

## SHOW NOTES: TLS WEBINAR

### Education, Healthcare, and the Justice-Impacted Workforce

Increasing access to education and public benefits, such as healthcare, are two critical ways to increase opportunities for justice-impacted individuals to advance economically. There have recently been two big federal policy changes, i.e., the reinstatement of Pell Grants for students who are incarcerated and Medicaid expansion for individuals who are incarcerated, that will have an important impact on the justice-impacted workforce.<sup>1</sup>

#### Reinstatement of Pell Grants for Students who are Incarcerated

##### 1. What it is?

After a 26-year ban, Pell Grants were reinstated for incarcerated students on July 1, 2023 through the FAFSA Simplification Act. This is following the Second Chance Pell Experiment which expanded access to select federal and state penal institutions since 2015. A Pell Grant is a federal grant that is awarded to an undergraduate student (in most cases) who displays financial need. Unlike a loan, it does not need to be repaid.

##### 2. Who is eligible?

Any incarcerated person is eligible regardless of sentence length or conviction type. A prison education program (PEP) must be approved by the oversight entity (corrections agency), an accrediting agency, and the United States Department of Education to offer Pell Grants. Following the end of the PEP's second year, a best interest determination review is completed by the oversight entity to determine whether the PEP leaves pilot status and becomes an official PEP.<sup>2</sup>

##### 3. How can community groups get involved?

Community groups have opportunities to:

- Support the development of high-quality PEPs, including suggesting priority programs;
- Improve support to currently incarcerated and reentering people;
- Review PEPs to ensure they are operating in the best interest of students; and
- Participate in the feedback process that contributes to the decision to continue or discontinue a PEP.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vera.org/publications/accessing-pell-grants-for-college-programs-in-correctional-settings>

<sup>3</sup> Nowak, Amanda, Wheeler, Belinda, and Olson, Heidi, Education, Healthcare, and the Justice-Impacted Workforce, The National Reentry Workforce Collaborative, 7 Jun. 2024. Webinar.

## Medicaid Expansion for Individuals who are Incarcerated.

### 1. What it is?

Under Medicaid 1115 Reentry Waivers, states can now apply for expanded Medicaid to cover services when someone is incarcerated, starting up to 90 days pre-release. Over the next two years, there will be several new opportunities including grants to improve care transitions and systems-building, as well policy changes increasing youth and adult care.

### 2. Who is eligible?

States must apply for the Medicaid 115 Reentry Waiver. To date, waivers have been approved for four states: CA, WA, MT, & MA. Nineteen states have proposals pending, and more are likely to follow.

### 3. How can community groups get involved?

Community groups have opportunities to:

- Play a larger role in pre-release service delivery; and
- Increase services through building new connections and strengthening existing ones.<sup>4</sup>

#### Benefits of Increased Access to Medicaid<sup>4</sup>

##### Recognition of potential benefits of connections to services:

- Improved health, mental health, and substance use outcomes
- Reduced rates of re-incarceration and rearrests
- Fewer overdose deaths post-release
- Improved continuity of care and adherence to treatment
- Reducing unnecessary ER visits, hospitalizations, and incarcerations

##### Youth are an important population of focus

- High rates of mental health and substance use conditions
- Health and mental health interventions have significant potential to benefit youth and improve public safety

<sup>4</sup> Sawyer, John, Education, Healthcare, and the Justice-Impacted Workforce, The National Reentry Workforce Collaborative, 7 Jun. 2024. Webinar.

## Promoting Economic Advancement for Justice-Impacted Individuals

In Normalizing Opportunity, JFF's Center for Justice & Economic Advancement proposed a policy agenda to create equitable economic advancement for the 70 million people in the United States with criminal records.<sup>5</sup> They identified four critical areas where policies will have an impact on economic opportunity and policy recommendations for each:

### 1. Education, skills training, and career navigation

- Policy recommendations:
  - Expand access to education and training programs in corrections and the community
  - Strengthen pathways to credentials and careers
  - Ensure that education and training programs focus on skills and knowledge that are in demand
  - Empower learners to select and pursue their preferred careers
  - Integrate work and learning

### 2. Employment and wealth-building

- Policy recommendations:
  - Mitigate barriers to career entry
  - Promote the adoption and scale of fair chance hiring practices
  - Ensure equitable and inclusive working conditions and career pathways
  - Address sector-based workforce needs
  - Support entrepreneurship and capital creation opportunities

### 3. Mobility supports

- Policy recommendations:
  - Eliminate barriers to accessing resources that support reintegration into the community and families
  - Ensure poverty alleviation policies encourage pursuing education and careers for people receiving public assistance or serving on parole or probation
  - Make education and training programs more affordable
  - Promote the formation of community and regional partnerships

### 4. Essential infrastructure

- Policy recommendations:
  - Make strategic and significant investment in reentry and economic advancement strategies
  - Establish success metrics and devise strategies that promote shared accountability for achieving those targets
  - Use technology to mitigate barriers
  - Increase the availability and transparency of data

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jff.org/idea/normalizing-opportunity-policy-framework/>