps, and barriers include:

- The use of criminal background checks during the application process can serve as a deterrent to hiring prospective employees. In some instances a background check may be absolutely necessary for a given job, however it can further contribute to unemployment or underemployment for reentrants. In 2017 the ACJC moved forward in promoting “Ban the Box”, an environmental strategy/policy to tackle this potential barrier. It was reported that after studying the effects of “Ban the Box” initiatives elsewhere that passing such a law may have some other unintended negative consequences and was not a strategy being recommended for Alaska.
- There are laws that prohibit some people from obtaining particular jobs and entering in to certain professions, based on prior convictions. Some barrier crimes are regulated by the Federal government while others are imposed by the State of Alaska. Some barriers may exist for a period of time, while others may be a “lifetime ban.” It is possible to apply for a variance in order to become employed in a particular job that has restrictions, and that process is overseen by staff at DHSS. The variance process has reportedly been very time consuming, requires a great deal of documentation, and must have the support of the employer. There is some support in the community for those seeking assistance with a variance application, but anecdotal reports are that such support is limited. While barrier crimes can make employment in some fields difficult or nearly impossible to obtain, if an individual with a barrier crime has the support of an employer it can be possible to overcome these policy barriers. Information about the DHSS Background Check Program can be accessed online at <https://dhss.alaska.gov/dhcs/Pages/cl/bgcheck/default.aspx>.
- The LEAP Grant was a two-year program implemented through the Alaska DOLWD which aimed to improve employment outcomes after incarceration. There has been interest in implementing something similar, however that grant concluded in October, 2018.
- It has been reported that community residential center residents have imposed requirements to job searching; for example, residents must complete an AIDS prevention education class before they are able to access their case manager or go on job searches. Individuals residing at these



facilities also face restrictions in terms of the hours they may be away from the facility. During the pandemic further restrictions were put on the facilities that limited movement and interactions.

- It is reported by reputable and knowledgeable people by reentry service providers that the average, able-bodied reentrant can find minimum wage job opportunities soon after their release to the community. However, these opportunities may not provide the reentrant with a living wage, which according to the MIT Living Wage calculator was about \$17/hr for a single adult living in the Anchorage Municipality.
- Pre-release training opportunities may appear robust, but several training programs, particularly centered around construction trades do not offer the full training needed to obtain employment post-release. For example, a reentrant may need 40 hours of training to get a living wage job in the field they were trained in, while in the correctional facility they may earned their certificate through only 10 hours of training. This is a gap in meaningful training and employment opportunities. The ability to access and complete such trainings was limited during the pandemic, and it is unknown to what degree such training opportunities currently exist within the facilities around the state.
- In prior years, Anchorage Reentry Coalition stakeholders and reentrants identified the lack of coordination between probation and parole requirements and work schedules as a significant cause of failure, both in maintaining probation requirements and employment. Reentrants have reported that it is a struggle to meet probation requirements while also maintaining employment. Probation requirements, as outlined by the court system, often include submitting to impromptu urine analysis, attending substance use treatment, going to mental health treatment, and/or engaging in OCS-referred services for parents while also being compelled to seek employment that will provide a living wage. Reentrants frequently must rely on public transportation, walk, or use a bicycle to get to all appointments and employment, adding layers of imposed time constraints.
- The Anchorage Probation Office and community residential center policies restrict who may transport reentrants in private vehicles, which at times restricts transportation options and may have an unintended impact on restricting access to employment opportunities.

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## **Culture and Social Connectedness Services**

Culturally-relevant and social support services can be an important factor in one's reentry process. Reentrants in Anchorage have the ability to access and engage in numerous cultural programs, or join supportive social networks. According to the Inmate Reentry Survey Less than 20% of inmates indicated that they would need or seek out cultural or support services upon their release, while about 25% indicated they would seek out religious or faith-based services. These numbers are not large, however, culturally relevant services and support groups can be extremely important for some reentrants

### ***Assets/Strengths***

Community-based programs and services that offer culturally relevant or culturally sensitive services, including Alaska Native Justice Center, Southcentral Foundation's Family Wellness Warriors, and Cook Inlet Tribal Council. Programming offered includes support for reentrants that are seeking services as Native Alaskans, men, women, and those who have been incarcerated for long periods of time. The Alaska Nations Reentry Group is an established collective of Native reentrants with a defined mission, vision and goals. They have gained local and statewide support from leadership and the Anchorage Reentry Coalition in their reentry efforts promoting culture and social connectedness. There are also faith-based reentry services available to reentrants pre and post-release in Anchorage, including faith-based supportive housing, faith-based mentors, and chaplaincy programming. Other potential groups that promote social connectedness include Supporting Our Loved Ones Group, ACLU, and the Alaska Therapeutic Court Alumni Group.

