

PAROLING INTO HOMELESSNESS: AN ANALYSIS OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT
OF CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION REENTRY PROGRAMS

A Culminating Project Presented to the Department of Public Policy and Administration
at California State University, Sacramento in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

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May 2024

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Executive Summary

Having a stable place to call home comes with the opportunity to live life with dignity and health, cultivate community and supportive relationships, and build economic security and mobility for individuals and families alike. Yet many Californians exiting incarceration continue to face steep systemic barriers to finding stable housing and as a result face a high likelihood of experiencing homelessness. In California, it is estimated that nearly 20% of people leaving state prisons parole directly into homelessness. Recent homelessness studies have also found that one in five (19%) unhoused people entered homelessness from an institutional setting, primarily a jail or prison. Stark indicators that California's reentry supports are not meeting the need. This only worsens the state's homelessness challenges and exacerbates the incarceration to homelessness cycle too many Californians face. Prison reentry programs are intended to provide wraparound services and supports such as housing navigation, employment, treatment, and family reunification to bridge the difficult transition back into community. Some programs offer a type of interim housing, but not all do, despite research underscoring the profound effects stable housing has on reducing recidivism, preventing and ending homelessness, and promoting well-being and public safety. In recent years, California has invested in differing types of reentry programs, but this report focuses on further exploring the limitations and shortfalls of pre-and-post release reentry programs under the California Department of Corrections (CDCR), with an emphasis on post-release residential programs as they include a temporary housing placement. This project strives to highlight the urgent need to further investigate and reform CDCR reentry programs as an upstream solution to preventing and ending homelessness in California. It is divided into the following major sections:

Section I introduces the basis of California’s homelessness crisis and draws attention to the disproportionate likelihood of experiencing homelessness among people with conviction histories. It underscores the critical need for CDCR reentry programs to prevent homelessness more effectively.

Section II gives a high-level overview of the intersectional cycle of incarceration and homelessness to build understanding of why it’s critical to provide reentry and housing supports to improve life outcomes and reduce recidivism. It touches on the disproportionate impact of incarceration and homelessness on marginalized communities, highlighting racial disparities and discriminatory policies that are the primary drivers.

Section III outlines the need for state intervention to improve housing outcomes for individuals exiting California prisons. It argues that housing supports upon release are insufficient, and housing market failures and programmatic exemptions are exacerbating negative housing outcomes. Additionally, it highlights that California voters and policymakers have also passed positive sentencing reforms, but failed to increase housing supports, and concludes with the presenting the high monetary costs of incarcerating Californians.

Section IV dives deeper into challenges faced by the reentry systems and currently offered CDCR programs. It details the various pre-and post-release reentry programs offered by CDCR, including their objectives, eligibility criteria, and estimated costs per slot, ultimately arguing that these programs are not meeting the need and have various shortcomings that must be addressed.

Section V compiles and elaborates on the limitations and shortcomings of post-release residential reentry programs. The identified shortcomings are categorized into three main findings: 1) capacity, location, and time limitations, 2) oversight and accountability failures, 3) lack of housing first practices, and 4) the opaque qualification process and unequal supports.

Section VI details three overarching policy recommendations for California policymakers to strengthen post-release residential reentry programs: 1) assess current program capacity, outcomes, and application processes, 2) increase housing options that support Housing First principles, and 3) strengthen pre-release housing navigation supports and systems integration.

As policymakers continue taking action to prevent homelessness and house Californians across the state, more critical analysis and reentry reforms must account for housing barriers after incarceration as upstream and cyclical factor that lead to becoming unhoused. Californians released from incarceration have served the time society – and our judicial system – have deemed as fitting for acts committed. Continuing to unjustly punish individuals upon their release through not providing appropriate supports does not benefit anyone – including the individuals experiencing it, other California residents, nor the government due to the high personal, societal, and monetary costs of homelessness and incarceration. Policymakers can work towards a California where our systems can mitigate homelessness and ensure everyone, regardless of their background, has a safe and stable home.

Acknowledgements

I want to express my profound gratitude to my family, friends, and the incredible network of women who have played a pivotal role in shaping my journey to where I am today. A heartfelt thank you goes out to mi madrecita, whose unwavering strength and support taught me that women *can* achieve anything, to lead with compassion, seek light in adversity, and ignited my passion for creating a just world. A shoutout to my sister, Susan, my closest confidante and constant source of wise words. To Sara Kimberlin and Alissa Anderson, my former and current supervisor at the Budget Center, thank you for your steady support, flexibility, and guidance in channeling my intellectual curiosity toward tangible ways to make a difference. Finally, thank you to the PPA faculty and my fellow cohort, I have grown in countless ways and can honestly say I am a better and more confident person because of it. It truly takes a village.

I dedicate this project – and this master’s degree – to the countless women that did not have the opportunity to pursue their education to help support their families. It’s on the dreams of my mother, grandmothers, and endless other women before me why I have had the privilege to be the first in my family to pursue higher education and a graduate degree. Gracias a todas por nunca rendirse.

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Section I: Introduction

In early 2023, California had the highest number of residents experiencing homelessness in America with over 181,000 unhoused individuals at a point-in-time. Throughout the same year, local homeless service providers connected with over 300,000 unhoused Californians needing to find a home or other life-sustaining essential needs (California Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2024). The core of our humanitarian crisis lies in the statewide shortage of affordable housing – especially for Californians with the lowest incomes. It is compounded by systemic challenges and policies rooted in racism, classism, sexism, and other discriminatory practices that place underrepresented communities more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness and its traumatic effects. Among these include people leaving incarceration and people with conviction histories. Formerly incarcerated Californians – who are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and Latino – face uniquely high barriers to finding a home in an already squeezed housing market. Landlords and rental companies often require high upfront costs and continued employment, credit, and housing history which people leaving incarceration often cannot fully present. This is layered with explicit discrimination even though recent state laws have attempted to bar landlords from inquiring about criminal/conviction histories in certain cases.

