**Promoting Lasting Change: Strategies for Recidivism Reduction at the Community and Individual Level**

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**I. Executive Summary**

**A. Overview of the white paper's objectives and key findings**

Leaving prison should mean having a fresh start, but for many returning citizens it presents a host of new challenges. Re-entering society can be overwhelming for many reasons, and unfortunately many people end up back in prison. Despite various prison reform initiatives, the rate of recidivism in the United States is still an astonishing 70% within 5 years of release (DurRose, 2014).

Studies have shown that more than half of prisoners have been incarcerated more than once(). For many people, breaking the cycle of incarceration is extremely difficult. Prison conditions and limited re-entry support, both during and after incarceration, make it very challenging to adjust to normal life. With over 2 million people in the criminal justice system at any given time, the U.S. has the largest prison population in the world and prisons tend to be overcrowded (). Further exacerbating this issue, there are few resources available to help formerly incarcerated people find housing, employment and other social services, and many return to criminal activity to get by financially.

Unfortunately, there is no “quick-fix” solution. Each justice-involved individual experiences a unique set of social and cultural circumstances that will affect the way he or she adjusts to their new situation. However, we can do much better as a society to help this community more holistically, and reduce a person’s chances of relapsing into criminal behavior.

There is no simple approach to reducing recidivism, but as a society we need to be much more engaged in addressing the collateral consequences of mass incarceration. Through the combined efforts of government, non-profit organizations, socially-conscious companies and grassroots initiatives, we can work together to change the narrative and help formerly incarcerated people create a positive path forward.

We are here to introduce the basics of the problems with the criminal legal system in the United States, the issue of recidivism and the complexity of why it exists, and to outline comprehensive, holistic solutions to how Community Based Organizations can reduce recidivism by utilizing evidence-based practices that will benefit both the justice-involved individuals and enrich the communities they return to.

**Key Findings About Incarceration and Recidivism**

* Despite a decline in the last several years, **the United States still has the highest incarceration and recidivism rates in the world** (Minton, 2021; Flores, 2018).
* The added socioeconomic cost associated with individuals being entangled with the criminal legal system and either jailed or incarcerated, including accounting for lost earnings, adverse health effects, and damage to their families, is estimated to be around **$1.2 trillion or greater** (Hayes, 2020).
* Most states **spend more money per person in prison or jail than they do on educating their elementary through high school students** (Stullich, 2016).
* According to the National Institute of Justice, **more than 76.6% of people released from prisons returned to prison in 2014** (Durose, 2014).
* About **68% of inmates in state prisons do not have a high school diploma**. Lack of education, criminal history, and a lack of applicable job skills worsens recidivism and increases the societal burden on taxpayers, both fiscal and otherwise (Steurer, 2019).
* **Structural barriers increase the costs of both incarceration and recidivism**. These barriers include a lack of continuity of post-release services, a systemic bias against returning citizens in hiring practices, and against the unhoused. These structural barriers create a cycle of punishment and heightened socioeconomic costs, resulting in unemployment, lost earnings and tax revenue, and cross-generational poverty. **These barriers perpetuate the cycle of recidivism and result in increased direct and indirect costs to taxpayers** (Couloute, 2018; Martin, 2017).

**THE UNSUSTAINABLE COST OF HIGH INCARCERATION AND RECIDIVISM RATES**

* The **U.S. spends $81 billion a year on mass incarceration**, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, **and that figure might be an underestimate**. In 2017, the Prison Policy Initiative estimated the actual cost to state and federal governments and impacted families is roughly **$182 billion**. (Kuhn, 2021).
* **The additional socioeconomic cost associated with lost earnings, adverse health effects, and damage to families is estimated to be $1.2 trillion** (Hayes, 2020).
* **Utilizing the 2020 U.S. population of 330 million people, the total cost of incarceration averages $3,630 per U.S. citizen per year.** (US Census Bureau, 2020)
* Research from the Department of Policy Studies at the UCLA found that spending $1 million on incarceration would prevent about 350 crimes. However, if the **same $1 million was invested in prison education/recidivism reduction programming, 600 crimes would be prevented** (Bazos, A. 2004). This shows that money can be spent on things other than more guards and more walls and the best interests of all of society can be served, including those of the incarcerated and those returning from incarceration.

**The Revolving Door of Recidivism**

According to the National Institute of Justice, in 2014, **over 76.6% of persons released from prisons returned to prison.** The Bureau of Justice Statistics' 10-year follow-up report on recidivism (Antenangeli, 2018) found that in 2008, of 400,000 prisoners released in 24 States:

* 66% were rearrested within 3 years, based on ten years;
* 82% were rearrested within 10 years;
* and, 61% percent returned to prison within 10 years for violating parole or probation or having a new sentence.

This revolving cycle of incarceration is illustrated below and is perpetuated by the fact that the U.S. reentry model is inequitable and insufficient, as it is built to fail, a system designed to punish instead of heal and rehabilitate and facilitate reentry into society. This fragmented reentry system has real, lasting negative impacts on people who seek to rebuild their lives after incarceration and on the communities that receive them. The system, which is not a single system but a patchwork of multiple systems and organizations that do not work well together or communicate efficiently, is ineffective in assisting returning citizens with obtaining their most basic needs…so how can this system be trusted with helping them to thrive and succeed (Vorpahl, A. 2022)? This is the problem…and we are here to provide solutions.

**B. Importance of addressing recidivism and its impact on individuals and communities**

Addressing recidivism is essential for both individuals and communities. By reducing recidivism rates, individuals have a greater opportunity to rebuild their lives, contribute positively to society, and experience personal growth and well-being. Communities benefit from increased safety, improved social cohesion, and reduced economic and social costs associated with crime.

**C. Purpose of the white paper and its relevance to community and personal level interventions**

This white paper is written to provide background research and relevant data about the incarceration, recidivism, and the root causes of these problems—and solutions to implement at a community level to reduce recidivism through evidence-based, holistic methodologies and grass roots cooperation between organizations and agencies.

**II. Introduction: What are the “Doorways to Incarceration?”**

The "**doorways to incarceration**" refer to the various pathways or factors that contribute to an individual's entry into the criminal legal system and subsequent incarceration. These doorways can vary from person to person and are often influenced by a combination of social, economic, and systemic factors. Here are some common doorways to incarceration:

1. **Poverty and Socioeconomic Factors:**

Economic disadvantage and poverty can limit access to quality education, employment opportunities, and stable housing, increasing the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities to meet basic needs. Lack of resources and support systems may result in limited access to legal representation, leading to unequal treatment within the criminal legal system (). The public defense systems in underprivileged communities, especially those of color, are underfunded and understaffed, leading to higher rates of plea bargains and longer sentences for those individuals, as well as longer sentences and higher rates of convictions, both for first offenses and for subsequent ones ()

1. **Substance Abuse and Addiction:**

Substance abuse and addiction are significant contributors to criminal behavior and can lead individuals to engage in illegal activities to sustain their habits. The cycle of addiction can perpetuate criminal involvement, such as drug trafficking, theft, or other drug-related offenses. Substance abuse and addiction are often linked to trauma, family history, and other external issues ().

1. **Mental Health Issues:**

Individuals with untreated or undiagnosed mental health disorders may engage in behaviors that bring them into conflict with the law, due to the criminalization of certain behaviors and the lack of a comprehensive mental health system in most communities, leading to policing of mental health issues (). Limited access to mental health services and inadequate support systems can lead to repeated encounters with the criminal legal system instead of receiving appropriate treatment and support. Individuals in underprivileged communities do not have access to adequate mental health resources due to lack of funding and lack of providers in their geographical areas, as well as being under- or uninsured ().

1. **Lack of Education and Employment Opportunities:**

Limited educational attainment and a lack of marketable skills can hinder employment prospects, leading to financial instability and increased vulnerability to criminal involvement, as people have to find ways to meet their basic needs due to a lack of a comprehensive social safety net. Barriers to obtaining meaningful employment, such as discriminatory hiring practices and occupational licensing restrictions, can contribute to a cycle of criminal behavior ().

1. **Racial and Ethnic Disparities:**

Systemic biases and racial discrimination within the criminal legal system disproportionately impact marginalized communities, leading to higher rates of incarceration. Racial profiling, disparate sentencing, and unequal access to legal resources contribute to the overrepresentation of certain racial and ethnic groups in the prison population, especially BIPOC individuals (). At this time, the fastest-growing demographic for prosecution and incarceration in the American criminal legal system is women, with the rate of incarceration increasing 475% in the past 40 years (The Sentencing Project, 2022).

1. **Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):**

Individuals who have experienced trauma, abuse, neglect, or adverse childhood experiences are at higher risk of engaging in criminal activities as a coping mechanism or due to the impact of unresolved trauma (). The lack of access to trauma-informed interventions and support services can further contribute to a pathway to incarceration.

