

COVID-19 State and Local Policy Changes Needed

For people who use drugs and people with substance use disorders, including those who are justice-involved

To help people who use drugs and people with substance use disorders:

- **Increase access to harm reduction services to help people who use drugs:** Increase access to syringe exchange services that do not require in-person contact.
- **Improve access to prescription drugs:** Use regulatory authority to require providers to supply at least 90 days' worth of prescription drugs, pharmacies to allow early refills, and insurers to relax prior authorization policies for certain drugs. States should take advantage of SAMHSA guidance to request permission to give patients in an opioid treatment program (OTP) up to 28 days' worth of medicine. States should facilitate access to essential medicines in a setting that doesn't expose patients to COVID-19, including increasing access to take-home doses.
- **Increase access to telehealth treatment and recovery services for mental health and substance use disorders, covered by insurance:** States should ensure virtual recovery supports and services are covered by insurance. States should increase funding for telehealth infrastructure that would help Recovery Community Organizations deliver virtual recovery services. States must make sure there is funding to support rapid training of the network of recovery support providers to navigate the telehealth infrastructure so they are able to adequately scale up their services to meet the demand for virtual recovery support services. States should also change payment rules to enable peer providers to bill for telehealth services. The National Telehealth Policy Resource Center [tracks](#) what states are taking action to remove policy barriers to telehealth utilization to address this pandemic.
- **Increase remote access to substance use prevention and early intervention services that are being provided by schools:** States should take action to ensure that schools can be reimbursed for health services that are being provided virtually or in the community as a result of school closures.
- **Expand mental health and substance use disorders services:** Increase funding for comprehensive and crisis services for mental health or substance use emergencies, including services tailored for young people and pregnant individuals. COVID-19 social isolation can exacerbate mental illness and substance use. Access to mental health services is also critically-important for individuals suffering

postpartum depression, which is being exacerbated by COVID-19 social isolation and stress.

- **Support recovery housing:** States should provide funding to support a full range of recovery housing for people with substance use disorders, from housing first to sober housing, which could be used to keep these facilities operating even if residents can't afford to pay rent.

To help people who are justice-involved:

- **Reduce jail populations:** Reduce the number of people in jail by releasing people who are within 30-45 days of finishing their sentence and people with non-COVID related chronic medical conditions unless they pose a violent threat to the community. Identify alternate housing locations if incarcerated people need to be isolated. Ensure all individuals returning to the community have a transition plan in place for accessing health and community services, including housing supports, upon release. Provide sustained funding (not just grants) for community-based programs that are alternatives to arrest and incarceration for nonviolent offenses related to substance use disorders and/or mental illness. Also, law enforcement and prosecutors should reduce the number of people entering jails by avoiding arrests whenever possible.
- **Create safer conditions in jails and prisons:** Follow hygiene, cleaning, and safety recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). When protocols restrict in-person visitation due to health and safety reasons, ensure incarcerated individuals have alternative communication options to maintain important connections with loved ones, such as increased tele-and virtual-communication.
- **Waive hygiene and medical costs for incarcerated people:** Provide hygiene and disinfectant products at no cost to incarcerated people. Waive all medical co-pays and costs related to COVID-19 and other health conditions.