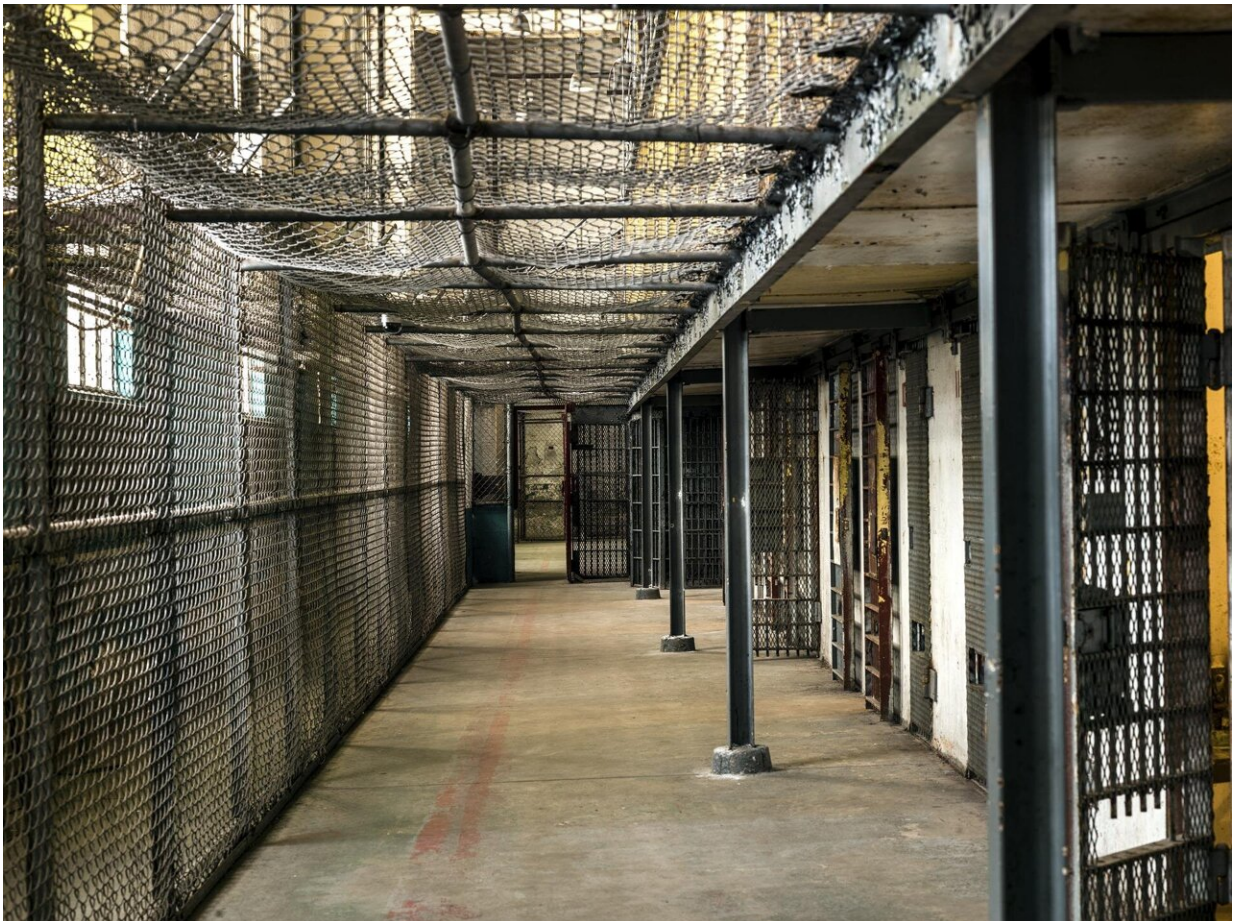


Inadequate post-release support drives up reincarceration rates, study finds

September 8 2022, by Lauren Sydoruk



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New research shows that people released from prison who sought help

for their mental health or substance use problems were more likely to end up back in prison, prompting calls for an overhaul of the system to allow quicker and more consistent support.

The study, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, examined the link between contact with [mental health](#) and substance use treatment services and reincarceration rates among 1,115 adults released from prisons in Queensland, Australia.

Lead researcher Professor Stuart Kinner, from the Curtin School of Population Health, said despite widespread belief that access to substance use treatment and community [mental health services](#) after release from [prison](#) can reduce reincarceration rates, this study actually found the opposite.

"Globally, more than 11 million people are incarcerated on any given day, and many of these individuals experience significant mental health and substance use issues. In our study, we found that more than half of the people released from prison had been diagnosed with a [mental illness](#) or a [substance use disorder](#), and 21% had been diagnosed with both," Professor Kinner said.

"In Australia, more than 60,000 people are released from prison each year and the incarceration rate is increasing rapidly. Almost one in two people released from prison is back in custody within two years.

"Although you might expect that treating substance use and [mental health issues](#) would result in better outcomes, our study found that people who accessed these services after release from prison were actually more likely to be reincarcerated."

Professor Kinner said that increased investment in high-quality, accessible, evidence-based and culturally appropriate services for people

released from prison had the potential to improve mental health and well-being, reduce reoffending, and save taxpayer dollars.

"We found that these services were more helpful if people accessed them in the first 30 days after release from prison. However, the majority of people who accessed these services in our study only had one or two follow-up appointments, which is not usually sufficient to address the issues that led to their incarceration in the first place," Professor Kinner said.

"Further research is needed to assess the full impact of these services, but our findings suggest that we should be investing more time and money in community-based mental health and substance use services to improve the health of people released from prison, reduce reincarceration rates, and reduce whole-of-system costs."

The study also involved researchers from University of Melbourne, RAND Corporation, George Mason University, The University of Queensland, Queensland Forensic Mental Health Service, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and Griffith University.

The paper is titled "Association between contact with mental [health](#) and substance use services and reincarceration after release from prison."

More information: Emma G. Thomas et al, Association between contact with mental health and substance use services and reincarceration after release from prison, *PLOS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0272870](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272870)

Provided by Curtin University

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