Housing instability and homelessness only increase recidivism odds and the likelihood of future justice system involvement. Unhoused individuals are more likely to interact with police and 11 times more likely to be arrested than people with housing due to various factors and targeted discriminatory laws. Broadly, people who have been incarcerated are also 10 times more likely than the public to be unhoused. In California, it is estimated that nearly 20% of people who exit state prisons parole directly into homelessness. A statewide homelessness study

additionally found that more than one third (37%) of participants who were homeless had spent time in prison at some point in their lives (UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, 2023). Among those who entered homelessness from institutional settings, including jail or prisons, 67% had been unhoused when they entered institutionalization (UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, 2023). Recognizing the steep barriers to housing and reintegration for those leaving their custody, the California Department of Corrections (CDCR) which oversees the state’s prisons, is one agency that does administer reentry programs designed to support individuals reintegrate into their communities after completing their sentences. However, only select reentry programs offer a temporary housing after release and have limited placement slots, resulting in many Californians falling into homeless before being able to adequately find stable housing or employment.

As homelessness and incarceration are still inextricably linked, more information is needed to explore how California can leverage its current state-level structures and resources to address various upstream factors of the homelessness crisis – beginning with reentry housing for people leaving state prisons. This report focuses on exploring the relationship between incarceration and homelessness and how CDCR reentry programs can more proactively prevent homelessness. An overview of CDCR pre-and-post release reentry programs is presented, with a deeper emphasis on post-release residential reentry programs as they can potentially provide more direct housing supports to individuals facing homelessness upon or shortly after their release. The remainder of this report is structured into the following sections: **Section II** offers a background into the intersection of incarceration and homelessness and how reentry programs can be pivotal in breaking the cycle. **Section III** outlines the need for state intervention to improve housing outcomes for people leaving state prisons. **Section IV** dives deeper into reentry

system challenges and currently offered CDCR pre-and-post release reentry programs, followed by **Section V** that names the most urgent limitations and shortfalls of post-release residential reentry programs. Lastly, **Section VI** offers three overarching policy recommendations to improve CDCR administered post-release reentry programs to improve housing outcomes shortly after prison release.

Section II: Incarceration, Homelessness, and Breaking the Cycle with Reentry Programs

Access to safe, stable, and affordable housing is core to successful societal reintegration after incarceration. Yet people leaving incarceration often face high barriers to securing the stable, long-term housing needed to reconnect with support and familial networks, find stable employment, and maintain their health and well-being. As a result, many find themselves experiencing homelessness shortly after their release. This is one of the main contributors to cycling in and out of homelessness and incarceration. However, upstream factors ranging from the lack of affordable housing, educational attainment barriers, over policing of communities of color, intergenerational trauma, employment discrimination, and gaps in our safety net are all driving factors of homelessness. At its core, the likelihood of experiencing incarceration or homelessness have largely overlapping fundamental factors that, if addressed in tandem, can prevent the incarceration to homelessness cycle. This section further explores the demographics and drivers of experiencing homelessness and incarceration.

Homelessness affects people of all ages, backgrounds, and regions across the state – rural, suburban, and urban alike (Davalos, 2023b). Most unhoused individuals are single adults – over 45% who were over the age of 50 – with smaller shares of families and unaccompanied youth. Racial disparities persist, with Black, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander individuals facing the highest risk, alongside an increasing share of Latino Californians (Davalos, 2023a). In 2021,

Black Californians experiencing homelessness were four times as likely to connect with homeless service providers than the general population and Indigenous and Pacific Islander Californians were nearly twice as likely (California Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2024). Former foster youth, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and survivors of domestic violence are also overrepresented in the unhoused population due to distinct drivers (Kimberlin & Davalos, 2023). Men are also overrepresented in California's unhoused population. The striking disparities seen among the unhoused population are the result of intentional racist, classist, and other discriminatory policymaking that is deeply embedded in our societal systems. While these ingrained practices need further exploration as they are fundamental homelessness drivers, this report focuses on how post-prison housing options and programming can better support Californians.

There are also deep health impacts of being unhoused. Not having a home causes severe stress and trauma, harming physical and mental well-being, which can trigger mental health problems or worsen existing behavioral health challenges. It's associated with higher complex coping mechanisms and overall difficulty in maintaining basic needs such as health, work, and dignified living conditions (Kimberlin & Davalos, 2023). Consequently, the 2023 California homelessness point-in-time count showed 25% of the 181,399 people experiencing homelessness had a severe mental illness and 24% had a substance use disorder. However, while there is likely overlap between these individuals as behavioral health conditions are often co-occurring, the full extent is not reported (Davalos & Ramos-Yamamoto, 2024). Unhoused Californians also face steep barriers to medical access, face daily safety concerns, and often have limited access to basic necessities such as consistent meals, proper medication storage, and sanitation. Experiencing homelessness ultimately limits the opportunity to live a long, healthy

life and reach older ages, which is reflected by higher mortality rates in unhoused populations when compared to their housed counterparts as well (Funk et al., 2022).

While housing insecurity is the primary driver of homeless for most people, becoming unhoused often follows periods of incarceration. However, because the two experiences are inextricably linked, and individuals' experiences can vary. The strongest driver of this cycle is the criminalization of homelessness (see Figure 1). Deeply rooted stigma, and insufficient affordable housing and services funding which has resulted in higher visible homelessness, fueled discriminatory laws attempting to push unhoused people out of view. This includes ordinances encompassing life-sustaining acts such as sleeping, resting, self-sheltering/camping, or asking for donations (Tars, 2021). These harmful tactics are the most ineffective and costly methods to address homelessness. Research increasingly demonstrates that providing quick, low barrier permanent housing options – not punishment – is cheaper and more effective for solving homelessness over the long-term (Tars, 2021).

Nevertheless, unhoused individuals are more likely to interact with police and 11 times more likely to be arrested than people with housing (Bae, 2023). Legal cases within the last decade have upheld that localities cannot punish unhoused individuals for using public spaces for life-sustaining service if other forms of shelter are not available. However, in April 2024, the US Supreme Court will rule on whether local governments can make it a crime to involuntarily live outside and unsheltered, when adequate shelter is not available. This ruling may only perpetuate the detrimental impacts to unhoused Californians and pressures on law enforcement and the carceral system.