**ACES** stands for **Adverse Childhood Experiences**. They refer to **traumatic or stressful events that occur during childhood**, typically before the age of 18. These experiences can have a profound and long-lasting impact on an individual's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Common examples of ACEs include physical or emotional abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, substance abuse within the household, parental incarceration, and domestic violence.

ACES have been found to be strongly associated with a range of negative outcomes, including increased risk of health problems, mental health disorders, substance abuse, and impaired social functioning. Furthermore, **ACEs can significantly influence the likelihood of incarceration and recidivism**. Here's how:

1. **Increased Risk of Criminal Behavior**: Individuals who experience ACEs are more likely to engage in criminal behavior later in life. The trauma and adversity associated with ACEs can disrupt healthy development, impair impulse control, and lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, aggression, or delinquency.
2. **Substance Abuse and Addiction**: ACEs are linked to an increased risk of substance abuse and addiction. Individuals who have experienced trauma during childhood may turn to substances as a means of coping with emotional pain or self-medicating. Substance abuse is a significant risk factor for involvement in criminal activities and increases the likelihood of incarceration and recidivism.
3. **Mental Health Challenges**: ACEs are strongly associated with mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and borderline personality disorder. These mental health challenges can contribute to impaired decision-making, difficulty managing emotions, and maladaptive behaviors that increase the risk of criminal involvement and recidivism.
4. **Impaired Social Skills and Relationships**: ACEs can disrupt the development of healthy social skills and relationships. Individuals who have experienced trauma during childhood may struggle with trust, have difficulty forming positive relationships, and exhibit antisocial behaviors. These challenges can hinder successful reintegration into society after incarceration and increase the risk of recidivism.
5. **Inter-generational Transmission:** ACEs have been found to have inter-generational effects, meaning that individuals who have experienced ACEs are more likely to have children who also experience adversity. This cycle of trauma and adversity can perpetuate a cycle of criminal behavior, incarceration, and recidivism within families.

Understanding the impact of ACEs is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems to address the underlying trauma and break the cycle of incarceration and recidivism. Trauma-informed approaches that provide trauma-specific interventions, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and support networks can help individuals affected by ACEs heal, develop healthier coping mechanisms, and reduce their risk of further involvement in criminal activities. Additionally, early prevention efforts and supportive services for at-risk children and families can help mitigate the impact of ACEs and promote healthier outcomes.

It is important to note that **these doorways are interconnected and often reinforce one another, perpetuating a cycle of involvement with the criminal legal system.** Addressing these doorways requires comprehensive approaches, including **criminal legal reform, equitable access to education and employment opportunities, mental health and addiction treatment, trauma-informed care, and community-based support systems**.

**III. What is Recidivism?**

Recidivism refers to **the act of relapsing into criminal behavior after a person has been previously convicted and served a sentence for a criminal offense**. It is commonly used to describe the tendency of individuals to reoffend or commit new crimes after their release from prison, completion of probation, or other forms of supervision.

**Measurement of recidivism** involves tracking and analyzing the rates at which individuals who have been involved in the criminal legal system commit subsequent offenses.

**IV. Scope and Significance of the Recidivism Challenge**

The recidivism challenge in US society holds significant scope and significance due to its wide-ranging impact on various aspects of individuals, communities, and the criminal legal system.

High recidivism rates can pose a threat to **public safety**. When individuals with a history of criminal behavior reoffend, it can lead to an increase in crime rates and victimization within communities. Addressing recidivism is crucial for reducing the overall incidence of crime and enhancing public safety, but it is also crucial also for breaking the cycle within those **communities and within the individuals’ lives**. As victims of systemic racism and collective trauma, many individuals entangled in the criminal legal system recidivate not because they are “bad people,” but because they have no choice. They are often forced by a lack of options and by a system that is built to fail them into making decisions which lead back to incarceration. This then leads to further negative outcomes not only for the individual, but for their loved ones, their community, and for society at large.

Recidivism also has substantial **economic consequences**. The costs associated with investigating, prosecuting, and incarcerating individuals who reoffend place a significant burden on the criminal legal system and taxpayers. Recidivism reduces the American GDP by an estimated $65 billion per year (Vallas & Dietrich, 2014). Moreover, recidivism **contributes to lost productivity and hinders economic growth by limiting the ability of individuals to secure stable employment and become financially self-sufficient.**

High recidivism rates **contribute to prison overpopulation**, straining correctional facilities and resources. The resulting overcrowding can lead to issues such as increased violence, limited access to rehabilitation programs, and inadequate conditions, which impede successful reentry and rehabilitation efforts ().

Recidivism **exacerbates existing racial and social disparities within the criminal legal system.** Marginalized communities, including minorities and those from low-income backgrounds, often face **greater barriers to successful reintegration**, such as limited access to education, employment opportunities, and support networks. This perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage and unequal treatment within the system ().

**Addressing recidivism necessitates a focus on rehabilitation and successful reintegration of individuals into society.** By providing evidence-based programs and support services that address the underlying causes of entanglement with the criminal legal system, such as substance abuse, mental health issues, and lack of education, there is an opportunity to break the cycle of reoffending and facilitate positive change ().

**Recidivism is not solely a criminal legal issue but also a humanitarian concern**. Individuals who repeatedly cycle in and out of the criminal legal system face a loss of personal freedom, strained familial relationships, and diminished well-being. Effective measures to reduce recidivism can contribute to the overall betterment and rehabilitation of individuals, promoting fairness and justice ().

**Addressing the recidivism challenge requires a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach that focuses on prevention, rehabilitation, and community support**. By investing in evidence-based strategies, such as education and vocational training, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and providing support during the reentry process, society can help individuals successfully reintegrate into their communities, reduce recidivism rates, and promote safer and more equitable societies.

Most importantly, understanding that **not sending people to prison or jail in the first place** will ameliorate the majority of the mass incarceration problem is a crucial issue (). Recidivism can be largely eliminated by decriminalizing certain behaviors, expanding social safety nets to improve quality of life across the board, eliminating systemic racism and discrimination, and implementing programs such as restorative justice and diversion programs that do not result in incarceration in the first place (). Closing prisons and jails would allow literally billions of dollars to be spent elsewhere in the economy ().

**V. Understanding How People Encounter the Criminal Legal System**

1. **Factors contributing to entanglement with the criminal legal system, including individual, social, and systemic factors**

Incarceration is influenced by a complex interplay of various factors that can contribute to an individual's likelihood of reoffending. These factors can be broadly categorized into individual, social, and systemic factors. Here are some key factors known to influence interaction with the criminal legal system:

1. **Individual Factors:**
2. **Previous Criminal history:**

Previous criminal history increases the possibility of arrest or re-arrest/recidivism due to several interconnected factors.

Individuals with a history of criminal behavior have already engaged in and become accustomed to a **criminal lifestyle**, which creates a learned pattern of behavior, making it more likely for them to continue engaging in criminal activities, especially if they have a lack of supportive family or community peers.

Previous criminal history often correlates with the presence of **criminogenic factors**, which are personal characteristics or circumstances associated with an increased risk of what is labeled as criminal behavior. These factors can include substance abuse, antisocial attitudes, low self-control, lack of problem-solving skills, and a history of associating with criminal peers. When these factors persist, they contribute to an elevated risk of reoffending.

Individuals with prior criminal involvement may also develop **attitudes and beliefs** that are conducive to engaging in criminal behavior. They may engage in unproductive thinking practices developed due to trauma, such as justifying their actions, minimizing the harm caused, or believing that they are unlikely to get caught or face serious consequences. These cognitive distortions can contribute to a continued engagement in criminal behavior.

Previous criminal history often means that individuals have established **social networks** within the criminal subculture. These networks can provide both opportunities and pressures for continued criminal involvement. Associating with criminal peers and being influenced by their behavior and values increases the likelihood of recidivism.

Those with a criminal record often face **stigma and labeling**, which can hinder their ability to reintegrate into society. The negative perceptions and discrimination they encounter can limit their access to employment, housing, education, and social support, increasing the risk of reoffending as they face limited opportunities for a successful and law-abiding life.

It's important to note that while previous criminal history is a significant risk factor for recidivism, it does not guarantee future criminal behavior. The presence of other factors, such as successful rehabilitation programs, strong social support, and access to opportunities, can mitigate the influence of previous criminal history and help individuals break the cycle of reoffending.

1. **Substance abuse:** Substance abuse is strongly associated with an increased rate of entanglement with the criminal legal system and with recidivism due to several reasons.

Substance abuse can **impair an individual's judgment, decision-making abilities, and impulse control.** This is not always simply a behavioral issue, but can become a neurological problem with chronic, long-term usage of certain substances (). When under the influence of drugs or alcohol, individuals may engage in impulsive and reckless behaviors, including criminal activities, without considering the consequences. This impulsive behavior increases the likelihood of falling into trouble.

