

From Implementation to Impact: How Counties and States Can Make the Case for Medicaid 1115 Reentry Waivers

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A growing number of states are, for the first time, advancing continuity of care for people returning to their communities from incarceration using [Medicaid 1115 reentry waivers](#). Under these waivers, eligible individuals can receive case management and medication-assisted treatment up to 90 days before release and 30 days of prescription medications upon release. These pre-release services are designed as a bridge to support people's successful transition to community.

As states and counties implement these changes, policymakers and stakeholders have a strong interest in understanding the impact of these new policies. Measuring outcomes and communicating impact can help states and counties build understanding, strengthen implementation over time, and inform future policy decisions.

ESTABLISHING SHARED OBJECTIVES AND METRICS

To support these efforts, health and corrections partners should establish shared objectives and metrics early in implementation and develop a cohesive plan for tracking and communicating progress from the outset. In this context, *measuring outcomes* means objectively evaluating the effectiveness of the reentry waiver implementation at achieving its goals of improving health and safety. This includes identifying the right indicators and tracking them consistently over time. *Communicating impact* means translating those findings into clear, meaningful messages to help different audiences understand how the program is working and affecting the community, in a way that evolves alongside implementation. Together, these efforts help build stakeholder understanding and demonstrate progress toward key metrics and the broader human impact of the initiative.

States implementing Medicaid section 1115 reentry waivers are required to [evaluate their work](#) and report their findings to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). These federally required evaluations, which generally focus on the health impact of the waivers, shape how success is measured by federal policymakers. Thus, it is important for states and local partners to align their data collection efforts with state evaluation plans, while also identifying metrics that reflect broader program goals. For a reentry waiver, that means identifying health, public safety, and community goals and aligning meaningful metrics to measure progress towards each. From there, data sources must be identified to report on those metrics in a consistent and reliable way.

MEASURING PROGRESS AT EACH STAGE OF IMPLEMENTATION

There are multiple stages of implementation and therefore different measures to consider along the way. While understanding long-term outcomes is critical, implementers do not need to wait years to demonstrate progress. Sustaining interest in and understanding of programs requires monitoring short-term indicators throughout the waiver period. Early evidence of impact can inform policymaker and stakeholder understanding even as longer-term outcomes are still developing.

The following examples highlight how measures may differ across stages of implementation:

- ▶ **Short Term** (immediately after services have gone live)
 - **Goals:** collect data to understand whether and how services are being provided, identify gaps and opportunities for process improvements, and report quick wins
 - **Potential Metrics:** number of claims for pre-release services, number of people eligible for and enrolled in reentry benefits, number of warm handoffs to community providers, interviews or surveys of people's experiences
- ▶ **Medium Term** (after services have been provided for several months)
 - **Goals:** collect data on access to care and early progress towards health and safety goals
 - **Potential Metrics:** three-month rearrest rates, number of data transfers of clinical information from correctional facilities to community care, number of individuals leaving custody with medications in hand
- ▶ **Long Term** (typically after services have been provided for more than a year, when in-depth, independent evaluations become feasible)
 - **Goals:** collect data on changes to health and safety in the community and among the broader population
 - **Potential Metrics:** year-over-year overdose rates, rates of hospitalization among the reentry population, multi-year reconviction rates

IDENTIFYING DATA SOURCES

Selecting the right data source to report on a metric is essential to understanding outcomes and communicating impact. The following questions are worth considering when selecting the right data source:

- ▶ **Where does the data originate and who has access to it?** Identifying where the data comes from and ensuring that the right people can access it is essential to ensuring you can reliably access the information you need.
- ▶ **Is it possible to use quantitative data, qualitative data, or a mixture of both?** While quantitative data can reveal trends over time, the real-life experiences of the people providing and receiving services can help tell the story of the work in a compelling way and inform ongoing implementation.
- ▶ **How will the data be shared and with whom?** Some information may be more useful internally (for example, due to privacy concerns), while other data may be appropriate for external audiences.

STRATEGIES FOR USING DATA TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

Once states and counties have identified and collected the right data, it is critical to use it to track progress, support communication efforts, and strengthen implementation. A thoughtful communication strategy can help translate data into clear, meaningful insights that build engagement and trust while supporting continuous improvement in the work. The following strategies for data use demonstrate how it can be used purposefully and support communication particularly with key partners and stakeholders:

- ▶ **Track and share progress continuously**
 - Develop internal systems or regular updates to monitor key metrics and keep partners (health, corrections, community-based organizations, etc.) aligned
- ▶ **Use data to identify and respond to challenges**
 - Flag implementation issues early and pair data with context to explain trends over time or across populations
- ▶ **Build credibility with stakeholders**
 - Anticipate concerns, provide transparent data, and maintain feedback loops to ensure findings are understood and trusted

COMMUNICATING IMPACT: USING DATA TO TELL THE STORY

Sharing results is not only about reporting data. It also involves telling a clear story to help partners, policymakers, and community members understand what is happening and why. In many cases, counties are particularly well-positioned to tell the story of how these initiatives directly impact people. Engaging with partners to identify what information is most important to particular audiences is a critical part of this effort, as different stakeholders respond to different types of information. The form of communication is similarly important to tailor to the audience and may include press releases, fact sheets, videos, newsletters, reports, news articles, events with stakeholders, and data dashboards. The following examples illustrate what this could look like in the context of the reentry waiver:

- ▶ **Data dashboards** can provide real-time visibility into program progress and support transparency across partners.
 - [Cook County's public-facing data dashboard](#) with key criminal justice data suggests the type of information a dashboard could include.
- ▶ **Impact reports and briefs** can show how outcomes evolve over time and help make the case for continued investment.
 - Counties can develop their own summaries of progress and impact, which can stand alone or contribute to broader state-level reports. [California's Justice Involved Reentry Initiative impact report](#) is one model of how a state has communicated progress and lessons learned even as implementation continues.
- ▶ **Videos and storytelling** can explain how programs work and highlight real-world experiences.
 - For example, [San Diego County's video](#) on its CalAIM Justice-Involved Initiative illustrates implementation and impact in a way that is easy for a broad audience to understand.
- ▶ **News articles and public-facing stories** can reach wider audiences and provide deeper context on the importance of reentry initiatives.
 - Coverage such as this [New York Times article](#) on Medicaid and reentry can help elevate local efforts and connect them to broader national conversations.

LOOKING AHEAD

Section 1115 reentry waivers are an opportunity to strengthen continuity of care and improve health and safety outcomes for people leaving incarceration. Measuring outcomes and communicating impact are interconnected and ongoing processes that allow states, counties, and other implementing partners to demonstrate progress, refine implementation, and inform stakeholders.

As reentry waiver implementation continues, focusing early on strong measurement and communications strategies will lead to improved systems and demonstrate the direct impact of those improvements on the health and safety of individuals and communities.

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