Peer support has been gaining support in Alaska as a viable and effective way of engaging with reentrants with histories of substance use and/or other mental health issues. In 2019, the State of Alaska released a proposed certification for peer support that would facilitate the use of peer support staff in State funded programs and progress has been made to establish this certification. Standards for the peer-support certification were informed by input from individuals that have contributed to the Anchorage Reentry Coalition. There are several reentry agencies in Anchorage who already hire individuals with lived experience as professionals, including C.H.O.I.C.E.S., Alaska Native Justice Center, and Cook Inlet Tribal Council. Progress continues to be made in the area of peer support, but policy barriers to hiring people with prior justice involvement could stymie development of peer support within the reentry community.

### ***Barriers***

Social connectedness can be challenging for reentrants connecting with other reentrants, especially if they are currently under supervision. Reentrants that are under supervision are technically restricted from associating with other people that have a criminal background; advance approval from the Department of Corrections is required if they want to be connected to their family member of peers who have a felony conviction or are on community supervision. Anchorage is a very diverse city, however, culturally relevant services for reentrants that also happen to identify with a minority racial/ethnic group other than Alaskan Native may be difficult to access.



### ***Policy, Network or Funding Gaps***

Peer-support is often requested and encouraged by community providers; however, staffing gaps and retention can disrupt services. Peer support for those that primarily identify as “justice-involved” may encounter greater policy barriers than peer support that is primarily aimed at those with alcohol or substance use disorders, or other mental health issues. Policy barriers are rooted in the fact that people with misdemeanor or felony convictions may be inhibited or prohibited from engaging with people currently under supervision. For example, Alaska Department of Corrections has been known to deny access to the inside of institutions for staff conducting community in-reach due to a prior conviction.

Another gap to consider relates to the lack of gender and sexual minority-sensitive programs and services for women, and those also for individuals from the LGBTQ community who are also involved in the criminal justice system. While there are services sensitive to the needs of both these segments of the community, there are not many organizations operating explicitly within the space of reentry that caters to these two groups. There are some programs and locations that will work with women, that are gender-specific (Akeela, Salvation Army, SCF), and programs and services that work with women (One2One Mentorship, PRC, ANJC, Oak House, New Life Development), but there continues to be a lack of reentry programs explicitly for women. Similarly, there are programs and organizations that do cater to the LGBTQ community (Identity, Choosing Our Roots, Full Spectrum Health), however, there is not a strong presence within the reentry community of LGBTQ-centric providers. Safe and affirming housing options for members of the LGBTQ community are lacking in Anchorage, particularly for trans individuals. While it is possible to place someone temporarily in a single room or apartment, there are not any known housing programs in Anchorage designed for individuals that are a reentrant and also transgender. There are no known local reentry programs specifically geared to work with fathers.

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## Transportation

### ***Introduction***

Transportation is an essential resource for most people in a community. Reliable transportation is necessary to go to and from work, to access food and services, and to stay engaged with social networks. Access to transportation, however, is frequently cited as a barrier and a challenge for reentrants upon release. Even if an individual that has been incarcerated for an extended period of time has access to a personal vehicle, they may not have a driver's license, and may encounter challenges with maintaining auto insurance and affording fuel and other costs associated with having a vehicle. Therefore, many individuals find themselves reliant either upon public transportation, family or friends, or they walk or use a bicycle to get around. Using a bicycle or walking are acceptable and low-cost forms transportation, however, that comes with its own challenges when timing and efficiency are of concern.

The following is a brief analysis regarding the need for transportation services and assistance, and a description of the current transportation options available to justice-involved individuals in Anchorage. Much of the following analysis was first collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and in the very early days of the pandemic. While the pandemic disrupted public transportation and nearly all systems and processes in Anchorage, it is anticipated that impacts to transportation in the context of reentry were just transitory. This section has been updated during February and March, 2021.

