

# Qualitative Findings: Substance Use Treatment and Services for Adults During and Post-Incarceration

August 2024



## Engaging People with Lived Experience

Substance use treatment improves recidivism outcomes for justice-involved people with substance use disorders but is often under-utilized; barriers include:<sup>1</sup>

- Difficulty getting admitted to treatment
- Denial of a problem
- Negative social support dissuading treatment
- Demands and barriers of post-incarceration life that prevent engagement with treatment

People with lived experience play a vital role in this information gathering process, helping us:<sup>2</sup>

- Develop deeper understanding of conditions that promote and prevent risk
- Contextualize and inform policies, programs and practices
- Promote equity: Include PLEs at all decision-making points.

## Guiding Questions

- What challenges do people face to achieving sobriety/recovery while justice involved (pre, during and post-incarceration)? How are their experiences different when participating in a diversionary drug court program?
- What treatment and recovery services are offered inside jail/prison and upon release? What specific barriers did people face?
- What can we do to help incarcerated/formerly incarcerated people obtain long term recovery?

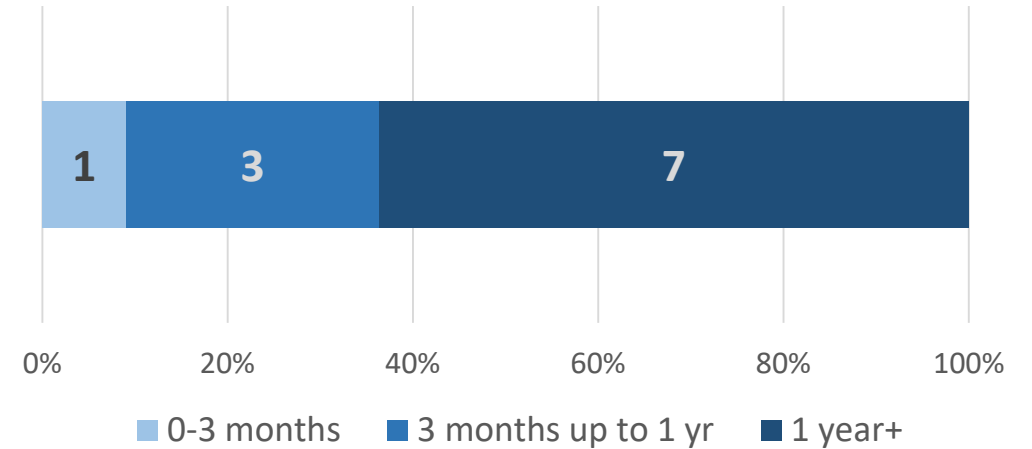
<sup>1</sup>Owens MD, Chen JA, Simpson TL, Timko C, Williams EC. Barriers to addiction treatment among formerly incarcerated adults with substance use disorders. *Addict Sci Clin Pract.* 2018 Aug 21;13(1):19

<sup>2</sup> ASPE-HHS, Engaging People with Lived Experience to Improve Federal Research, Policy and Practice: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/lived-experience>

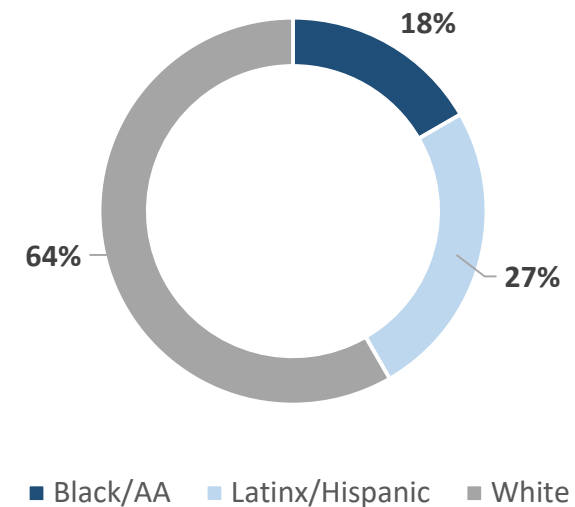
# Participants & Methods

- One focus group was conducted in Spring 2024 with adults ages 18-63 (n = 11).
- Efforts were taken to achieve a diverse range of adults.
  - Length of time in recovery
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Gender (64% male, 36% female)

Length of Time in Recovery (n = 11)