Substance addiction creates a strong **physiological and psychological dependence** on drugs or alcohol, which goes hand-in-hand with **financial instability and challenges in finding and maintaining employment**. The cravings and withdrawal symptoms associated with addiction can lead individuals to engage in criminal activities, such as theft or drug-related offenses, to obtain money or drugs. The desperation to satisfy cravings can drive individuals back into the cycle of criminal behavior. The availability of treatment programs, including MAT (Medically Assisted Treatment), is essential for assisting those with Substance Abuse Disorder are given the best possible chance at successful reentry. Unfortunately, many disadvantaged communities do not have good access to such programs, or when they are available, the wait lists are long and space is limited, meaning that people slip through the cracks. We once again come back to the issue of the lack of a strong social safety net being a crucial part of the origin story.

Substance abuse disorder often **co-occurs with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, or personality disorders.** These conditions can exacerbate the risk of recidivism, as they can contribute to impulsivity, difficulty managing emotions, and impaired decision-making abilities. The presence of co-occurring mental health issues further complicates the rehabilitation and reintegration process, making it more challenging to break the cycle of contact with the criminal legal system.

1. **Mental health:** Untreated or poorly managed mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, or personality disorders, can contribute to encounters with the law.

Many individuals with mental health issues **turn to substance abuse as a way to self-medicate and alleviate their symptoms**. Substance abuse often exacerbates mental health symptoms and impairs judgment, leading to an increased risk of engaging in criminal behavior to obtain drugs or as a consequence of substance-induced impulsivity.

Individuals with mental health issues, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, may face **barriers in accessing proper mental health treatment, medication, and support services**. The lack of appropriate interventions can contribute to unaddressed mental health symptoms and increase the risk of being arrested or reoffending.

Individuals with mental health issues often struggle with **managing their emotions, coping with stress, and resolving conflicts effectively**. These difficulties can lead to maladaptive behaviors and impulsive actions, increasing the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities as a means of coping or “acting out.” These types of behaviors are increasingly criminalized by society, as there is an insufficient mental health framework in community. As a result, many people with mental health problems end up being arrested and processed into the criminal legal system, where their conditions are worsened by the traumas they experience during incarceration ().

Subsequently, **correctional systems often struggle to provide adequate mental health services within prisons and during the reentry process**. Insufficient access to evidence-based mental health treatment, counseling, and support in both institutional and community settings can impede individuals' ability to manage their mental health effectively and reduce the risk of recidivism.

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Individuals with mental health issues often face **social stigma and discrimination**, which can result in limited opportunities for employment, housing, and social support. The lack of community integration and support can increase feelings of isolation and hopelessness, making it more difficult for individuals to reintegrate successfully and decreasing their chances of avoiding criminal behavior.

1. **Lack of education and employment**: Limited access to education, vocational training, and employment opportunities can hinder successful reintegration into society.

Individuals with a criminal record often face significant barriers to finding employment and accessing educational opportunities. Many employers have **policies that discriminate against individuals with criminal histories**, making it challenging for them to secure stable employment. The lack of suitable job prospects can lead to financial instability and a sense of hopelessness, increasing the risk of reoffending to meet basic needs.

The inability to secure employment or to earn a livable wage can create **financial insecurity**, which can push individuals towards criminal activities as a means of survival. This can include engaging in theft, drug dealing, or other illicit activities to support themselves or their families. The financial motivation for criminal behavior increases the likelihood of recidivism. Food and housing insecurity are powerful drivers for difficult choices. Again, the need for a healthy social safety net is illustrated.

Education and vocational training play a crucial role in equipping individuals with the necessary skills for employment and personal growth. **Without access to quality education and training programs, individuals may lack the skills and qualifications needed to secure legitimate employment**. Many underserved and impoverished communities have schools that are underfunded and lacking in quality programming, and the rates of secondary students moving on to higher education are lower than in other communities; the lack of options narrows the choices that individuals have in life, making interaction with the criminal legal system more probable (). Ultimately, lack of training can limit their opportunities for lawful and stable employment, making them more susceptible to resorting to criminal activities to meet their basic needs.

Employment and education are essential for **fostering social integration and providing individuals with a sense of purpose and belonging**. Without meaningful engagement in productive activities, individuals may experience feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and a lack of direction. The absence of social support networks and positive role models can contribute to a higher risk of reoffending. Additionally, employment and education serve as **protective factors against recidivism by providing individuals with alternative pathways and opportunities for personal and professional growth**. They help individuals establish positive routines, develop skills, and build social connections that support a law-abiding lifestyle. By breaking the cycle of unemployment and limited education, individuals have a better chance of reintegrating successfully into society.

Efforts to reduce recidivism must address the barriers to employment and education faced by individuals with criminal records. This includes implementing policies that promote fair hiring practices, providing vocational training and educational programs within correctional facilities, and facilitating access to supportive services and resources to enhance employability and educational attainment. By empowering individuals with the means to gain employment and education, society can significantly reduce the likelihood of recidivism and support their successful reintegration into the community.

1. **Social Factors:**
2. **Lack of social support**: Limited family support, unstable or dysfunctional relationships, and a lack of positive social networks can contribute to recidivism. The lack of social support contributes to recidivism in several ways.

Individuals released from incarceration often face challenges in reintegrating into society. The **absence of social support networks**, such as family and friends, makes it more difficult for them to navigate the complexities of post-release life. Many formerly incarcerated people lose their social support networks before or during incarceration, due to the shame, stigma, family conflicts, or simply because of the difficulty and cost of communication during the time of incarceration, meaning that the person has little support when they release. Without positive social connections and support, individuals may struggle to find stable housing, employment, and access to essential services, increasing the risk of returning to criminal behavior in order to meet their basic needs.

Social support plays a crucial role in **shaping individuals' behaviors and choices**. Without a supportive network, individuals may be more susceptible to negative peer influence, particularly if they are exposed to criminal peers or continue to associate with individuals involved in criminal activities, again, due to a lack of options. Many recently released formerly incarcerated people are required to release to halfway houses or to their previous neighborhoods, where they might have negative associations. The lack of positive role models and social reinforcement can perpetuate a cycle of criminal behavior and increase the likelihood of recidivism.

Additionally, social support provides **emotional stability and a sense of belonging**. The absence of social support can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and low self-esteem. These emotional challenges can contribute to the development or worsening of mental health issues, substance abuse, and a higher susceptibility to engage in criminal behavior as a way to cope with or escape from these negative emotions. Also, social support systems often provide a level of **accountability and supervision** that helps individuals stay on a positive path. Without such support, individuals may have fewer external checks and balances, making it easier to engage in criminal activities without consequences. The lack of social support can contribute to a sense of detachment from societal norms and expectations, increasing the risk of reoffending.

Social support networks can provide individuals with **access to resources, such as job referrals, educational opportunities, and community services**. The absence of these resources makes it more difficult for individuals to meet their basic needs and engage in productive activities. The resulting financial and resource limitations can drive individuals to resort to criminal behavior to meet their needs, contributing to recidivism.

Addressing the lack of social support requires comprehensive reentry and rehabilitation efforts. This includes providing access to mentoring programs, support groups, and community-based organizations that offer guidance, assistance, and positive role models. Strengthening family relationships, building social connections, and facilitating community integration are crucial for reducing recidivism rates and supporting individuals in their successful reintegration into society.

1. **Peer influence:** Associations with criminal peers and involvement in criminal networks can influence an individual's behavior and increase the likelihood of reoffending.
2. **Poverty and being unhoused:** Socioeconomic disadvantages, including poverty, inadequate housing, and being unhoused (“homeless”), can create challenges for individuals reentering society after incarceration. Poverty and homelessness contribute toward recidivism in several significant ways.

Poverty and financial instability can create a strong motivation for individuals to engage in criminal activities as a **means of survival**. The lack of resources and basic necessities, such as food, shelter, and clothing, can push individuals toward desperate measures, including theft, drug-related offenses, or other illicit activities to meet their basic needs. The economic motivation for criminal behavior increases the risk of recidivism.

Being unhoused and poverty often result in a **lack of stability and support systems**. Individuals without stable housing may s**truggle to find regular employment, maintain consistent relationships, or access essential services.** The absence of a stable environment and supportive networks hampers individuals' ability to address underlying issues, such as substance abuse, mental health challenges, or lack of education, that contribute to criminal behavior. Not having a home address for job applications or service applications makes it very difficult to get even the most basic things done. Being unable to reliably take showers, store food, change or wash clothing, or have a safe place to sleep or store one’s belongings means it is almost impossible to find or keep gainful employment or attend school or job training, or to meet the obligations of supervision programs, which can lead directly to violating probation or parole.

Poverty and being unhoused can **impede access to rehabilitative programs and services**. Without financial resources or stable housing, individuals may have limited access to substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling, vocational training, or educational programs that can support their rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society. The lack of opportunities for personal growth and skill development increases the likelihood of recidivism.