### ***Need for Transportation Support & Assistance Among Reentrants***

The Anchorage Reentry Coalition conducted an Inmate Reentry Survey with 79 inmates at four different correctional institutions during 2018-19. Among all the respondents to the survey, 72% (n=57) indicated that when they were released they believed that they would seek out or need assistance with transportation, such as help with obtaining a bus pass or a bicycle. Among other potential areas of need, access to and assistance with transportation was one of the most commonly cited areas of need among the inmates and was frequently mentioned as a key factor for ensuring one successfully remained in the community after their release.<sup>1</sup>

The Anchorage Reentry Coalition Case Manager works with high-risk/high-need reentrants releasing to Anchorage. Historically, bus passes have been one of the more frequently accessed resources among those clients. Anecdotally, it is not uncommon to hear current inmates and reentrants that have released to Anchorage speak about the challenges of relying on public transportation, particularly if they are originally from a rural Alaskan village and unfamiliar with Anchorage. Stories include accounts of concern, trepidation, and failures using the bus system during their first few attempts.

Previous data collected by the Anchorage Reentry Coalition substantiated that transportation is an area of need for reentrants, and also that access to transportation (public and private) can be difficult in terms of costs and physical proximity. Previously reported data found that some reentrants must additionally seek approval from Probation to share transportation if that means encountering other reentrants. Because of the need for transportation assistance, many programs make bus passes available to their clients.<sup>2</sup> An Anchorage resident who spent two decades incarcerated once shared their story with the Coalition Coordinator and described how they were able to obtain a personal vehicle to get to and from work but only after receiving approval from their probation officer. This individual obtained employment



working a late-night shift when the public buses were not in operation, which necessitated having a vehicle. This anecdote illustrates the compounding challenges that may impede one's ability to integrate into the community after incarceration.

While the pandemic disrupted processes in the community, the impacts on the need for transportation and the need for supportive services were likely not impacted in the long-term. During the time periods that Anchorage was under hunker down orders by the Mayor, there may have been temporary relief from needing transportation assistance for some but it may have exacerbated the situation for others that rely exclusively upon public transportation.

### ***Taxi & Ride-Sharing Services***

Anchorage is serviced by taxi companies, and Uber and Lyft are available in Anchorage. Some assets and barriers to using or accessing taxis and ride sharing are listed below.

#### Assets

- Taxi and ride-sharing apps increase transportation options for individuals that lack reliable and/or timely transportation.
- Taxis and ride-sharing apps can pick-up and drop off individuals anywhere in the city.

#### Barriers

- Taxis and ride-sharing apps may not be long-term transportation solutions.
- Ride-sharing apps require a smartphone, sign-up for the service, and require a credit card.

### ***Public Transportation***

The People Mover is the major public bus system servicing Anchorage that is operated by the Municipality of Anchorage. The People Mover bus system has 15 regular routes that operate throughout Anchorage and a limited portion of Eagle River. There are three primary transit hubs: Downtown Anchorage, Dimond Transfer Center, and Muldoon Transfer Center. In 2021 a new route was added that ran between Downtown and Dimond Transit Centers. Fares for adults between 19-59 years old are \$2.00 per ride; \$5.00 for a day pass for unlimited use; \$26 for a weekly pass; \$60 for a 30-day pass; and \$660 for an annual pass. Seniors 60 years and older, veterans, and individuals with qualifying disabilities are eligible for half-priced fares (requires an authorized ID card). Riders can pay for fares by utilizing the People Mover mTicket app on a smartphone, loading a smart card with pre-purchased rides, purchasing passes from one of six locations around Anchorage, or pay for a one-way ride or day pass on the bus.<sup>3,4</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the public bus system in Anchorage was essentially shut down from mid-May to June 1, 2020.<sup>5</sup> After the People Mover began operations again in June, 2020 capacity on the busses was limited.<sup>6</sup> As of this writing, however, ridership restrictions have been lifted and capacity has returned to normal levels. Assets and barriers relating to the public transportation system in Anchorage are listed below.



### Assets

- If one lives, works, or seeks services near a bus line, the People Mover can be a relatively easy way to get around Anchorage. The People Mover has stops and routes that increase accessibility to Downtown Anchorage, Midtown, UMed, and Mountain View areas.
- The People Mover bus can be an affordable alternative to owning and operating a personal vehicle for those that can afford the fare.
- The People Mover bus has the ability to transport bicycles for those that rely on mixed modes of transport.
- Numerous service providers and law enforcement agencies are located near bus stops.
- Reentrants that are engaged in programming are often able to receive bus passes from service providers.
- If an individual has access to a cell phone or smartphone, People Mover updates can be received (weather delays, detours, etc.) and fares can be purchased without physically visiting a ticket window or ticket machine.
- Reentrants that may not have a valid photo ID or driver's license can still access the bus system.