The other key piece to this cycle is the implication of having spent time in prison and a conviction record. Formerly incarcerated individuals face high barriers to finding a home even

though criminal history has a proven limited association with responsible tenancy (Housing California, 2021). Landlords and rental companies often require high upfront costs and continued employment, credit, and housing history which people leaving incarceration often cannot fully present. “Crime free” residential ordinances, previous evictions, and direct stigma also play a fundamental role. The California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) does currently prohibit housing providers from having outright bans for those with previous conviction histories. Yet practical enforcement of the FEHA is also a concern due to the lengthy process and the need of resources and time people on the brink of homelessness often do not have. Plus, people with a criminal history are also not a protected class under FEHA (Housing California, 2021).

Figure 1

Figure 1



Source: *The Council on State Governments Justice Center*

Californians who are disproportionately imprisoned, and thus more likely to have conviction histories, also reflect deep racial and ethnic disparities driven by racist and classist

policies. While California has passed various positive sentencing reforms designed to reduce our prison population, these disparities persist. Pre-pandemic data shows that Black, Indigenous, and Latino men are overrepresented in state prisons, alongside Black and Indigenous women despite the overall prison population decrease (Graves, 2021). These stark racial disparities are again not by accident. Detailed research demonstrates implicit racial bias in the criminal justice system. This touches all aspects including policing, pretrial detention, charging decisions, and sentencing laws (Ramos-Yamamoto & Davalos, 2021). Combined, the mass incarceration of people of color has lasting and intergenerational detrimental impacts that makes Californians of color more vulnerable to face cascading experiences which can lead to homelessness.

The systemic drivers of homelessness and incarceration is where reentry programs can play a pivotal role in breaking the cycle. Reentry programs and supports are critical to ensuring successful reintegration and can help mitigate the experience of incarceration and homelessness if people are connected to the housing services they need upon their release. The connection to housing options, documentation attainment and preparation, familial connections, and employment readiness among other supports reduce recidivism and encourage self-sufficiency for most. Even for individuals who may require more robust services and interventions due to health or behavior health challenges, appropriate housing options are especially needed to ensure they receive the care and supports they need. Robust and adequately funded reentry programs can be monumental in addressing homelessness among the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in California. However, the programs that are currently offered through CDCR are not meeting the need and have various administrative challenges that must be addressed as this report further explores. Through doing so, California can take proactive and intentional steps to ensuring all Californians – regardless of the background – are not pushed into homelessness.

Section III: State Intervention is Needed to Improve Housing Outcomes for Californians Exiting Prisons

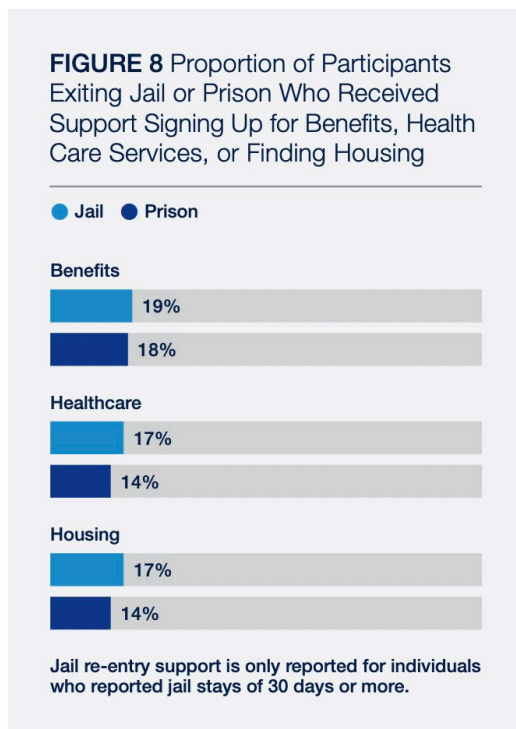
This section provides justification for government involvement in creating stronger housing options and outcomes for individuals transitioning from state prison. It additionally discusses documented reentry system barriers, stemming from policy decisions, which can be effectively addressed through government intervention.

Housing Supports Upon Release Are Insufficient

The California government has the responsibility to ensure all residents have access to a home and ensure public resources are utilized effectively. Yet, there are too many Californians experiencing homelessness upon or shortly after their release from prison which comes at the high cost of lives, human dignity, and monetary resources. The UCSF homelessness statewide study found that nearly one in five (19%) of unhoused people entered homelessness from an institutional setting, primarily a jail or prison, and only one in seven (14%) of respondents reported having support upon their exit from prison (see Figure 2) (2023). Demonstrating that there are clear barriers or uneven reentry implementation practices across the state prison system which only exacerbate reentry challenges as individuals already face. Unsurprisingly, it's estimated that up to 39 percent of all people entering parole from California prisons report housing instability and likely need rental assistance to remain housed (California's Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health, 2021). However, rental assistance – in any form from housing vouchers to small sums – is very difficult to obtain even for the broader population. More critically, unstable housing is a well-documented factor that leads to higher recidivism rates and can result in returning to prison especially for people on parole or community supervision which is preventable. It's also the main driver of homelessness as explained in Section II. The high levels of housing instability faced by individuals demonstrate that current

state housing supports and efforts for people exiting prisons is not enough. Leaving individuals in precarious housing situations places them at significant disadvantages compared to Californians who are released to a secure, long-term housing placement which in turn are more likely to have lower post-release criminal activity and rates of homelessness.

Figure 2



Source: University of California, San Francisco, California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness

Housing Market Failures and Programmatic Exemptions

Early homelessness prevention and resolution is critical as homelessness continues to be one of the top concerns for Californians (Baldassare et al., 2024). The inequities that drive homelessness – primarily the lack of accessible, affordable housing – is also a major growing social justice movement (National Homelessness Law Center, 2020). Fundamentally, the state is responsible for addressing public concerns and the negative externalities that arise from systemic and market failures that created insufficient accessible homes for those leaving incarceration and

Californians at large. In 2022, only 24 housing units were affordable and available for every 100 extremely low-income renter households in California which newly released individuals often fall into (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2024). More broadly, the California Department of Housing and Community Development estimates that 2.5 million homes are needed over the next eight years to address the housing shortage statewide – with more than a million of these homes specifically for low-income households (2023). Combined, it's clear that the supply of housing is not meeting the demand and regardless of the drivers of this imbalance, the state has role to play in addressing it.