**A cycle of disadvantage and social marginalization** often are the result of poverty and being unhoused. Individuals without stable housing or financial resources face significant barriers in finding employment, securing housing, and accessing educational opportunities. The lack of opportunities for social and economic advancement contributes to feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and alienation, increasing the risk of engaging in criminal behavior and perpetuating the cycle of recidivism.

Being unhoused and poverty can **expose individuals to criminal networks and environments**. Homeless individuals may be vulnerable to exploitation, coercion, or recruitment by criminal elements. The need for protection, support, and belonging can lead individuals to associate with criminal peers and engage in criminal activities as a means of survival within these networks.

Addressing poverty and homelessness requires a comprehensive approach that combines efforts to provide affordable housing, economic opportunities, and social support services. By addressing the root causes of poverty and being unhoused, society can help break the cycle of recidivism and support individuals in accessing the resources and support necessary for rehabilitation and successful reintegration into the community.

1. **Community factors**: Living in areas with higher levels of criminal legal involvement (“high crime”) with limited access to resources and opportunities can contribute to a cycle of criminal behavior.
2. **Systemic Factors:**
3. **Inadequate rehabilitation and reentry programs**: Insufficient access to evidence-based treatment, educational programs, job training, and support services during incarceration and after release can hinder successful reintegration. Many incarcerated individuals face **limited access to rehabilitation programs while in prison**. This can be due to resource constraints, overcrowding, lack of staff, or a lack of prioritization of such programs. Insufficient access to educational, vocational, mental health, and substance abuse treatment programs can hinder successful reentry into society. Some existing rehabilitation programs have been criticized for their **limited effectiveness**. Factors such as inadequate program design, insufficient duration, lack of evidence-based practices, and limited post-release support can contribute to suboptimal outcomes. Successful rehabilitation programs require comprehensive and tailored approaches to address individual needs and risks.

**Insufficient support during the reentry process** can hinder successful community integration and increase the likelihood of recidivism. Barriers include **limited access to stable housing, employment opportunities, education and training, healthcare services, and social support networks**. These challenges can make it difficult for individuals to rebuild their lives and reduce their risk of reoffending. Disparities in access to rehabilitation and reentry programs exist, **particularly among marginalized and disadvantaged populations**. Individuals from low-income backgrounds, racial and ethnic minorities, and those with mental health or substance abuse issues often face additional barriers to accessing adequate programs and support, which can contribute to higher recidivism rates within these groups.

**The most effective rehabilitative programs are those which take place before incarceration, by addressing trauma at its root, before criminal activity occurs. The next most effective line of defense against recidivism is peer-led support, using evidence-based methods that address the formerly incarcerated individual’s holistic (whole person) needs, in community.**

**b. Overcrowded prisons and limited resources**:

Overburdened correctional systems that lack the capacity to provide individualized attention and support to offenders can contribute to high recidivism rates.

**c. Stigma and discrimination**:

As described previously, prejudice and discrimination against individuals with criminal records can impede their ability to secure housing, employment, and social support, increasing the risk of reoffending.

**B. Disproportionate impact of recidivism on marginalized communities**

Recidivism has a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, exacerbating existing social inequalities. Here are some key points highlighting the disproportionate impact.

Marginalized communities**, particularly BIPOC communities**, experience higher rates of recidivism compared to their white counterparts. This racial and ethnic disparity is influenced by various factors, including biased law enforcement practices, systemic inequalities, socioeconomic disadvantages, and unequal access to resources and support. These communities often face **higher levels of poverty, limited economic opportunities, and concentrated disadvantage**. These socioeconomic factors contribute to an increased risk of criminal involvement and hinder successful reintegration after release, leading to higher recidivism rates.

Marginalized communities, particularly BIPOC populations, are **disproportionately represented at every stage of the criminal legal system**. They face higher rates of arrests, convictions, and harsher sentencing, which can contribute to a higher likelihood of recidivism. These communities also often have **limited access to quality education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social support services**. The absence of these resources creates significant barriers to successful reentry and increases the risk of reoffending.

Marginalized communities face **systemic inequalities and discrimination that hinder their ability to break the cycle of recidivism.** This includes biased policies, limited access to rehabilitation programs, housing and employment discrimination based on criminal records, and stigmatization within society. The impact of recidivism is **compounded for individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups (intersectional),** such as individuals who are both racial minorities and have low socioeconomic status, individuals with disabilities, or individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. These intersecting factors create unique challenges and vulnerabilities that can contribute to higher rates of recidivism.

Addressing the disproportionate impact of recidivism on marginalized communities requires targeted efforts aimed at addressing systemic inequalities, reducing biases within the criminal legal system, and providing equitable access to resources and support services. Implementing policies and programs that promote fair and unbiased practices, focus on rehabilitation rather than punitive measures, and prioritize community-based solutions can help mitigate the disproportionate impact of recidivism on marginalized communities and promote a more just and inclusive society.

**C. Economic and societal costs of recidivism.**

**Overall Cost:** The annual cost of recidivism in the United States is estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars. A report by the Pew Charitable Trusts in 2016 estimated the total economic cost of recidivism to be around **$55 billion annually ().**

**Corrections Expenditure**: The high rates of recidivism place a heavy burden on the correctional system. Maintaining prisons, staffing correctional facilities, and providing healthcare, food, and other services to incarcerated individuals are costly endeavors. The more individuals return to prison, the greater the strain on the correctional budget. The United States spends a substantial amount on corrections, which includes funding for prisons, probation, parole, and related services. **In 2017, the total state and federal correctional expenditure exceeded $80 billion** ().

**Employment Challenges:** Unemployment rates among individuals with a criminal record tend to be higher compared to the general population. A study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that **formerly incarcerated individuals faced an unemployment rate of around 27% within the first year after release** ().

**Loss of Productivity**: Recidivism affects the productivity of individuals who reoffend, leading to lost earnings and reduced contributions to the economy. Individuals involved in the criminal justice system face challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment, often resulting in unemployment or underemployment. This, in turn, limits their ability to support themselves and their families, pay taxes, and make positive economic contributions. The Center for Economic and Policy Research estimated that the cumulative cost of lost earnings due to incarceration and recidivism ranged from **$57 billion to $65 billion annually ().**

**Welfare and Social Support**: Individuals who recidivate often require social welfare assistance upon release, particularly if they face difficulty securing employment and stable housing. This places a strain on social welfare programs, such as welfare benefits, housing assistance, healthcare, and food support, increasing public spending. A study published in the Journal of Offender Rehabilitation estimated that **the annual cost of providing social services to individuals released from prison in the US was approximately $9 billion ().**

**Law Enforcement and Judicial System Costs:** Recidivism contributes to increased law enforcement and judicial system costs. Police investigations, arrests, court proceedings, and legal representation are all expenses incurred when individuals reoffend. The repeated involvement of law enforcement and the judicial system in addressing recidivism cases drains resources that could be utilized elsewhere ().

**Victim Costs:** Recidivism has a direct impact on victims of crimes. Repeat offenses can cause physical, emotional, and financial harm to individuals and communities. Victims may incur medical expenses, property damages, and psychological trauma, resulting in increased healthcare costs, insurance claims, and social support services ().

**Lost Productivity:** Recidivism affects the productivity of individuals who reoffend, leading to lost earnings and reduced contributions to the economy. Individuals involved in the criminal justice system face challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment, often resulting in unemployment or underemployment. This, in turn, limits their ability to support themselves and their families, pay taxes, and make positive economic contributions ().

**Intergenerational Impact:** Recidivism can have intergenerational effects, perpetuating a cycle of trauma and disruption of family relationships and within families. Children of incarcerated parents may experience adverse outcomes, such as poor educational attainment, mental health challenges, and increased likelihood of engaging in criminal activities themselves. This perpetuates the societal costs associated with crime and recidivism over generations ().

It is important to note that these figures represent estimates and can vary depending on the methodology used and the specific time period examined. The economic costs of recidivism are multifaceted and include direct costs related to the criminal justice system, lost productivity, and social welfare expenses. Efforts to reduce recidivism through effective rehabilitation and reentry programs have the potential to yield significant cost savings and positive societal outcomes.