### Barriers

- Access to the People Mover can be difficult if one lives away from a major thoroughfare; the bus system has limited services south of Tudor Road.
- For reentrants that have extremely limited or no income, affording the bus fare may be problematic.
- The People Mover system does not operate 24 hours a day. Routes vary, but generally start operating at about 6:00 am and run until 10:00pm-midnight during the work week. On weekends buses generally operate between 8:00 am and 7:00-8:00 pm. Reentrants that work late at night or on weekends may find it difficult to utilize the People Mover. Buses routes may be serviced only 1-2 times per hour, making it an inefficient option for some.
- The People Mover is the only public transportation option in Anchorage.
- There are limited locations for purchasing monthly/long-term passes.

### ***Bicycle Paths and Trail System***

According to the Anchorage Department of Parks and Recreation, Anchorage has more than 135 miles of paved trails in addition to the sidewalks that line most major streets throughout the city.<sup>7</sup> Bicycles can be purchased at various retailers around Anchorage, and via second-hand sellers. Anecdotally, during the early days of the pandemic bicycles were harder to obtain from retailers due to supply and demand issues.

The network of paths and sidewalks increase accessibility across Anchorage for both cyclists and for pedestrians. Historically, Partners Reentry Center periodically has obtained bicycles and given them to compliant program participants. It was reported that a number of bicycles were distributed to at least one transitional housing provider, specifically to help residents get to and from work while the public bus service was halted during the pandemic. Some assets and barriers to using or accessing the pathways and trail system are listed below.



### Assets

- The Campbell Creek Trail, Chester Creek Trail, and Coastal Trail are paved, multi-use trails, portions of which are lighted. They are interconnected and increase accessibility for pedestrians and those on bicycles.
- Bicycling and walking is a low-cost option for getting around Anchorage.
- Sidewalks are common around Anchorage.

### Barriers

- The Campbell Creek Trail, Chester Creek Trail, and Coastal Trail may not be easily accessible or in proximity to one's residence.
- In the winter months, snow and ice can make bike riding and walking difficult whether it be on a paved trail or on sidewalks. Roadways and sidewalks may be impassible and unsafe with the build up of snow and ice.
- Bicycles properly equipped to handle snowy and icy conditions can be expensive.

### **Summary**

Access to transportation is a distinct and important area of need for many reentrants. Accessing services, getting to work, or checking in with probation all hinge on one's ability to get there (note: during the height of the pandemic, there were instances in which people on probation were not required to travel to the probation office for check-ins). Anchorage is a moderately sized city that, although is not entirely walkable, can largely be traversed via public transportation, bicycle, personal vehicles, or on foot. The costs associated with owning a personal vehicle or utilizing public transportation is a major barrier for many reentrants, particularly during that period immediately after release. Family and friends can be of assistance, but for many depending on assistance from family and friends is either not an option or only a very short-term solution. Relying on public transportation can be time consuming, but both the bus system and the extensive trail system does enhance accessibility in Anchorage.

Despite the challenges associated with reentry in general, there are numerous transportation options that are available in Anchorage that can facilitate the reentry process and increase the accessibility to services and resources throughout the city. Programs that aid access to transportation are vital to reentrants. Any further disruption caused by COVID-19 on reducing access to public transportation will further exacerbate the difficulties reentrants face while they reintegrate back into the community.

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## Substance Use

### ***Introduction***

Use and abuse of alcohol and drugs is a common factor among many individuals that become incarcerated, both nationally<sup>1,2</sup> and in Alaska.<sup>3</sup> A U.S. Department of Justice study found that more than half of state prisoners and almost two-thirds of jail inmates met the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) criteria for drug dependence or abuse.<sup>2</sup> Addiction and abuse of alcohol and drugs can increase risks for numerous negative impacts including unintentional injuries, violence, and acute and chronic disease.<sup>4,5</sup>