It's also important to consider California has already recognized its role through funding CDCR reentry programs and taking other legislative and regulatory steps. However, CDCR contracts with third parties to carry out these services, often for both pre-and-post release supports. The patchwork network of reentry providers throughout California often offer differing services or levels of support which places people leaving incarceration in precarious situations. Some contractors are successful in their efforts, but many are not compensated adequately nor have accountability oversight. The short-term housing that reentry contractors do offer is typically transitional or recovery housing which is exempt from following “Housing First” model that other housing-related programs in California must abide by to receive state funding (Welfare and Institutions Code, Ca. Stat. § 2016 & rev. 2022). Housing First is a homelessness preventing, evidence-based model through which low-barrier, accessible housing is offered without preconditions or restrictions but still offer wraparound supports. The housing reentry providers offer differs from this model as individuals residing in transitional or recovery housing often have strict conditions they must abide by or risk losing their housing. However, restrictions imposed are not individually tailored. Time curfews, mandated meetings, and other requirements

often do not consider time variable employment opportunities, individual supports needed, or normal behaviors that people in other types of housing are not punished for. The inconsistent state regulations of evidence-based practices and programming show clear population bias which it has the responsibility to correct.

California Voters and Policymakers Passed Positive Sentencing Reforms, but Failed to Increase Housing Supports

The successes of voter-approved and government sanctioned sentencing reforms and prison closures additionally signal the ongoing need for government intervention in addressing the prison reentry system. As of June 2023, CDCR housed over 96,000 incarcerated Californians (California Department of Corrections, 2024c). However, over the last five years, its population fell by 34,000 individuals – almost a 26% reduction between 2019 and 2023 alone (Miller, 2024). While part of this reduction is due to the COVID-19 pandemic-related releases, there has been an overall steady decline in the prison population (Graves, 2020). Currently, its estimated 15,000 prison beds sit empty which is projected to increase to 19,000 by 2028 (Miller, 2024). Yet over 34,000 Californians are estimated to be on parole for at least the next five years which include newly released individuals (California Department of Corrections, 2024c). During this period, housing costs also substantially increased, exacerbating housing accessibility challenges while various pandemic-era safety net supports expired. Unsurprisingly, homelessness across the state increased during this timeframe even though the state began providing major, one-time funding for homelessness. Research underscores that homelessness increases as rents rise, especially in urban areas (Horowitz et al., 2023). The positive sentencing reforms, supported by both the public and policymakers, unfortunately overlooked the necessity for robust housing supports and infrastructure to effectively assist individuals transitioning from incarceration.

Incarcerating Californians is Extremely Costly

Keeping individuals incarcerated, rather than providing post-release reentry supports or other housing assistance, is also costly. In 2022, it was estimated to cost California \$106,000 per year to incarcerate one person in a prison (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2022). Considering that the average years served by an individual released to parole is roughly five years, direct incarceration costs state are steep (California Department of Corrections, 2020b). In contrast, CDCR post-release reentry programs costs ranged from roughly \$2,500 to \$7,800 per slot in fiscal year 2020-21 depending on the services offered to participants (see Section IV) (California Department of Corrections, 2020a). Yet recidivism rates remain high at around 50% after a year of prison release. Among those who were reconvicted, roughly 17% returned to prison (California Department of Corrections, 2024i).

The state must also consider other cost savings that can come with providing affordable house or housing assistance. For example, a higher end estimate for a rental subsidy in the private market housing for a formally incarcerated person is only \$14,000 per year (Housing California, 2021). Individuals with more complex needs may require additional housing supports that are primarily served through permanent supportive housing (PSH). PSH combines affordable housing with wraparound supportive services but on average costs only \$17,000 per-unit to operate annually (Reid, 2023). It encourages broader public system savings that could reduce state costs in other ways, especially over the long term. A Los Angeles study demonstrated PSH was associated with a roughly 60% decrease in public service utilization costs per participant (from \$38,146 to \$15,358), 20% total net cost savings (accounting for supportive housing operating costs), 1.64 fewer ER visits per year, and 4 days less of inpatient hospital stays (Hunter et al., 2017).

California Reentry Programs Fall Short in Preventing Homelessness

As it is estimated that nearly 20% of people parole directly into homelessness, and nearly 20% of people experiencing homelessness entered directly from an institutional setting, it's clear that reentry programs are falling short in preventing homelessness. California's recidivism rate, while decreasing, also still remains relatively high at almost 42%. A signal that intervention being offered at the state level are clearly not enough nor fully working as intended. With this, understanding why the state is failing to reduce recidivism rates which feeds into homelessness is crucial. Stable housing and employment that provide livable wages are often very difficult to obtain after incarceration due to stigma, pre-release documentation barriers, other various factors. While community-based reentry programs that offer transitional housing and other supports can help break the cycle of reoffending, but they are limitedly offered and accommodate a relatively small number of people incarcerated or recently released (Cate, 2022). These programs are also exempt from "Housing First" practices as mentioned previously which meaning individuals are susceptible to losing their housing placement if some sort of mistake or relapse occurs. Research has supported that participants in a Housing First program were independently housed for longer periods despite experiencing homelessness for longer periods. According to a literature review by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, "the rigid nature of the treatment first model produces inferior housing stability outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness and can result in disengagement from critical services" (2023). Considering CDCR post-release housing programs do not Housing First principles and have various restrictions, it's unsurprising to see relatively modest program completion rates (see Section IV) and high rates homelessness and of technical parole violations among those who are reincarcerated. Some research even suggests that residential housing settings – meaning

transitional housing – increases reincarceration likelihood due certain crimes and technical violations (Lee, 2023).

Overall, the resources that are being allocated to reentry programs and corrections can have higher utility – individually, socially, and economically – if the state focuses on proactively housing people leaving incarceration with adequate supports needed to successfully reintegrate.

Section IV: Reentry System Challenges and Currently Offered Programs

This section provides a broad overview of the documented systemic challenges of California’s reentry programs. It also describes current CDCR administered pre-and-post reentry programs, detailing the support services provided and the scope of individuals served.

Overarching Systemic Challenges in California’s Reentry System

Reentering society after long-term incarceration is a monumental process often lined with complex barriers to successful reintegration. While his report centers on enhancing reentry housing options, understanding the need for comprehensive policy and administrative reforms to strengthen California’s reentry system is crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of the systemic challenges to do so.