**VI. Recommendations for community-Level Interventions**

1. **Recommendations for strengthening Community Support Systems**

The old saying, “It takes a village to raise a child,” also applies to doing anything in community, including helping people recover from incarceration. When a person has been in jail or prison, there are multiple traumas that they have endured, compounding the traumas that they already had suffered prior to their incarceration. Dealing with the loss of an individual from their family and community, the loss of earnings, the financial burden of sustaining a person during incarceration, the emotional and mental strain on the family and community while the person is gone…it is a difficult time, and that difficulty does not end once the person “comes home.” In fact, it has only begun. Community support systems, including Community-Based Organizations, are essential for making the transition smoother for both the returning citizen and for those around them. The steps for doing so are as follows:

**1. Recommendations for establishing comprehensive reentry programs that address housing, employment, and education:**

Establishing comprehensive reentry programs that address housing, employment, and education requires a multi-faceted approach involving collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, community organizations, and private entities. Here are some key steps to consider, **which need to be implemented at a local level**:

1. **Needs Assessment:** Conduct a thorough needs assessment to identify the specific challenges and needs of individuals reentering society. This assessment should involve collecting data on housing availability, job market demands, educational opportunities, and other factors that impact successful reintegration.
2. **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Forge partnerships between government agencies, community-based organizations, nonprofit groups, educational institutions, employers, and other relevant stakeholders. Collaboration is essential to pool resources, expertise, and support services for comprehensive reentry programs.
3. **Housing Support**: Develop housing programs and initiatives that address the housing needs of individuals post-release. This may involve partnerships with housing authorities, nonprofits, and landlords to provide transitional housing, subsidized housing, or rental assistance programs. Supportive housing models that integrate wraparound services such as case management, counseling, and life skills training can be particularly effective.
4. **Employment and Job Training:** Establish programs that provide vocational training, job readiness skills, and job placement assistance to individuals with criminal records. Collaborate with employers willing to offer second chance opportunities and consider incentives for businesses that hire individuals with criminal backgrounds. Develop apprenticeship programs, vocational training partnerships, and entrepreneurship initiatives to expand employment opportunities.
5. **Education and Skill Development:** Create educational programs that address the unique needs of individuals reentering society. Offer educational opportunities within correctional facilities, such as high school equivalency programs, vocational training, and post-secondary education. Collaborate with educational institutions to provide accessible and affordable educational pathways for individuals post-release.
6. **Wraparound Services:** Develop comprehensive wraparound services that address the various needs of individuals, including mental health support, substance abuse treatment, healthcare access, and counseling services. Ensure access to these services both during incarceration and post-release to support individuals' overall well-being and reduce the risk of recidivism.
7. **Mentorship and Peer Support:** Establish mentoring programs and peer support networks that provide guidance, encouragement, and positive role models for individuals transitioning back into the community. Peer support can be particularly effective in fostering a sense of belonging, reducing isolation, and promoting pro-social behaviors.
8. **Continuum of Care:** Emphasize the importance of continuity of care throughout the reentry process. Coordinate services and support from pre-release to post-release, ensuring a smooth transition and ongoing support to address evolving needs.
9. **Evaluation and Data Analysis:** Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of reentry programs. Collect and analyze data to measure outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and inform evidence-based practices. Use this data to advocate for continued support and resources.
10. **Policy Reform and Advocacy:** Advocate for policy changes that support comprehensive reentry programs, such as fair hiring practices, expungement or record-sealing policies, and policies that reduce barriers to education and housing for individuals with criminal records. Engage with policymakers and community leaders to raise awareness about the importance of successful reentry and its broader impact on public safety and community well-being.

By implementing these steps and engaging in ongoing collaboration, communities can establish comprehensive reentry programs that address housing, employment, and education, thus increasing the chances of successful reintegration and reducing the risk of recidivism.

**2. Recommendations for fostering collaboration between community organizations, service providers, and criminal legal agencies**

Fostering collaboration between community organizations, service providers, and criminal legal agencies is crucial for reducing recidivism. Here are some strategies to facilitate collaboration among these stakeholders:

1. **Establish a Collaborative Framework:** Create a formal framework or coalition that brings together community organizations, service providers, and criminal legal agencies. This framework should outline shared goals, roles and responsibilities, communication channels, and decision-making processes.
2. **Develop Trust and Relationships:** Foster trust and relationships among stakeholders by facilitating regular meetings, open dialogue, and opportunities for networking and relationship-building. Encourage transparency, active listening, and respect for different perspectives to create an environment conducive to collaboration.
3. **Share Information and Resources**: Facilitate the sharing of information and resources among stakeholders. This includes sharing data, research, best practices, and lessons learned. Develop mechanisms for sharing relevant information securely and efficiently, such as through data-sharing agreements and shared databases.
4. **Coordinate Service Delivery**: Establish mechanisms to coordinate service delivery across stakeholders. This involves aligning programs, services, and interventions to ensure a seamless and comprehensive continuum of care for individuals involved in the criminal justice system. Identify gaps and overlaps in services and work collaboratively to address them.
5. **Joint Training and Professional Development:** Organize joint training and professional development opportunities for stakeholders. This can enhance their understanding of each other's roles, build cross-disciplinary skills, and foster a shared knowledge base. Training can cover topics such as trauma-informed care, cultural competency, and evidence-based practices in reentry.
6. **Engage in Cross-Referrals:** Encourage cross-referrals among stakeholders to ensure that individuals receive the appropriate services and support. Develop protocols and mechanisms for seamless referrals and information sharing between agencies, organizations, and service providers.
7. **Participate in Joint Planning and Evaluation**: Engage in joint planning and evaluation processes to assess the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. Collaboratively set goals, develop strategies, and measure outcomes to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. Use evaluation findings to inform decision-making and refine interventions.
8. **Engage in Policy Advocacy**: Work collectively to advocate for policies and reforms that support evidence-based practices, reduce barriers to reentry, and promote alternatives to incarceration. Advocate for funding and resources to support collaborative initiatives and promote the adoption of best practices at the systemic level.
9. **Involve Individuals with Lived Experience:** Include individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system in the collaborative process. Their perspectives and insights are invaluable for shaping effective interventions and policies. Engage them as active participants in decision-making, program design, and evaluation.
10. **Foster Community Engagement:** Involve the broader community in collaborative efforts to reduce recidivism. Engage community members, local businesses, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders to raise awareness, challenge stigmas, and create opportunities for community reintegration and support.

By implementing these strategies, stakeholders can foster collaboration, leverage collective expertise, and develop comprehensive approaches to reduce recidivism. Working together, community organizations, service providers, and criminal legal agencies can make a more significant impact on individuals' successful reentry and contribute to safer and more resilient communities.

1. **Recommendations for promoting Restorative Justice Practices**

Restorative justice is a philosophy and approach to justice that focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime or conflict through inclusive and participatory processes involving all affected parties. It emphasizes accountability, healing, and the restoration of relationships within the context of a supportive community.

In traditional criminal justice systems, the primary focus is often on punishment and isolation of the offender. In contrast, **restorative justice seeks to address the needs and interests of victims, offenders, and communities by promoting dialogue, understanding, and active participation in the resolution of harm.**

At this critical time in our country, **working to shift the paradigm from seeing crime as a violation of the law to understanding crime as harm that requires individual, interpersonal, community, and system-wide accountability and healing is an important step to take**. Through restorative justice diversion, survivors have a voice in their healing process and people who have caused harm are accountable for the harm they’ve caused without being pushed into the juvenile or criminal legal systems. Here are some ways that restorative justice works, compared to the criminal legal/penal system:

**1. Recommendations for implementing restorative justice models that emphasize accountability, healing, and community involvement**

Implementing restorative justice models that emphasize accountability, healing, and community involvement can indeed contribute to the reduction of recidivism. Here are some ways in which restorative justice approaches can help achieve this goal:

1. **Focus on Accountability and Responsibility:** Restorative justice models prioritize holding individuals accountable for their actions. Instead of solely focusing on punishment, these approaches encourage offenders to take responsibility for the harm they have caused and actively participate in repairing the harm.
2. **Encourage Dialogue and Communication:** Restorative justice models facilitate meaningful dialogue and communication between victims, offenders, and community members. This process allows all parties to express their needs, share their experiences, and work towards understanding and resolution. Open communication can promote empathy, healing, and a sense of community.
3. **Promote Healing and Rehabilitation**: Restorative justice models prioritize the healing and rehabilitation of both victims and offenders. By addressing the underlying causes of harmful behavior and providing support services, such as counseling, therapy, and substance abuse treatment, these approaches aim to help offenders reintegrate into society as responsible and productive individuals.
4. **Involve Community Members**: Restorative justice models actively involve community members in the justice process. By engaging community members as participants or observers in restorative conferences or circles, these approaches encourage community ownership and support in addressing the harms caused by crime. Community involvement fosters a sense of responsibility, reintegration, and reconnection.
5. **Empower Victims:** Restorative justice models seek to empower victims by giving them a voice in the justice process. Victims are given the opportunity to share their experiences, express their needs, and directly participate in decision-making regarding the resolution of the offense. This empowerment can aid in the healing process and promote a sense of justice for the victim.
6. **Encourage Skill Development and Education:** Restorative justice models often include opportunities for skill development and education as part of the rehabilitation process. By providing access to educational programs, vocational training, and job placement support, these models equip offenders with the necessary tools to reintegrate into society and reduce the likelihood of reoffending.
7. **Support Reintegration into the Community:** Restorative justice models prioritize the reintegration of offenders into the community. By involving community members and offering support services, such as mentorship programs and social support networks, these approaches help individuals rebuild their lives and connections, reducing their isolation and increasing their chances of successful reentry.
8. **Evaluate and Improve Effectiveness:** Continuous evaluation and improvement of restorative justice programs are essential. Monitoring and collecting data on recidivism rates, victim satisfaction, and participant feedback can help identify areas for improvement and inform evidence-based practices.