A 2016 report on the behavioral health system of Alaska estimated that 11.5% of all adults in Alaska were in need of treatment for alcohol or illicit drug use in the past year. Substance use disorder rates were also found to be much higher among men than women, and higher among Alaska Native adults compared to White adults.<sup>6</sup> It has been estimated that up to 80% of the incarcerated population in Alaska demonstrates symptoms of a substance abuse disorder. Although exact rates are unknown, a degree of prevalence of substance use disorders has been clearly established among justice-involved people in Alaska. Indeed, according to data contained in a 2018 ACJC report the most common technical violation for individuals on probation or parole was not for committing a new crime, but for violating rules relating to drug or alcohol use.<sup>3</sup>

According to ADOC, in 2019 more than 3,200 individuals were released to Anchorage from an Alaska correctional facility (this figure dropped to 2,300 in 2020).<sup>7</sup> Given the relative high proportion of annual releases, combined with knowledge about prevalence of SUD, it is presumed that there is a great need for robust treatment options in Anchorage for justice involved people. Triangulation of data and information from various sources may serve to further inform both the prevalence and need for treatment and recovery programs in Anchorage.

The following analysis is an attempt at describing the need for treatment based on relevant data, and a description of the current treatment options available to justice-involved individuals in Anchorage. The following data was largely collected by the Anchorage Reentry Coalition Coordinator during the first half of 2019. Time and access to updated and local data were limiting factors that impacted the breadth of this analysis, even with the assistance from the Coalition Case Manager in gathering data from local service providers.

The analysis does not yet fully account for the impact of COVID-19 nor the alcohol tax that was passed into law by Anchorage voters in April, 2020. It is known that some treatment providers severely restricted some services during the pandemic, while others simply made adjustments to their service delivery but continued to offer client services. In-person support group meetings were disrupted; some moved online, while others ceased. Consumption patterns of alcohol and drugs have likely been impacted as well, but the total impact of this is still unknown.



### ***Alcohol Consumption Data***

Excessive and problematic alcohol consumption is common throughout Alaska. Exact measures of abusive alcohol consumption and addiction are difficult to quantify among justice-involved individuals so it may be necessary to rely on data from the at-large Alaskan community to better understand the issue.

The Alaska Mental Health Trust provides an array of services centered around advocacy, planning, and support for programs in Alaska that benefit and target individuals with mental illness, developmental disabilities, chronic alcohol or drug addiction, Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, and traumatic brain injuries. In the Trust's 2018 Annual Report, it was estimated that there were 41,800 adult beneficiaries 18 years or older that were dependent on or abusing alcohol.<sup>8</sup>

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is the country's principal survey for gathering health-related data in all 50 states.<sup>9</sup> The Alaska BRFSS questionnaire contains a measure regarding binge drinking, which is "defined as having had 5 or more alcoholic drinks for men or 4 or more alcoholic drinks for women on one or more occasions in the past 30 days." In 2016, 18% of Alaskan adults reported binge drinking. Prevalence of binge drinking among men (22%) was higher than women (15%), and Alaska Native adults had a higher rate (21%) than the average adult.<sup>10</sup> Comparatively, Alaska suffers from higher rates of alcohol-related mortality than national averages.<sup>4</sup>

Healthy Alaskans 2020 (HA2020) is a state-level health improvement plan that presents a comprehensive set of benchmarks and strategies relating to various health indicators.<sup>11</sup> HA2020 included a benchmark pertaining to excessive alcohol consumption by adults, which utilizes the BRFSS definition (see above). In 2016, 20.7% of adults 18 years or older in Anchorage reported binge drinking in the last 30 days.<sup>12</sup>

ADOC data available in the annual Offender Profile report suggests several hundred individuals were convicted of a crime directly relating to the consumption of alcohol (driving while intoxicated, felony driving while intoxicated).<sup>13</sup> The data likely underestimates the prevalence of alcohol addiction among the current inmate population. According to the Inmate Reentry Survey conducted by the Anchorage Reentry Coalition, 15% (n=12) of respondents stated their preferred substance of choice was alcohol.<sup>14</sup>

Available data suggest that rates of unhealthy and dangerous alcohol consumption are greater in Alaska than most other states, and at minimum, alcohol consumption is a factor for a portion of those that become involved in the criminal justice system in Alaska.