A collaborative report by CDCR, California Correctional Health Care Services (CCHCS), and the Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health (CCJBH) identified 32 barriers to successful reentry across the individual, program/provider, and system-level in California (2021). Broadly, increased support for accessing services, enhanced responsive services to individuals’ needs with cultural humility, and greater service coordination across systems are largely needed. At the individual level, housing is the primary issue identified which is the focus of this report. There are insufficient placements to meet the need and those available are often in low resource neighborhoods limiting employment and transportation options. Socially, negative,

and traumatic experiences from incarceration can make it difficult to cope with the shock of reentry and re-establishing familial relationships can be challenging. Individuals also reported general hardship in accessing services due to limited clarity, lack of identifying documents, and stigma among other factors. Separately, the involvement in reentry programs and post-release housing placement applications are largely voluntary which individuals must apply for themselves. And while there are some supports to help; it varies by the resources each state prison offers.

At the program and provider-level that CDCR typically contracts with, there is general limited capacity for community-based organizations to appropriately serve individuals due to funding and staffing constraints. Inadequate resources to maintain high-quality, evidence-based programs and interventions is the primary challenge. It also complicates recruitment, training, and retention of staff who have the expertise to serve the reentry population. This is particularly true for peer providers with lived experience that are consistently not prioritized for hiring even though the warm hand off and connections greatly benefit the reentry process. Administrative burden and inconsistent reporting requirements are also a barrier and often do not account for the perspective and experiences of incarcerated Californians. At the system-level, limited data and information sharing across state and local entities, limited technological infrastructure, and administrative and funding challenges are the primary barriers. Data sharing between the state, county probation and behavioral health agencies, social service agencies and Continuums of Care is very difficult. This has deep implications in the pre-lease planning as it can lead to service gaps and delays in benefit applications, which include housing placements.

CDCR Administered Pre-and-Post Release Reentry Programs

CDCR oversees various pre-and post-release rehabilitate reentry programs that are intended to support people leaving incarceration reintegrate into their communities. This is done through leveraging community partnerships and relying on a network of providers to do so. Pre-lease programs allow individuals to carry out the remainder of their sentences in a community setting outside a prison, but they are still under the state's custody. On the other hand, post-release programs fall into two categories: 1) residential and live-in programs and 2) outpatient and drop-in centers. Most people released from California state prisons are required to serve a period supervision, either through formal parole, typically individuals with felony and some misdemeanor convictions, or post-release community supervision (PRCS) for those with non-violent, lower-level convictions (Root & Rebound, 2018). In 2019, roughly 49% of releases were to parole and about 47% to PRCS, however, CDCR reentry programs are largely targeted toward people on parole, which is partially why this report focuses on them specifically (California Department of Corrections, 2024c). Generally, most incarcerated individuals must voluntarily navigate the process to apply to these programs which requires various steps and housing placement securement. The main exception is those who have indeterminate sentences but are granted parole by the Board of Parole Hearings. They must typically spend the initial 6 months of their release in transitional housing as a condition of their release.

Pre-release community programs allow individuals to serve the last portion of their sentence in residential settings outside a prison and typically have group housing as a key feature. It is intended to connect individuals with community rehabilitative services including substance use disorder treatment (SUDT), education, housing, family reunification, and vocational training and employment services. Most pre-release programs are undergoing application regulation establishment as there currently is none. CDCR stated in a February 2024

public notice “establishing regulations for the programs ensures the programs are administered equitably and not subject to variance between institutions and the community facilities”

(California Department of Corrections, 2024h). It is unclear if the number of placement slots or approvals for all reentry programs meet application the demand and program enrollments are dependent on eligibility. For all reentry programs discussed, rapidly accessible public information on waitlists, current number of enrollments, and current completion rates are not available.

(See **Appendix A** for a more comprehensive summary of CDCR pre-release reentry programs and post-release residential reentry programs.)

CDCR administered pre-lease programs are the following:

❖ **Alternative Custody Program (ACP)** is offered statewide and allows eligible individuals to serve up to the last 12 months of their sentence in community. They can be housed in a private residence, a transitional care facility, or a residential drug or other treatment program (California Department of Corrections, 2024a). Those enrolled are expected to maintain employment, continue education, or other rehabilitative efforts. In 2018, 992 individuals had completed the program since its establishment in 2011 (Boatwright, 2018). The current number of individuals enrolled or completed is unclear.

❖ **Community Prisoner Mother Program (CPMP)** is hosted at one location in Santa Fe Springs, CA and reunites incarcerated mothers with their children if age 6 or under. Mothers are housed with their children in a supervised facility away from the institution setting and provided with other supports. It is a 24-bed facility that houses 24 individuals and up to 40 children (California Department of Corrections, 2024b).

◆ **Female Community Reentry Program (FCRP)**, formally the Custody to Community Transitional Reentry Program, provides various services that assist with substance use recovery, employment, education, housing, family reunification, and social support. There are six facilities statewide with a 399 beds total (California Department of Corrections, 2024d). Since its establishment in 2012, over 800 participants participated by 2018 (Boatwright, 2018).

◆ **Male Community Reentry Program (MCRP)** provides substance use disorder, mental health care, medical care, employment, education, housing, family reunification, and social support (California Department of Corrections, 2024g). There are 11 locations statewide; the number of placements is not publicly available.

Post-release residential programs are intended to provide transitional housing and other services to support community reintegration. They also may offer connections to SUDT, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), employment, life skills, and education supports.

CDCR administered post-release residential reentry programs are the following:

◆ **Specialized Treatment for Optimized Programming (STOP)** community-based services are available in most counties statewide and administered from six regional placement offices. It is the largest post-release reentry program. Services can vary between providers but can include recovery and reentry housing, life skills, and SUDT among other rehabilitative and supportive services. From 2018-2022, there were 400 state-funded reentry homes and treatment facilities but many of them are expected to be non-operative (Lyons, 2023). Individuals can participate for 180 days (roughly 6 months), with the possibility of an additional 185 days max. In FY 2020-21, there were

17,650 participants, however according to CDCR this number is inflated due to pandemic-enrollment increases and some FOTEP programs enrolled into STOP contracts (California Department of Corrections, 2020a). Investigative reports also suggest this number could be closer to 8,200 (Lyons, 2023). The estimated cost per slot was \$4,745 with a 40% program completion rate.