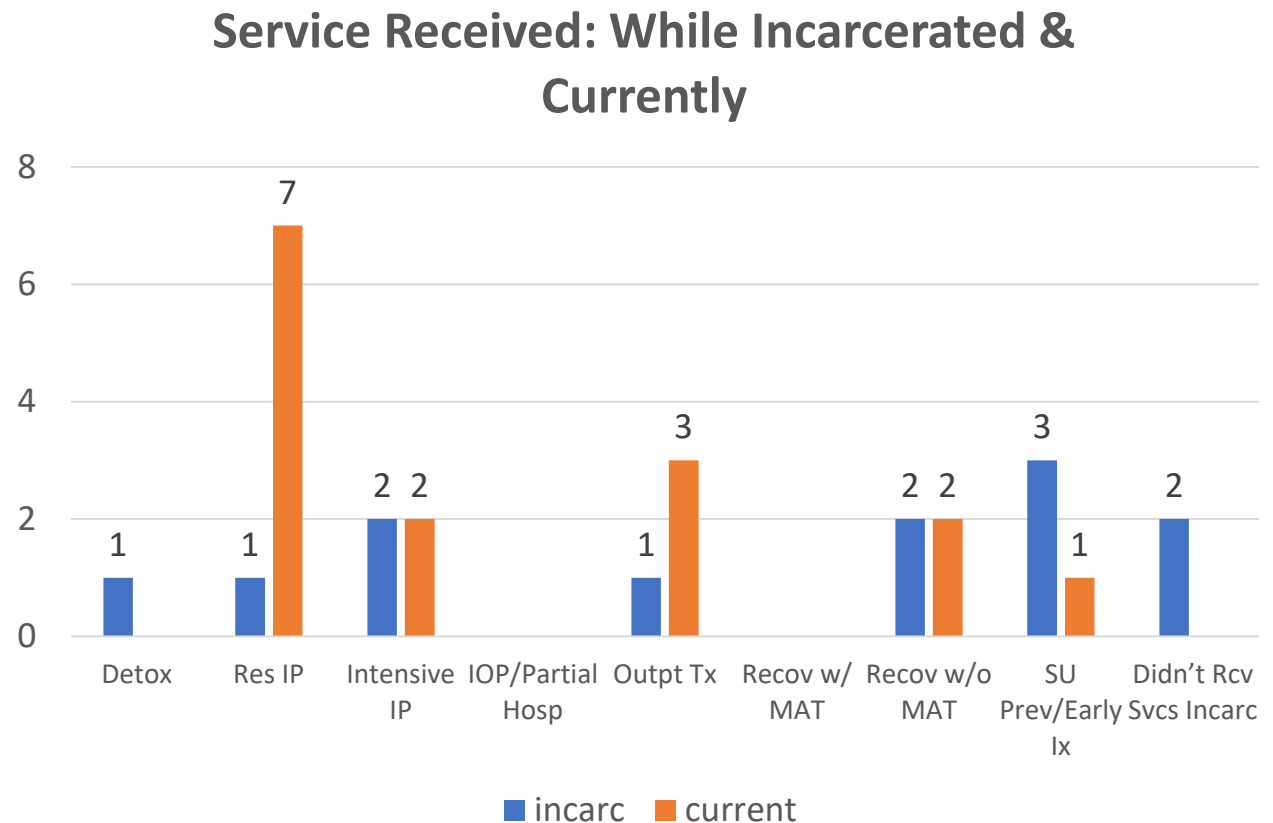
Race/Ethnicity Endorsed by Participants



# What Treatment and Recovery Services Did People Receive?

The majority of participants are currently in residential inpatient treatment

Number of services per person while incarcerated ranged from 0-3



# What Were People's Experiences with Substance Use Treatment and Recovery Services in DuPage County?

## While Incarcerated

- DuPage treatment and recovery offerings were less consistent compared to neighboring counties
- Stigma exists within the substance using community for drug court; some substance users advised others against drug court

## Upon Release

- Inpatient services upon release in DuPage county were difficult to access

**Participant:** I wasn't incarcerated long term, only in jail 3 days and then bailed out.

**Interviewer:** So, there was no connection to services or supports?

**Participant:** No, it was really kinda up to me and I wasn't ready for it. So it was up to my parents asking me to do it. Yeah, there wasn't any list of services, but I don't know if I would have taken it.

# What Gaps or Needs Remain in Substance Use Service and Supports?

- Participants reported systemically, far fewer offerings for women than men both during and post incarceration
- Time period between from release from jail and treatment can be highly vulnerable to relapse; there is need for greater support and navigation
  - participants identified supports that would help ease this transition, e.g., linkage to treatment, transportation, employment
  - if jail stay is less than 90 days, many people need to maintain sobriety with limited or no support before entering treatment

**“I feel that the women don't have enough help either. I mean look at the men's house and look at the women's house, it's 3 times the size. And there's a waiting list. And nothing's changed. We only have 3 three quarter houses and the men have like 6, it's not just Serenity House but it's everywhere.”**

**“Help trying to get your license, a job, help for people with bad backgrounds.”**

# How Did People Access Substance Use Services Upon Release?

Participants most commonly noted accessing substance use treatment upon release with the support of:

- Probation officers
- Prison based treatment and drug court programs
- One participant was linked to treatment by Alcoholics Anonymous counselor

Many participants reported needing to identify substance treatment without assistance.