### ***Other Substance-Related Data***

According to the Alaska Mental Health Trust the Trust's 2021 Annual Report, it was estimated that there were 19,700 beneficiaries in Alaska 18 years or older that were dependent on or abusing illicit drugs.<sup>8</sup>

Although arrest data cannot necessarily be directly tied to consumption rates, it can serve as a proxy indicator for the prevalence and existence of drugs in Anchorage, and be suggestive of the need for treatment services and resources. According to data reported in the 2020 Uniform Crime Report, Anchorage Police Department reported making 40 arrests for drugs sales, 234 arrests for drug possession, and 1,239 arrests for driving under the influence.<sup>15</sup> This data did not dramatically differ from the previous year's report.



Alaska is also enduring the impacts of opioids, as deaths due to opioid use have been increasing on an annual basis. In Alaska there was a 43% increase in opioid-related deaths between 2013 and 2017, and hospitalizations related to heroin use in Alaska also increased between 2016 and 2017 by 52%.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Inmate Reentry Survey conducted by the Anchorage Reentry Coalition, respondents indicated their preferred drugs of choice included marijuana (15%; n=12), methamphetamines (14%; n=11), opiates (8%; n=6), or more commonly a poly-drug use preference (27%; n=12). Despite the small sample size of the survey, self-reported illicit drug use was common (but not universal).<sup>14</sup>

### ***Community-based Treatment Data***

According to 2013 data, 11,576 adults in Anchorage were provided medical care with the support of State Medicaid/Behavioral Health Funds. Among those adults, just under half (47%) were reported to have had a substance use disorder. Data presented in the report indicated that state-wide rates of substance use disorder among this population was steadily rising over time. There is also a great disparity between Anchorage and other locales in terms of the number of Medicaid/Behavioral Health Funds patients being serviced that have a substance use disorder.<sup>6</sup>

Rates of opioid abuse rates in Alaska have been rising over the last decade, and include use and abuse of both prescription opioids, heroin, and synthetic opioids. According to a 2018 State of Alaska Epidemiology Bulletin on the Health Impacts of Opioid Misuse in Alaska, between 2013-2016, 46% of all patient admissions to substance use treatment for opioid treatment were reportedly for heroin usage.<sup>16</sup> Comparisons of various data sources indicate a clear need for drug and alcohol treatment in Anchorage for the population-at-large, and are suggestive of a need for treatment options for justice-involved individuals as well.

### ***In-Prison Treatment Options***

Usage and prevalence data suggests that there is a potentially high-level of need for drug and alcohol treatment options in correctional settings. Currently, in-prison treatment delivered by qualified professionals is not offered at every correctional institution in the State, meaning that some inmates do not currently have access to structured treatment options. Based on data and known in-prison treatment options, there is likely a deficit of treatment options and un-met need among the incarcerated population.

Up-to-date and publicly available data on in-prison drug treatment in Alaska is limited. According to a 2013 report, in FY2013 the Department of Corrections reported that 567 individuals were assessed for a drug or alcohol addiction, 482 completed LSSAT (intensive outpatient case management), 119 completed RSAT (intensive residential inpatient treatment), and 133 completed an aftercare component.<sup>6</sup> Comparatively, in FY2021 a total of 8 individuals completed intensive out-patient and 32 people completed RSAT.<sup>19</sup> Reportedly, Medicated Assisted Treatment options are more widely available across eight facilities and can be accessed by sentenced and un-sentenced individuals. Vivitrol, suboxone, and methadone can be prescribed and accessed under certain circumstances.<sup>20</sup> There are anecdotal reports from some incarcerated people that reported difficulty scheduling and completing a substance use



assessment while in-custody, although it was reported that more than 1,100 SUD assessments were completed during FY 2021.<sup>19</sup>

COVID-related restrictions certainly impacted the availability and delivery of treatment options over the last two years. Starting in March, 2020, all formal treatment programs were put on hold due to the pandemic and subsequent restrictions imposed by DOC administration regarding movement inside the facilities and outside visitation. As of this writing facilities have begun to open again, however there continue to be reported disruptions that are likely to have a negative impact on treatment programs.

Overall, abusive alcohol consumption and illicit drug use is common among justice-involved adults in Alaska but treatment options inside correctional institutions are limited and are not sufficiently meeting treatment needs of those who are incarcerated. The 2016 Alaska Behavioral System Assessment identified two important issues that impact the understanding of the need and demand for treatment options. Firstly, although an individual may exhibit symptoms of having a substance use disorder and a clinical need for treatment, the individual may not desire to engage in treatment at that time. Secondly, and specifically for criminal justice-involved individuals, despite receiving in-prison treatment an individual will oftentimes need to continue some form of treatment after being released back to the community in order to maintain sobriety or sliding back into risky behaviors.<sup>6</sup> In-custody treatment availability is important to ensure the continuum of care is not broken for those individuals that are truly seeking treatment and sobriety.