❖ **Female Offender Treatment and Employment Program (FOTEP)** is offered in five counties has focuses recidivism reduction through intensive substance use disorder, family reunification, vocational training, and employment services. Participants can have their children with them as they progress through the program for up to 15 months contracts (California Department of Corrections, 2024e). It requires a referral from a parole agent. In FY 2020-21, 397 individuals participated, and the program had a 33% completion rate. The estimated cost per slot was \$1,433 from FY 2018-19.

❖ **Long Term Reentry Recovery Program (LTRRP)**, which was combined with the Transitional Housing Program since they serve the same population, is offered in five counties and primarily for people with indeterminate sentences that are granted parole (California Department of Corrections, 2024f). It is a group residential program that provides housing, meals, support services and resources, and other programming. Individuals can participate for 180 days (roughly 6 months), with the possibility of an additional 185 days max. In FY 2020-21, there were 1,063 participants. The estimated cost per slot was \$7,799 with a 48% program completion rate (California Department of Corrections, 2020a).

(For more on CDCR post-release residential reentry program number of enrollees, cost per person, and completion rate for the last reported fiscal years, see **Appendix B.**)

CDCR also administers post-release outpatient and drop-in centers which are intended to provide employment assistance and placement, social support, CBT, housing assistance, and vocational training. These are the Caltrans Parolee Work Crew Program, Day Reporting Centers/Community-Based Coalitions, and Specialized Treatment for Optimized Programming providers without a housing placement. However, this report does not elaborate on these programs as they do not provide a secure housing slot for individuals on parole which is the focus of this analysis.

Section V: Limitations and Shortfalls of Post-Release Residential Reentry Programs

Both pre-and-post release reentry programs are critical to ensuring Californians have appropriate housing and other supports when they are released. However, post-release residential reentry programs are the remaining focus of this analysis as they serve individuals who are no longer in the custody of the state, have a temporary housing component, are primarily funded through state contracts, and can more directly intervene to prevent homelessness upon or shortly after release. Focusing on these currently established programs also presents an opportunity for the state to leverage its existing resources, administrative oversight, and partnerships to improve housing placements and programmatic outcomes. To achieve these commendable reforms, this section elaborates on the limitations and shortfalls of the post-release residential reentry programs that were described in Section IV.

Capacity, Location, and Time Limitations

A significant drawback of the housing provided by post-release reentry providers is the insufficient number of available placement slots as there are individual that continue to be released directly into homelessness. This is an issue survey interviews with reentry providers and people leaving prisons repeatedly surface. Geographical locations of reentry housing placements

also have drawbacks. It's unclear if there are sufficient placements where individuals resided prior to incarceration which is critical to reintegration. As noted previously, transitional and recovery housing places are also often in lower resourced neighborhoods creating challenges to economic opportunities, transportation, and connection to other supports or care that are needed. This could inadvertently be driving up program costs and negative program outcomes because of the additional layered barriers that individuals face. More research is needed to investigate the capacity of different types currently offered program to see if they are meeting the demand.

Residential reentry programs also have very stringent time limits on allowed stays. The two largest reentry programs, STOP and LTRRP, have a maximum of 180 days (six months) to stay in their housing placement. Those in FOETP have a maximum of 15 months but it serves a much narrower population of women with their children. Six months of transitional or recovery housing is often not enough time for individuals to obtain identifying documents, steady employment, build savings, rebuild familial and communal relationships, and adjust to life outside of prison. These steps must often come before the ability to even qualify for housing in the private rental market if not faced with additional discriminatory screening barriers along the process. Individuals can apply for extended stays for up to an additional six months, but it is not guaranteed. For those that may qualify for an extension, this can be positive in their reintegration to obtain stable housing. However, it means that the limited available housing slots will not experience turnover to serve others. This conundrum only exacerbates the negative housing outcomes that people leaving incarceration often face.

Oversight and Accountability Failures

Post-release residential reentry programs have documented continuous oversight and accountability failures. A recent investigative report by CalMatters (2023) sheds light on the

major failings by CDCR for the STOP program which is the largest CDCR administered reentry program. Investigators found that CDCR STOP program provider data is outdated, inaccurate or is not tracked -- a sentiment reiterated by some pre-release reentry providers. State officials rarely reviewed the operations of the four main companies that hold STOP contracts. While these companies were required to annually inspect their subcontractors, the reviews were not happening annually as the state's contract required. In some cases, reentry homes listed on CDCR sources included several with suspended business licenses and nonprofit status revoked by the California Department of Justice. Many reentry homes were also found to be inoperative altogether, meaning people assigned to these facilities were forced to find an alternative or ended up with no housing upon release.

These main STOP contract holders work with nearly 200 nonprofits and for-profit subcontractors, which provide transitional and recovery housing in roughly 450 houses and treatment centers (Lyons, 2023). However, one major contract reported subcontractors were allowing unapproved staff to work and not providing the needed and promised programming. An issue reflected in the need for adequately trained and appropriate staff as also flagged by the CCJBH reentry barriers analysis as noted in Section II. These supports are critical for reintegration and to help people transition in a structured way to life outside of prison. The investigation also found that state does not collect data on how many STOP participants found employment or returned to prison. And only 40% of participants completed at least one of the services they were offered through STOP. While CDCR has since promised to increase oversight and accountability for these contracts, more investigation into the implementation of these reforms is needed.

Beyond STOP, it is unclear what are the oversight and accountability measures for FOETP and LTRRP programs as well. These programs serve more targeted populations and have estimated people enrolled but research on the number of available slots, contractors, and outcomes of these programs is not provided publicly. As a researcher, it was incredibly difficult to piece together information on any of these programs. CDCR had various webpages with differing information, and it was unclear when they were updated or if there were internal programmatic consolidation processes occurring. Interview requests to speak with CDCR staff to learn more about these programs were also unsuccessful. It ultimately raises the question as to whether similar oversight and accountability failures are happening for these programs as well.