Restorative justice models can be implemented in various stages of the criminal justice system, including diversion programs, pretrial resolutions, sentencing alternatives, and post-conviction processes. By embracing the principles of accountability, healing, and community involvement, these models can contribute to a more holistic and effective approach to reducing recidivism and promoting a more just and inclusive society.

1. **Recommendations for mediation and conflict resolution strategies for addressing harm and repairing relationships**

Like restorative justice, mediation and conflict resolution strategies for addressing harm and repairing relationships can play a significant role in reducing recidivism that do not place individuals in a carceral setting, while having the great advantages of being both low in actual cost and high in actual positive effect long-term, both for victims and offenders. Here's how they can contribute to this goal:

1. **Facilitating Dialogue**: Mediation and conflict resolution strategies provide a structured and safe space for open dialogue between offenders and victims. By allowing both parties to share their perspectives, express their emotions, and explore underlying issues, these processes can help foster understanding, empathy, and the opportunity for healing.
2. **Restoring Relationships**: Mediation and conflict resolution focus on repairing the harm caused by the offense and rebuilding relationships between offenders, victims, and affected parties. By actively involving all parties in the resolution process and addressing the impact of the offense, these strategies promote the restoration of trust, accountability, and meaningful connections.
3. **Personal Responsibility and Empowerment:** Mediation and conflict resolution emphasize personal responsibility and empowerment. Offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and actively participate in finding solutions and making amends. This sense of personal responsibility can contribute to personal growth, self-reflection, and a commitment to positive change, reducing the likelihood of future offenses.
4. **Collaborative Problem-Solving:** Mediation and conflict resolution approaches focus on collaborative problem-solving rather than punitive measures. By involving all parties in the process, these strategies encourage them to work together to identify mutually agreeable solutions and address the underlying causes of the conflict or harm. This collaborative approach promotes a sense of ownership and investment in the resolution process, increasing the chances of sustainable outcomes.
5. **Long-Term Resolution and Prevention**: Mediation and conflict resolution strategies aim to address the root causes of conflicts and harm, reducing the likelihood of recurring offenses. By addressing underlying issues, identifying potential triggers, and developing strategies to prevent future conflicts, these approaches contribute to long-term resolution and prevention of recidivism.
6. **Skill Development:** Mediation and conflict resolution processes often involve the development of communication, problem-solving, and conflict management skills. By equipping offenders with these skills, they are better equipped to handle disputes, manage emotions, and engage in constructive relationships in the future. Improved social and emotional skills can reduce the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior.
7. **Community Integration:** Mediation and conflict resolution processes can involve community members as mediators or facilitators. By engaging the community in the resolution of conflicts and harm, these strategies promote a sense of community ownership, support, and reintegration. This integration can provide a stronger support network for those returning from incarceration, enhancing their chances of successful reentry and reducing recidivism rates.
8. **Cost-Effectiveness:** Mediation and conflict resolution strategies can be more cost-effective compared to traditional adversarial processes. By resolving conflicts through mediation, fewer resources are required for court proceedings, incarceration, and long-term supervision. This cost-effectiveness allows for the allocation of resources to other critical areas such as rehabilitation programs and community support services.

By incorporating mediation and conflict resolution strategies into the criminal legal system, it is possible to address harm, repair relationships, and reduce recidivism. These approaches prioritize collaboration, personal responsibility, and long-term resolution, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes for both returning citizens and victims.

**C. Recommendations for Prevention and Early Intervention**

1. **Recommendations for Investing in evidence-based programs that target at-risk individuals and communities**

By identifying at-risk individuals and communities, community-based organizations can target who needs their services the most. Evidence-based programs are those which have undergone rigorous evaluation and research, demonstrating their effectiveness in addressing risk factors and promoting positive outcomes, and include:

1. **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**: CBT programs focus on addressing the cognitive distortions and behavioral patterns that contribute to criminal behavior. These programs help individuals develop pro-social skills, manage emotions, and make better decisions. Examples of CBT programs include **Thinking for a Change and Moral Reconation Therapy**.
2. **Substance Abuse Treatment Programs**: Substance abuse is a significant risk factor for criminal behavior. Evidence-based substance abuse treatment programs, such as **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Substance Abuse (CBT-SA) and Matrix Model**, combine therapy, education, and support to address addiction and reduce the likelihood of relapse and reoffending.
3. **Parenting and Family-Based Interventions**: Programs that target at-risk families and focus on improving parenting skills, family dynamics, and child well-being have shown promising results in reducing recidivism. Examples include the **Strengthening Families Program, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), and Multisystemic Therapy (MST).**
4. **Education and Vocational Training:** Providing educational and vocational opportunities for at-risk individuals can help improve their employment prospects, increase stability, and reduce recidivism. Programs like the **Correctional Education Association's Academic and Vocational Education and Training (AVET) and the Prison-to-Employment Initiative (PEI)** emphasize skill development, job readiness, and post-release support.
5. **Reentry Programs and Services**: Comprehensive reentry programs that address housing, employment, education, substance abuse, mental health, and social support have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism.
6. **Restorative Justice Programs:** Restorative justice programs, which focus on healing, accountability, and community involvement, have demonstrated positive outcomes in reducing recidivism. Examples include **Victim-Offender Mediation, Restorative Circles, Circles of Support and Accountability, Impact/Justice, and Community Conferencing programs**.
7. **Community-Based Programs and Services**: Programs that engage the community in supporting at-risk individuals and addressing systemic factors can help reduce recidivism. Mentoring programs, community supervision and reentry services, and community-based organizations offering counseling, support, and skill-building programs are examples of effective interventions. Some examples of successful programs include the **Safer Return Initiative and the Big Brothers Big Sisters' Amachi program and the Youth Advocate Programs' Reentry Services**.

2. **Recommendations for Addressing underlying issues such as substance abuse, mental health, and poverty**

Without addressing these vital areas of basic needs that contribute to incarceration in the first place, funneling money into programs to try to prevent recidivism is like trying to shut the barn door after the horse has already gone out. In the absence of a strong national social safety net, which would provide for basic needs such as food, housing, medical/mental health care, education, and job training and placement, local Community Based Organizations and nonprofit agencies must reach out to local, state, and federal bodies as well as network with one another to address these underlying issues. Substance abuse and mental health problems are often results of trauma, and poverty is also a driving factor in trauma as well—all of these are risk factors for incarceration and recidivism. These intersectional, essential needs must be met if an individual is to remain free, once they are out of prison or jail. Assessing every individual for their needs, whether they need substance abuse treatment, mental health care, and assistance with financial planning, job skills training or placement, temporary basic needs assistance, will allow the local organization to help the individual focus on staying out of jail or prison as they begin rebuilding their life.

**VII. Recommendations for Personal-Level Interventions**

**A. Recommendations for Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions**

**1. Implementing cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) programs to address criminogenic factors and promote behavioral change**

Implementing CBT programs in the community requires collaboration between probation/parole/community corrections centers, mental health professionals, and other relevant stakeholders as well as Community Based Organizations. By targeting criminogenic factors and promoting behavioral change, CBT programs can contribute to reducing recidivism and facilitating successful reintegration into society.

Implementing **cognitive-behavioral therapy** (CBT) programs can be an effective strategy to address criminogenic factors and promote behavioral change in individuals involved in the criminal legal system. CBT focuses on identifying and modifying negative thought patterns and behaviors that contribute to criminal behavior. Here are some key considerations for implementing CBT programs:

1. **Program Design**: Develop a structured CBT program specifically tailored for the target population. The program should address criminogenic risk factors such as antisocial attitudes, distorted thinking, impulsivity, and problem-solving skills deficits. Ensure that the program is evidence-based, with a clear theoretical framework and established protocols.
2. **Qualified and Trained Staff**: Have trained and qualified mental health professionals or counselors who are skilled in delivering CBT interventions. They should have knowledge and expertise in working with individuals involved in the criminal legal system and be familiar with the specific challenges they face.
3. **Individual and Group Sessions:** CBT programs can be delivered through individual or group sessions, or a combination of both. Individual sessions allow for personalized attention and targeted interventions, while group sessions provide opportunities for peer support, sharing experiences, and practicing skills in a social context.
4. **Cognitive Restructuring**: Focus on helping participants identify and challenge their negative and distorted thinking patterns that contribute to criminal behavior. Teach cognitive restructuring techniques, such as cognitive reframing, examining evidence for and against thoughts, and identifying alternative perspectives.
5. **Skill Building:** Provide opportunities for participants to develop and practice pro-social skills that are necessary for positive behavior change. This may include anger management, problem-solving skills, communication skills, impulse control, and conflict resolution.
6. **Role-Playing and Behavioral Rehearsal:** Use role-playing and behavioral rehearsal techniques to allow participants to practice new skills and strategies in simulated or real-life situations. This helps to build confidence and competence in applying the learned skills in everyday life.
7. **Gradual Exposure and Reinforcement:** Gradually expose participants to real-life situations that trigger their criminogenic behaviors. Provide reinforcement and positive feedback for using alternative, prosocial behaviors. This helps participants develop new habits and reinforce positive changes.
8. **Continuity of Care:** Ensure a continuum of care by coordinating with other service providers and stakeholders involved in the individual's reentry process. Collaboration with probation or parole officers, substance abuse treatment providers, and other relevant agencies can support a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of participants.
9. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the program's effectiveness and adapt it as needed. Collect data on participant outcomes, including changes in criminogenic risk factors, recidivism rates, and participant satisfaction. This information can guide program improvements and provide evidence of the program's impact.

