

WA expands Medicaid coverage for people nearing release from jails and prisons

BY: [GRACE DENG](#) - JULY 25, 2023

Washington will offer limited Medicaid coverage to youth and adults in correctional facilities up to 90 days before they are released, starting July 1, 2025.

The expansion is part of Washington's Medicaid Transformation Project 2.0, an agreement between the state and the federal government that allows Washington to use federal Medicaid funds in new Apple Health programs. (Apple Health is the state's name for Medicaid.) In June, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services approved an update to Washington's Medicaid Transformation Project, renewing it for five more years.

People nearing release from state prisons, local jails and youth correctional facilities will be eligible for the new benefits.

The prerelease benefit package includes providing treatment medication for substance-use disorders. Research shows that the [leading cause of death for former](#) prisoners is drug overdose. People lose physical tolerance for drugs while incarcerated, which makes return to use especially dangerous. [One study of former North Carolina prisoners suggests](#) recently released individuals are up to 40 times more likely to die from an overdose.

California has announced a similar Medicaid program for soon-to-be released people. Rhode Island has offered medication-assisted treatment for incarcerated individuals with drug addiction since 2016; [the program cut post-incarceration deaths by two-thirds](#).

Congressional lawmakers introduced a federal proposal similar to Washington's new program called the [Reentry Act](#) in March. The legislation — which has bipartisan support but hasn't gained much traction — would provide Medicaid coverage to people up to 30 days before release from a correctional facility.

[Other new programs](#) announced under the June renewal of the state's Medicaid Transformation Project include expansion of postpartum care, continuous Apple Health enrollment for children ages 0-5 years and social services programs like rent subsidies.

The state's Medicaid Transformation Project is carried out under what's known as [a Section 1115 demonstration waiver](#). These waivers offer states a way to try out new Medicaid initiatives that otherwise wouldn't be allowed under federal law. Medicaid is the nation's main safety net health coverage program for low-income people and those with disabilities.

This story has been updated to reflect new information from the state Health Care Authority regarding the program's start date.