Lack of Housing First Practices

The limited transitional or recovery housing slots that are offered are not necessarily tailored or conducive to societal and community reintegration which is the main goal of these programs. These contracts do not have to follow Housing First principles as described in Section III. While some individuals may find value in the current structure of these programs, further exploration and integration requirements of evidence-based practices should be upheld as all other state programs that receive funding for housing must follow. Even in the reentry space this would not be a newly piloted idea. The Board of State of Community Corrections currently administers the Adult Reentry Grant Program which was established in 2018 and grantees must follow Housing First principles as outlined in state law (2024). The grants provide funding for community-based organizations to deliver reentry services for people formerly incarcerated in state prison through funding supports rental assistance, warm handoff and reentry services, and rehabilitation of existing property and buildings. However, the total 2023-24 funding for this program is proposed

to be cut 2024-25 state budget. CDCR reentry programs on the other hand have received continued appropriations and are not held to the same standards.

Opaque Qualification Process and Unequal Supports

The application and qualification process to be accepted into a residential reentry program is opaque. Before their release, individuals are normally connected with a counselor or reentry service providers if the prison they are in have special programming. Yet this does not appear to be the case for all individuals, and even those that might have additional in-prison supports, there are limitations to how many people can receive services particularly from contracted in-prison programs. Individuals interested in residential reentry programs must first be referred and fill out an application, which takes into consideration convictions/in-prison behavior, but how they are chosen or potentially ranked is not publicly clear. In conversations with some in-person reentry providers, release may be contingent on pre-approval for a housing placement slot particularly for people with indeterminate sentences that have to appeal to the Board of Parole. Broadly, it also appears that the burden of securing housing upon release is often left to individuals to work within the resources and knowledge they have. Correction counselors do play a pivotal role, but systematic barriers often interfere as outlined in Section II. It is also unclear if counselors have high caseloads which could erode the quality. Plus, supports that can be provided for reentry processes that are often time intensive.

Looking Forward

The shortcoming post-release residential reentry programs face requires urgent and meaningful reforms. Strengthening oversight, expanding housing capacity, and extending housing time limitations are critical steps in addition to implementing Housing First practices. Simplifying the application process and enhancing coordination between prison and community services are also

vital. The next section further explores how California can address these issues to better support successful reintegration and improve housing outcomes.

Section VI: Policy Recommendations

Post-Release residential reentry programs can be strengthened in ways that provide promote compassionate self-sufficiency, evidence-based practices, reduce recidivism, and promote public safety without placing blame and ownance on individuals for systemic outcomes and biases they may encounter. State policymakers have large discretion in how reentry systems are structured and eventually executed by CDCR, and as such can implement various reforms and policy augmentations to ensure better housing outcomes. As California continues to grapple with ways to address its homelessness crisis, a critical step is improving CDCR post-release residential reentry programs. The policy recommendations listed below remain high-level as there are various accountability and information gathering steps that need to be taken before fully moving forward with more in-depth reforms of the programs of focus, but the essence of the recommendations remain the same.

Recommendation 1: Assess Current Program Capacity, Outcomes, and Application

Processes

- Administrative program tracking and information needs to be implemented, transparent, and effectively monitored. Finding in-depth information on the programs offered needs to be easily accessible and transparent which it currently is not.
- Compile transparent information that needed to determine the number of eligible individuals that qualify for residential reentry housing and number of applicants statewide to determine the need.

- Track and quantify number and type of a housing slots available to determine capacity, average length of stay, programming, and geographical needs.
- Adequately assess contract and subcontract holders to ensure they are meeting accountability standards and contract requirements.
- Implement routine Legislative accountability hearings for the Department to demonstrate outcomes and ongoing need as continuous appropriations remain part of the state budget.
- Increase transparency in the program application process at all levels.

Recommendation 2: Increase Housing Options that Support Housing First Principles

- Require CDCR residential reentry programs to support Housing First principles which help individuals reintegrate successfully, maintain programmatic engagement, remain housed, build life skills, and promote public safety.
- Increase types of housing offered to ensure properly tailored housing supports, including short-and-medium term housing and longer or permanent housing placements with appropriate supportive services, with the goal of creating needed reentry housing as a universal benefit.
- Following Housing First principles, explore and implement models that provide a range of tailored living situations, recognizing that individuals returning may desire structured programming or substance-free housing after long periods of incarceration (Welch, 2020).

Recommendation 3: Strengthen Pre-Release Housing Navigation Supports and Improve Systems Integration

- Improve internal system coordination with post-release housing subcontractors to ensure warm-hand off processes.

- Increase CDCR counselors or in-prison reentry providers that can help individuals secure housing and other needed supports before release.

State-level Sidebar: California policymakers should fundamentally do a holistic critical analysis of CDCR's administration and oversight of the reentry programs they administer to assess if the department is even the appropriate agency to be running housing, reintegration, and homelessness prevention programs. The state needs to also promote policies and budget choices that increase the supply of affordable rental housing to meet the demand at all levels to successfully address the root cause of homelessness. This must be coupled with other homelessness prevention policies including emergency and ongoing rental assistance, targeted safety net supports, and stronger renter protections. Additional public education on the rights the people with conviction histories and broader enforcement of antidiscriminatory laws in the housing market are needed to combat the bias individuals face. Separately, while not the focus of this report, tailored solutions for subpopulations with more complex care needs leaving incarceration must be taken into consideration at all system levels as well.

Conclusion

The preliminary research and information gathering of this report highlights the critical intersection between incarceration and homelessness and underscores the stark reality that too many individuals exiting state prisons face immediate housing instability or homelessness. Despite the existence of CDCR reentry programs, which may offer temporary housing placements, the current system falls short of meeting the profound need for stable housing upon reintegration into society. As California strives to address its homelessness challenge, it is imperative that policymakers prioritize comprehensive reforms to residential reentry programs under the California Department of Corrections. This includes a thorough assessment of program

capacity, outcomes, and application processes, as well as an expansion of housing options rooted in Housing First principles. Moreover, pre-release housing navigation supports must be strengthened, and efforts to integrate systems across various agencies should be enhanced in addition to tackling the affordable housing shortage statewide.

It is essential to recognize that failing to address housing barriers for people with conviction histories perpetuates cycles of homelessness, recidivism, and incarceration — ultimately failing both individuals reentering society and the broader community. By investing in effective reentry programs and housing supports, policymakers can break this cycle through policy choices and interventions that promote treating everyone with dignity. To build a California where homelessness is prevented and everyone has access to safe and stable housing, proactive measures must be taken to dismantle systemic barriers and ensure equitable opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their past involvement with the criminal justice system. It is not only a matter of justice but also a crucial investment in the well-being and prosperity of our communities.