**2. Enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and decision-making skills**

Enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and decision-making skills is crucial in programs aimed at reducing recidivism. These skills **help individuals understand and manage their emotions, make better choices, and respond to challenging situations in a more adaptive and prosocial manner**. Here are some strategies to incorporate these elements into recidivism reduction programs:

1. **Psychoeducation**: Provide psychoeducational components that focus on increasing self-awareness about emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Teach participants about the impact of their emotions on decision-making and how self-awareness can help them recognize triggers and respond more effectively.
2. **Emotional Regulation Techniques**: Teach participants skills to regulate and manage their emotions in healthy ways. This may include techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness exercises, relaxation techniques, and identifying healthy coping strategies to replace maladaptive behaviors.
3. **Cognitive Restructuring**: Incorporate cognitive restructuring techniques to help participants identify and challenge their negative or distorted thought patterns. Teach them how to reframe negative thinking and develop more balanced and realistic perspectives, leading to better decision-making.
4. **Problem-Solving Skills**: Enhance participants' problem-solving abilities by teaching them structured problem-solving techniques. Help them identify problems, generate alternative solutions, evaluate potential outcomes, and implement and evaluate the effectiveness of their chosen solutions.
5. **Social Skills Training**: Include social skills training to improve interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, empathy, and assertiveness skills. Participants can learn to express themselves effectively, handle conflicts without resorting to aggression, and build positive relationships.
6. **Role-Playing and Skill Practice**: Provide opportunities for participants to practice newly learned skills through role-playing exercises or real-life scenarios. This allows them to apply self-awareness, emotional regulation, and decision-making skills in a supportive environment, building confidence and competence.
7. **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Techniques:** Incorporate CBT techniques such as thought records, journaling, and behavioral experiments. These techniques encourage participants to examine the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and develop alternative responses.
8. **Motivational Enhancement:** Use motivational interviewing techniques to enhance participants' intrinsic motivation for change. Help them explore their values, goals, and aspirations, and connect these with the need to make positive choices and avoid reoffending.
9. **Continuity and Generalization:** Provide opportunities for participants to generalize their skills beyond the program setting. Support their application of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and decision-making skills in real-life situations, such as through aftercare programs, community support, and ongoing counseling.
10. **Evaluation and Feedback**: Regularly assess participants' progress and provide constructive feedback. Use outcome measures and participant feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and make necessary adjustments to improve its impact.

By incorporating these elements into recidivism reduction programs, individuals can develop essential skills that support their ability to manage emotions, make informed decisions, and navigate challenges in a more constructive and prosocial manner. These skills can contribute to long-term behavior change, reduced recidivism, and successful reintegration into society.

**B. Recommendations for Education and Vocational Training**

1. Expanding access to education and vocational programs during incarceration and post-release

2. Equipping individuals with marketable skills and job placement assistance

**C. Recommendations for Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Care**

**1. Integrating mental health and trauma-informed services within correctional facilities and community-based programs**

a. **Mental Health and the Incarcerated Community**

The mental health of incarcerated individuals is a significant concern. Here are some statistics related to the mental health of the incarcerated population:

**Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders**: Studies suggest that **the prevalence of mental health disorders among incarcerated individuals is higher than in the general population**. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, **about 44% of state and federal prisoners and 37% of jail inmates** in the United States reported experiencing a mental health problem ().

**Serious Mental Illness**: The prevalence of **serious mental illness is also disproportionately high** among incarcerated individuals. According to a report by the Treatment Advocacy Center, approximately **14% of state prisoners and 26% of jail inmates** in the United States have a serious mental illness ().

**Co-occurring Substance Use Disorders**: There is a **strong correlation between mental health disorders and substance abuse** among incarcerated individuals. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that about **68% of state prisoners and 58% of federal prisoners** reported symptoms of a substance use disorder ().

**Limited Access to Mental Health Treatment:** Many incarcerated individuals **do not receive adequate mental health treatment while in custody**. According to a survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, **only about 40% of state and federal prisoners with a mental health problem received treatment or counseling during their incarceration ()**.

**Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Communities**: Individuals from marginalized communities, such as **racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and individuals with low socioeconomic status, are disproportionately represented in the incarcerated population**. These individuals may face additional barriers in accessing mental health services and may be more vulnerable to mental health issues ().

**Impact on Recidivism:** Mental health issues can **contribute to a higher risk of recidivism**. Studies have shown **that individuals with untreated mental health disorders are more likely to be rearrested and reincarcerated after release ()**.

These statistics highlight the urgent need for improved mental health services and support for incarcerated individuals. Access to proper mental health care, including assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and post-release support, can play a crucial role in addressing the mental health needs of incarcerated individuals and reducing recidivism rates

2. **Ensuring continuity of care and support upon reentry**

By implementing the strategies we are discussing, continuity of care will be promoted for individuals transitioning from incarceration to freedom, and reduce recidivism. Those strategies include:

**Early reentry planning**: “Reentry begins at Day 1” should not be just a motto, but an actual practice while incarcerated; ideally, CBOs should begin this process before the individual returns home.

**Collaborative case management**: Facilitate collaboration and information sharing between correctional facilities, community service providers, and healthcare professionals. Establish effective communication channels and mechanisms for sharing relevant information, such as medical records, treatment plans, and assessments. This ensures a smooth transition and minimizes gaps in care.

**Medication and Treatment Continuity**: to ensure that individuals have continued access to necessary medications, including mental health medications, upon release, and collaborate with healthcare providers to facilitate the seamless transfer of prescriptions and medication management, as well as provide education and support to individuals to help them adhere to their treatment plans.

**Provide direct linkages to community services**: CBOs much stablish strong linkages between correctional facilities and other community-based service providers, such as mental health clinics, substance abuse treatment centers, and primary care clinics. Primary reentry organizations need to arrange for appointments and referrals to these other wraparound services prior to release to facilitate a smooth transition. Case managers must follow up with individuals to ensure they attend their scheduled appointments for greater success.

**Case Management and Support Services**: Every returning citizen should be assigned a dedicated case manager or reentry specialist upon their release. This professional can help coordinate and connect individuals to needed services, including mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, housing assistance, employment support, and educational opportunities. The case manager can also provide ongoing support and advocacy to address barriers to successful reintegration.

**Peer Support and Mentoring**: CBOs must engage individuals who have successfully transitioned from incarceration to the community as peer mentors. These peer mentors can provide guidance, support, and encouragement to individuals during their reentry process. Peer support programs can help individuals navigate challenges, stay motivated, and access needed services.

 **Continuation of Treatment Programs**: If individuals were engaged in treatment programs or interventions while incarcerated, ensure the availability of similar programs in the community. Establish partnerships between correctional facilities and community organizations to provide seamless continuation of evidence-based programs, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or substance abuse treatment.

**Holistic Reentry Services**: Recognize the importance of addressing various needs, including housing, employment, education, and social support, alongside healthcare and mental health services. Provide comprehensive reentry programs that address these areas to support successful reintegration and reduce the risk of reoffending.

**Ongoing Monitoring and Follow-Up**: Establish a system for ongoing monitoring and follow-up after release. This can involve regular check-ins, scheduled appointments, and supportive contacts with individuals to assess their progress, address any emerging needs, and offer guidance and support. Continuous monitoring helps identify challenges and provides opportunities for early intervention.

**Data Sharing and Evaluation**: Implement systems for data sharing and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of continuity of care efforts and identify areas for improvement. Collect data on reentry outcomes, including healthcare utilization, treatment adherence, recidivism rates, and individuals' satisfaction with services. Use this information to inform program enhancements and policy changes.