### ***Community-based Treatment Options***

According to the Inmate Reentry Survey conducted by the Anchorage Reentry Coalition, 37% of respondents indicated that treatment for alcohol or drug use would be a service they would seek out or area of need upon their release to the community.<sup>14</sup> There are numerous treatment and recovery programs available in Anchorage for justice-involved individuals, however, navigating and understanding the scope and appropriateness of these services as a potential client can be very difficult. No two treatment programs are the same: eligibility criteria varies; patient capacity and availability is frequently changing; payment options can change; and treatment modality, intensity, and duration varies by program. The Anchorage Reentry Coalition attempted to create a directory of treatment options in Anchorage, both for the purposes of making information available to the community and for the purposes of informing this assessment.<sup>17</sup>

The Anchorage Reentry Coalition, through its own research, found at least a total of 20 different distinct substance use treatment options in Anchorage (pre-COVID). This number is inclusive of residential in-patient, out-patient, and medicated-assisted treatment options. Many programs accept individuals with a dual-diagnosis, most all are available to all race/ethnicities, many are centrally located, none require a referral to receive treatment, and most offer a sliding scale fee and accept various forms of payment. Many accept Medicaid, but not all.<sup>17</sup> Anecdotally, there appear to be many more treatment options in Anchorage as compared to other communities, with a range of treatment modalities available. There are a great number of other service providers and programs that can aid patients with other ancillary services that may serve to support treatment (e.g. other mental health services, support groups, physical health services, public transportation, etc.).



The Alaska Criminal Justice Commission made the determination that the State lacks the overall capacity to fully address the need for substance abuse treatment.<sup>3</sup> According to the State of Alaska Bed Count, managed by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health, as of April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020 there were a total of 53 residential treatment beds available for adults in Anchorage through ten distinct programs.<sup>18</sup> As of this writing, this data is not actively provided on the DHSS website. Through research completed by the Anchorage Reentry Coalition prior to the pandemic, a total of 240 residential treatment beds were identified through ten programs. Regardless of the differences in bed counts, there appears to be a very small number of residential treatment beds compared to a potentially high number of people in need of treatment.<sup>17</sup>

Besides a lack of consistent information, other potential barriers that could impede access to treatment relate to the need for and cost of a pre-treatment assessment, which depending on the assessment and setting can exceed \$100. Some programs do not accept individuals with certain criminal backgrounds (e.g. arson, sex offense, violence) and on-site child care options are not common. There is only one known detoxification option in Anchorage, and residential treatment availability may not be immediately available and require placement on a waitlist.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding true capacity and availability of services in Anchorage is also complicated by the fact that the State of Alaska recognizes some treatment programs as “approved” providers, however, this does not necessarily reflect the total amount of true treatment capacity available in Anchorage for those seeking treatment for drug or alcohol use. There are also instances in which state agencies may differ in which providers are approved providers and which are not. For example, DOC may not approve of a particular treatment program for individuals under community-supervision, but that same program may be recognized by the Division of Behavioral Health as an approved SUD treatment provider.

The byzantine layers of community-based programs, various State agencies and offices, and out-of-date information available in various forms make understanding treatment options and availability in Anchorage difficult for non-addiction professionals and for the average community member seeking treatment for themselves or for another person.

### ***Summary***

Treatment services for drug and alcohol use is clearly an area of need in Alaska and in Anchorage. What data is available strongly suggests that there is a pronounced need for treatment options for justice-involved and incarcerated individuals. While in-custody treatment options can be limited and vary by correctional institution, there are a modest number of treatment options in the Anchorage community. There are not a great number of residential treatment beds available in Anchorage, but there are more active beds available in Anchorage when compared to any other community in the State. There are also a variety of treatment options in Anchorage, and while there are inherent barriers that reentrants face upon release to the community and potential barriers in accessing treatment programs in a timely manner, motivated individuals that are seeking treatment do have the ability to access treatment in Anchorage. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have impacted alcohol and drug use in Alaska and had a negative impact on social supports and treatment providers, but the degree of the impacts are still being unraveled.



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