

What Kentuckians Think about Treatment vs. Incarceration for People with Substance Use Disorders



Results From The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati and the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky

Since 2000, Kentucky's prison population has been one of the fastest growing in the nation. The Commonwealth's inmate population is 45% larger than it was in 2000, despite a decline in population over the last 3 years. In comparison, the U.S. state prison system as a whole grew by only 13% since 2000.¹

There are several factors behind the growth in Kentucky's prison population, including a rise in the percentage of inmates who were drug offenders. In 2000, 30% of Kentucky inmates were drug offenders. This rose to 38% by 2009.²

On a positive note, Kentucky's recidivism rate—or the rate of people who return to prison after being released—is at a 10-year low.³ However, if the percentage of drug offenders continues to climb, the recidivism rate may also increase, as people incarcerated for

¹ Pew Center on the States (2010). *Kentucky: A Data-Driven Effort to Protect Public Safety and Control Corrections Spending*. Retrieved from www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/Kentucky_brief_updated.pdf.

² Ibid.

³ Kentucky Department of Corrections. (2011, January 4). *Kentucky's Recidivism Rate At 10-Year Low; Felon Population Also Declining* [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://corrections.ky.gov/news/Kentucky's+Recidivism+Rate+At+10-Year+Low-Felon+Population+Also+Declining.htm>.

Would you favor or oppose replacing prison sentences with mandatory drug treatment and probation for... (Graph presents only those who said they strongly or somewhat favor replacing prison sentences with treatment.)

People convicted of nonviolent illegal drug use*



People convicted of committing nonviolent crimes under the influence of alcohol



■ Strongly favor

■ Somewhat favor

* This refers to people who were convicted of using illegal drugs, not people who committed other crimes—including violent crimes—while under the influence of or to get money to pay for illegal drugs.

alcohol and illegal drug violations are more likely to have been arrested previously. A study by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA) found that people incarcerated for a drug law violation had been arrested an average of 4.6 times previously, and people convicted of an alcohol law violation had been arrested an average of 5.4 times previously.⁴

The study by CASA also found that only 11% of inmates with an alcohol or other drug use disorder had received professional treatment for their substance use while in prison. For many people convicted of illegal drug or alcohol violations, community-based treatment can be more effective

than prison for addressing their needs and preventing repeat run-ins with the law. Community-based treatment can also be more cost-effective than prison, and offenders can be diverted to court-mandated treatment rather than to prison or jail.⁵

Majority of Kentuckians Favor Treatment over Incarceration for Nonviolent Offenders

Almost 7 in 10 Kentucky adults (69%) favor replacing prison sentences with mandatory treatment and probation for people convicted of nonviolent illegal drug use.⁶

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⁵ Collins, T. (2009). *The State of Corrections Today*. Available at: www.occionline.org/pdf/home/State_Of_Corrections_Today.pdf.

⁶ This refers to people who were convicted of using illegal drugs, not people who committed other crimes—including violent crimes—while under the influence of or to get money to pay for illegal drugs.

These findings unless otherwise noted are from the 2010 Kentucky Health Issues Poll, funded by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky and The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati. The Kentucky Health Issues Poll was conducted December 3–22 and 27–28, 2010, by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati. A random sample of 1,677 adults from throughout Kentucky was interviewed by telephone. This included 1,469 landline interviews and 208 cell phone interviews with people who did not have a landline telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, the statewide estimates will be accurate to $\pm 2.4\%$. In addition to sampling error, there are other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording, or context effects that can introduce error or bias. For more information about the Kentucky Health Issues Poll, please visit www.healthy-ky.org or www.healthfoundation.org/khip.html.

Responses were similar for people convicted of nonviolent crimes while under the influence of alcohol, with 71% of Kentuckians favoring replacing prison sentences with mandatory treatment and probation for people convicted of committing nonviolent crimes under the influence of alcohol.

The majority of Kentucky adults regardless of age, sex, race, education, income, or political party favored treatment over incarceration for nonviolent illegal drug use or nonviolent crimes committed under the influence of alcohol.