**D. Recommendations for Peer Support and Mentoring**

1. **Establishing peer support networks and mentoring programs to provide guidance and positive role models**

Peer support and mentoring play a vital role in reducing recidivism by providing individuals with the necessary support, guidance, and positive role modeling. Every state has different types of peer support certification systems, with their own sets of requirements and programs, but the purpose of all of these programs is to enable individuals who have been impacted by issues such as mental health, substance abuse, incarceration, and other trauma to assist one another in meaningful recovery. Peer support is a proven method of recidivism reduction. Peer support specialists form the backbone of reentry work in communities, both certified and lay workers, who have the lived experience and empathy necessary to connected with their clients and assist them in working through the difficulties and celebrating the triumphs of their lives in reentry—because they have been there. The qualities that peer support specialists bring the Community Based Organization are:

**Empathy and Understanding**: Peers who have experienced similar challenges and life circumstances can offer a unique level of empathy and understanding. They can relate to the struggles and obstacles faced by individuals involved in the criminal justice system, creating a safe and non-judgmental environment for sharing experiences.

**Support and Encouragement:** Peer support provides individuals with a network of individuals who believe in their capacity for change and offer encouragement. Peers can provide emotional support, reassurance, and motivation, which can be crucial during difficult times or when facing setbacks in the reentry process.

**Role Modeling**: Mentors and peers who have successfully navigated the challenges of reentry can serve as positive role models. They can inspire and demonstrate that change is possible, showing individuals involved in the criminal justice system that a different path is attainable.

**Guidance and Practical Assistance:** Peer mentors can provide practical guidance and assistance to individuals during their reentry journey. This may include helping with job searches, housing applications, educational opportunities, and connecting individuals with community resources and support services.

**Accountability and Responsibility**: Peer mentors can hold individuals accountable for their actions and choices. They can encourage responsible decision-making, help identify potential triggers, and provide guidance on avoiding relapse into criminal behavior.

**Social Support and Connection**: Peer support and mentoring provide opportunities for individuals to develop positive social connections and build a sense of belonging. This can help reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness often experienced during the reentry process, enhancing overall well-being and resilience.

**Skills Development**: Peers can assist in the development of crucial life skills that support successful reintegration. This may include improving communication skills, conflict resolution, anger management, problem-solving, and coping strategies, empowering individuals to make healthier choices and respond to challenges effectively.

**Continuity and Long-Term Support**: Peer support and mentoring can extend beyond the immediate reentry phase to provide ongoing support during the transition to community life. Maintaining long-term relationships with peers and mentors can help individuals sustain positive changes and navigate future challenges.

**Community Engagement**: Peer mentors and support networks can facilitate community engagement and involvement. They can help individuals connect with community-based organizations, volunteering opportunities, and other positive activities, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose.

**Reciprocity and Empowerment**: Peer support models emphasize the mutual exchange of support and the idea that individuals can be both recipients and providers of assistance. This empowers individuals to develop their own leadership skills, build self-esteem, and contribute positively to the lives of others, reinforcing the belief in their own potential.

By incorporating peer support and mentoring into recidivism reduction efforts, individuals involved in the criminal justice system can access valuable support, guidance, and role modeling from individuals who have walked a similar path. These relationships foster a sense of belonging, inspire change, and contribute to long-term success in reducing recidivism rates.

**VIII. Recommendations for Collaboration and Coordination**

1. **Enhancing collaboration among criminal legal agencies, service providers, and community stakeholders**

Enhancing collaboration among criminal legal agencies, service providers, and community stakeholders is crucial for effectively reducing recidivism. As a Community Based Organization, there has to be collaboration between all of these entities, in order to ensure success for the individuals that need help and for the communities concerned. Here are some practices that can promote collaboration in this context:

**Establishing Partnerships:** Foster relationships and partnerships between criminal legal agencies, service providers, and community stakeholders. This can be achieved through regular meetings, joint planning sessions, and shared goals and objectives. Encourage open communication, trust-building, and a shared commitment to reducing recidivism.

**Coordinated Case Management:** Implement coordinated case management approaches that involve representatives from multiple agencies and organizations. This ensures that all stakeholders are aware of the individual's needs, progress, and any challenges faced. Regular case conferences and information sharing can facilitate collaboration and holistic support for individuals in the reentry process.

**Sharing Information and Resources:** Develop mechanisms for sharing relevant information, data, and resources among agencies and service providers. This can include creating shared databases or platforms that facilitate information exchange, collaboration on assessments, and access to supportive services. Sharing resources such as funding, training, and expertise can also enhance collaboration and maximize the impact of interventions.

**Integrated Service Delivery:** Aim for integrated service delivery models that bring together various support services in a coordinated manner. This may involve co-locating services, implementing joint programming, or establishing referral networks among different agencies and organizations. By providing seamless and comprehensive support, individuals can access the services they need more efficiently and effectively.

**Cross-Training and Professional Development:** Conduct cross-training and professional development opportunities for staff from criminal legal agencies, service providers, and community stakeholders. This can increase understanding of each other's roles, build common knowledge and language, and enhance collaboration. Training sessions, workshops, and conferences can facilitate the sharing of best practices and innovative approaches to recidivism reduction.

**Multi-Agency Task Forces and Committees:** Form multi-agency task forces or committees focused on reducing recidivism. These platforms bring together representatives from various sectors to address systemic issues, identify gaps in service delivery, and develop coordinated strategies. Task forces can collaborate on policy development, program evaluation, and the implementation of evidence-based practices.

**Engaging Community Stakeholders:** Involve community stakeholders, such as faith-based organizations, civic groups, and businesses, in the recidivism reduction efforts. Engaging the broader community fosters a sense of ownership, support, and collective responsibility. Community stakeholders can contribute resources, volunteer opportunities, mentorship programs, and employment opportunities for individuals in the reentry process.

**Evaluation and Data Sharing:** Implement collaborative evaluation frameworks and share relevant data and outcomes among criminal legal agencies, service providers, and community stakeholders. This promotes a shared understanding of the effectiveness of interventions, allows for evidence-based decision-making, and facilitates continuous improvement.

**Community Outreach and Education:** Conduct community outreach and education campaigns to raise awareness about recidivism, its underlying causes, and the importance of collaborative efforts. Engage the public through presentations, workshops, and media campaigns to dispel misconceptions, reduce stigma, and promote support for reentry initiatives.

**Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for policy changes that support collaboration among criminal legal agencies, service providers, and community stakeholders. Collaborate on policy recommendations, engage with policymakers, and work towards systemic reforms that address barriers to successful reentry and promote evidence-based practices.

By implementing these practices, stakeholders can work together more effectively, leverage collective resources and expertise, and create a coordinated and supportive environment that reduces recidivism and promotes successful reintegration.

**VII. Evaluation and Measurement**

1. **Importance of ongoing evaluation and monitoring of intervention programs**

All programs need to be evaluated and monitored using best practices to determine the effectiveness of all procedures and policies, in order to ensure the best outcomes for all program participants and the best usage of funds. Submitting data and records to external review through nonprofit auditing organizations is crucial for the sake of integrity for all parties involved.

1. **Utilizing outcome measurements and recidivism data to assess program effectiveness**

All metrics should be recorded and evaluated periodically for long-term effectiveness. Using CRM software specifically for nonprofits, such as Salesforce’s nonprofit pack, or a service such as UniteUs, which handles all aspects of service deliveries, will streamline the process and help ensure that data is managed and that outcomes are measured and goals are met.

1. **Incorporating feedback and adapting interventions based on evaluation findings**

**VIII. Conclusion**

**A. Call to action for stakeholders to prioritize and invest in evidence-based interventions**

**B. Final thoughts on the potential impact of comprehensive, community-centered approaches in reducing recidivism**

**Appendices:**

**Glossary of Terms**

Various methods and metrics are used to measure recidivism, including:

**Rearrest:** This measures the rate at which individuals are arrested for new offenses after their initial conviction. It focuses on law enforcement involvement and captures a broader range of criminal behavior beyond just convictions.

**Reconviction:** This measures the rate at which individuals are convicted of new offenses following their initial conviction. It takes into account the legal proceedings and outcomes resulting in a conviction.

**Reincarceration:** This measures the rate at which individuals return to prison after their release, either due to new convictions or violations of parole or probation conditions.

**Violation of supervision:** This measures the rate at which individuals fail to comply with the conditions of their probation, parole, or other forms of community supervision. It includes technical violations such as missing appointments, failing drug tests, or violating curfew, regardless of whether new criminal offenses are committed.

**Recidivism rates** can be calculated over different time periods, such as one year, three years, or five years, depending on the specific study or analysis. It's important to note that recidivism rates may vary based on factors such as the nature of the offense, age, gender, prior criminal history, and the effectiveness of rehabilitation or intervention programs.

**List of References**

**Examples of Successful Recidivism Reduction Programs and Resources:**

[**https://uniteus.com/**](https://uniteus.com/) **(integrative community solutions for nonprofits)**

[**www.hartfordjusticecenter.org**](http://www.hartfordjusticecenter.org) **(restorative justice with various other reentry programs and services)**

[**www.impactjustice.org**](http://www.impactjustice.org) **(restorative justice)**