- This indicates an interruption in the treatment continuum and a point of vulnerability for relapse.

# What Barriers Prevented Access to Substance Use Treatment and Recovery?

While Illinois has moved toward greater emphasis on treatment over punishment of substance use, necessary supports to meet demand for treatment haven't been fully realized

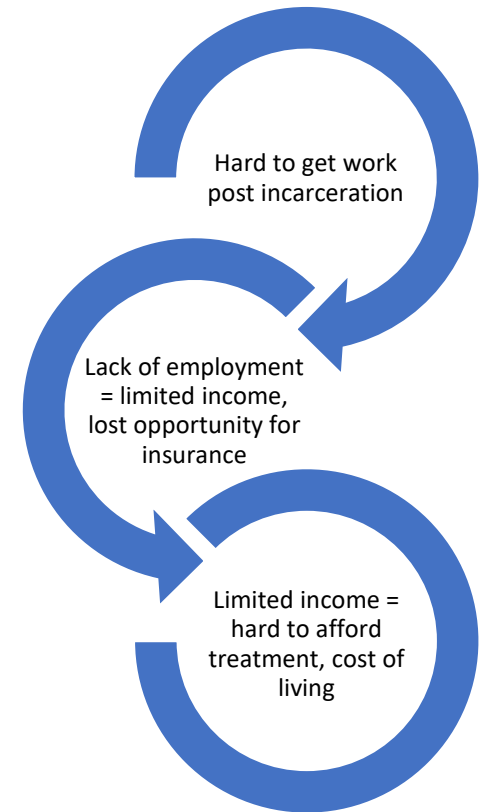
- Cost of treatment prohibitively high for many
- Limited or lack of insurance

Post-incarceration, cyclical barriers of lack of transportation, employment post-incarceration, income and insurance work against people seeking treatment



# What Removed Barriers to Substance Use Treatment?

- **Dedicated role to help participants transition from substance use treatment while incarcerated to treatment upon release**
  - Benefit realized: prevent treatment disruption
  - Jail and prison programs were inconsistent in offering this support; more common in drug court and treatment programs within jails/prisons
- **Barriers faced:**
  - Very limited access while incarcerated to arrange services with treatment and recovery centers
  - Transportation to get from jail/prison to post-release treatment facility
  - Transportation for other life necessities supports ongoing treatment, e.g. employment, groceries, healthcare



# What Challenges do People Face when Maintaining Recovery?

Participants answered this question by sharing what worked for them while maintaining recovery. They spoke from the experience of multiple iterations of treatment and recovery. Most comments stem from the challenge of not being ready to maintain recovery:

- Seeing treatment and recovery as a way to avoid a jail sentence
- Selectively listening to and following through on suggestions made by Drug Court professionals
- Not following the rules of Drug Court

# What are the Supports and Challenges Navigating Substance Use Services in Drug Court?

Participants described experiences in Drug Court where they were offered supports and services for substance use and mental health concerns, whereas their previous experiences with the traditional court system did not offer these supports and services.

*“[The court] brought no attention to the fact that I had a problem even though I had many underage drinking charges. I got no help, no support. If you saw a kid who had those charges you would think you would try to help them.”*

Participants did not mention challenges to navigating substance use support and services, in Drug Court however they mentioned Drug Court rules that challenged their ability to maintain steady employment:

- Background checks for employment held up in court
- Having to take off work every two weeks for court appointments
- Drug tests required during work hours

# What are the Facilitators and Barriers to Maintaining Long Term Recovery Post-Incarceration?

Participants shared that having mental health services (i.e., access to a psychiatrist and cognitive behavioral therapy) helped them to learn the drivers for substance use and address mental health issues, which in turn helped them to maintain long-term recovery.

***“I learned about dual diagnosis at [treatment center]. It was never drugs from the start. It was about things that needed to be dealt with and using drugs to cover them up. Once I knew it was about me and not the chemicals, I was in a better position to get ahead of them.”***

Participants identified triggers as the main barrier to maintaining long-term recovery.

- Former romantic relationships
- Seeing peers relapse
- Family of origin

# Recommendations

**Pre-incarceration:** Build awareness for substance use treatment and recovery supports

- Upon arrest for any substance related crime, offer treatment and recovery information and supports
- Build awareness for and offer participation in drug court program

**During incarceration:** Increase participation in treatment and recovery services

- Awareness and access to treatment and recovery programs

**Post-incarceration:** Address cyclical barriers that prevent participation in treatment and recovery post- incarceration

- Employment
- Transportation
- Availability of treatment and recovery beds
- Remove Drug Court rules that serve as obstacles to employment (e.g. drug tests and court appointments during work hours)

THANK YOU!