

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/a-path-to-recovery-treating-opioid-use-west-virginia-criminal-justice-system>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

In the United States, a disproportionate number of people who come into contact with the criminal justice system suffer from opioid use disorder. Key to confronting the opioid epidemic and related deaths is expanding access to a range of treatment options, including all forms of medication-assisted treatment (MAT). This report looks at how one state West Virginia is providing MAT to eligible people in its criminal justice system and how its efforts under the federal Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) may improve its availability. Drawing primarily on interviews with 13 stakeholders, including representatives from the executive and legislative branches, practitioners from corrections agencies, and their partners who provide community-based health services, the report summarizes West Virginia's efforts and draws out lessons for other states interested in using MAT to serve and treat those involved in their criminal justice systems who engage in harmful opioid use.

West Virginia is just one example of a state that is taking steps to address opioid use, in particular by expanding access to MAT to people in its criminal justice system. Given that the nation's opioid epidemic shows no signs of abating, the need for such progress is all the more urgent.

Many acceptable and evidence-based roads to recovery exist, but abundant research increasingly shows that MAT is one of the most promising approaches for effectively treating opioid use disorder.

West Virginia's Justice Reinvestment Act expanded drug courts, offered new treatment supervision sentencing for felony drug offenders, and strengthened community supervision and access to community-based substance use treatment.

JRI provides a framework for implementing MAT programs, through educating criminal justice system actors and employing community engagement specialists and peer recovery coaches as treatment guides and mentors.

PUBLICATION

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