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APPENDIX A – Summary of CDCR Pre-Release Reentry Programs and Post-Release Residential Reentry Programs

CDCR Pre-Release Reentry Programs					
Program	Summary	Time Limitation	Location(s)	Application	Notes
Male Community Reentry Program (MCRP)	Enables men to complete their sentences in a residential setting, with greater freedom and privileges. Programming is particularly (though not exclusively) geared towards people with both mental health and substance abuse issues. Services may include guidance and support, family reunification, community resources, education, employment, health care services, recovery groups, and housing.	Individuals are eligible to participate up to two years, but no less than 60 days.	Butte, Kern, Los Angeles, San Diego	Voluntary	Program must be in county of last residence. Can request transfer of county.
Female Community Reentry Program (FCRP)	Allows eligible women to serve their sentence in community settings in lieu of confinement. It provides a range of rehabilitative services that assist with alcohol and drug recovery, employment, education, housing, family reunification, and social support.	Individuals participate for a minimum of 45 days and a maximum of 32 months to participate prior to their release date.	San Diego, Los Angeles, Kern, San Joaquin, Sacramento (399 Beds total)	Voluntary	Participants may be returned to an institution to serve the remainder of their term at any time with or without cause.
Community Prisoner Mother Program (CPMP)	Residential program in Pomona for pregnant individuals and mothers with one or more children, six years of age or younger, who were convicted of non-serious, nonviolent offenses. Children are invited to live at the 24-bed facility. Participants develop individual treatment plans for themselves and their children, with an emphasis on substance abuse recovery. Program workshops and activities emphasize substance abuse prevention, healthy parenting, and education.	Can serve up to six years of their sentence at the CPMP. This means interested individuals can inquire they approach the last two years of their	Pomona - LA County (24-Bed Facility – Allows housing for 24 participants and up to 40 children)	Voluntary	Child(ren) may participate in CPMP until they reach the age of six years old, at which point the child's care must be arranged elsewhere. Participants may be returned to state prison to serve the remainder of their original sentence, with or without cause.

		sentences. Participants must also have more than 90 days to parole or release at the time of placement			
Alternative Custody Program (ACP)	Individually tailored program for men and women, each of whom must create a rehabilitation plan outlining their goals. Participants may be placed in private residence, transitional homes or residential drug treatment centers, based on their employment plans, transportation needs, and the need for focused services such as substance abuse treatment or parenting classes.	Serve up to the last 12 months of their sentence in the community in lieu of confinement in state prison	Depends on facility.	Voluntary. Need to first obtain an acceptance letter from an existing transitional housing facility.	ACP participants are expected to maintain employment, further their education, and/or work on their rehabilitation through outpatient treatment, self-help classes, and groups to assist in controlling their addictions and developing employment, educational, vocational, and intrapersonal skills

CDCR Post-Release Residential Reentry Programs

Program	Summary	Timeframe	Location	Application	Notes
Female Offender Treatment and Employment Program (FOTEP)	Designed to reduce recidivism through intensive substance use disorder, family reunification, vocational training, and employment services. Women have the ability to have their children reside with them as they progress through their treatment and recovery for up to 15 months.	15 months max.	Merced, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino	Need to be referred. Must have an identified screened need.	Available to female parolees (with or without minor children)
Specialized Treatment for Optimized Programming (STOP)	STOP contractors provide comprehensive, evidence-based programming, and services to parolees in their first year of release during their transition into the community in order to support a successful reentry.	Services are up to 180 days, with the possibility of up to an additional 185	Regional Placements: Campbell (Santa Clara), Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego. Available in most counties.	Need to be referred. May self-referred, but still crossed checked	Priority is given to parolees who are within their first year of release and who have demonstrated a moderate-to-high risk to re-offend and have a medium to high need.

		days, based on assessed need.		with supervision.	
STOP - Returning Home Well Housing (RHWH)	Specialized Treatment for Optimized Programming (STOP) contractors offer a service known as Returning Home Well Housing (RHWH). The RHWH is available for participants that are within ninety (90) calendar days of release, with only an identified housing need. The RHWH modality provides shelter, clothing, essential toiletries, and supervision for all participants residing at the facility. No treatment services are required for RHWH.	Up to ninety (90) calendar days with a possible ninety (90) calendar day extension. The total length of stay shall not exceed 180 calendar days.	Located in most counties. Placement is coordinated through STOP contracts from six regional placement offices: Sacramento, Campbell, Fresno, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego.	Need to be referred.	All parolees within ninety (90) calendar days of release from a correctional institution, and have an identified need for housing are eligible to participate.
Long Term Reentry Recovery Program (LTRRP)	A residential program that provides housing, meals, programming, supervision, and support services and resources in a safe, clean, drug-free environment. The program offers services that focus on the needs of individuals serving long sentences such as employment, job search and placement training, stress management, victim awareness, computer supported literacy, and life skills.	Up to 180 days with the possibility of an additional 185 days, based on assessed need, for a total of 365 days.	Have sites in Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles, Monterey, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, and San Francisco county.	Need a referral or a direct placement coordinated prior to release.	Individuals serving long sentences granted release are granted first priority.

APPENDIX B – CDCR Post-Release Residential Reentry Programs Enrollees, Cost Per Person, and Completion Rate

Supplemental Report of the 2020-2021 Budget Package
Annual Performance Measures

Female Offender Treatment and Education Programs (FOTEP) ²²

Program	FY 18/19	FY 19/20	FY 20/21
Number	766	414	397
Cost	\$1,433	N/A	N/A
Rate	28%	30%	33%

Specialized Treatment and Offender Programming (STOP)

Program	FY 18/19	FY 19/20	FY 20/21
Number	14,979	12,932	17,650 ²³
Cost	\$5,633	\$5,164	\$4,745
Rate	35%	36%	40%

Transitional Housing Programs (THP) ²⁴

Program	FY 18/19	FY 19/20	FY 20/21
Number	1,050	953	1,063
Cost	\$7,363	\$7,982	\$7,799
Rate	39%	47%	48%

Source: California Department of Corrections, Annual Performance Measures Report FY 2020-21, Page 44, https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/174/2022/10/CDCR_Annual_Performance_Measures_Report_FY_2020-2021.pdf