



The Cabinet-level Reentry Council is working to enhance community safety and well-being, assist those returning from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

Federal Benefits Coordination

Each year, about 640,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons, while millions cycle through local jails. When reentry fails, the costs—both societal and economic—are high. High rates of recidivism mean

more crime, more victims, and more pressure on an already overburdened criminal justice system. A primary focus of the Reentry Council is to remove federal barriers to successful reentry and support the smooth transition of persons reentering their community through cross-agency coordination and appropriate access to critical federal benefits, which fosters successful reintegration outcomes, reduces recidivism, and assures the continuity of care. The ability to access benefits for people who are eligible is most important immediately upon an individual's release, to help stabilize the critical time after incarceration when they are most at risk of relapse and reoffending.

Accomplishments to Date

- **Access to Online Resources:** Reentry Council agencies have developed online resources to make it easier for the public to access information. The Social Security Administration (SSA) launched a dedicated [reentry web page](#) in December 2013, which includes SSA-related information about accessing Social Security benefits and resource links to other federal agencies. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)'s Office of Child Support Enforcement also launched a new [reentry resources web page](#) and published the [Changing a Child Support Order guide](#) with accompanying state-specific modules to help parents and others understand the child support review and modification process.
- **Reentry MythBusters:** In addition to [Reentry Myth Busters](#) on Medicaid and Veterans Affairs, five Myth Busters have been released, clarifying federal eligibility policy for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- **"Points of Contact" Network:** Reentry Council agencies developed a network to facilitate increased communication with federal agencies at the regional and subregional levels. The network identifies staff from 12 agencies representing seven federal departments, the U.S. Administrative Office of the Courts, as well as state reentry coordinators who serve as liaisons for state and local reentry issues and help facilitate interagency coordination.
- **Veterans Health Care Halfway Houses:** The Veterans Administration (VA) expanded eligibility for its health care services to include veterans who are residing in correctional halfway houses, work-release centers, or other reentry-focused correctional settings.
- **TANF Clarification:** HHS issued a policy clarification related to the TANF ban for individuals convicted of a drug-related felony. The clarification indicates that the prohibition on receipt of TANF benefits does not apply to non-assistance benefits or employment-related services provided through the TANF program.
- **WIC Innovations at State Level:** Regulations for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provide state agencies the option of serving incarcerated women who are pregnant, including supplemental foods or referral services. Several states provide good examples of reentry assistance to these women and children.
- **Veterans Outreach:** VA has reached more than 135,000 veterans involved in the criminal justice system through direct outreach in prisons, jails, and criminal courts. The purpose of this outreach is to connect veterans with needed mental health, substance abuse, and other clinical services. VA recently produced a brief outreach video, [Suits](#), intended for veteran jail and prison inmates, and distributed it for viewing in all state and federal prisons, as well as more than 500 local jails (and counting).

Agenda Moving Forward

Continue to Strengthen Coordination across Federal Agencies and State/Local Partners

Reentry Council agencies are working together and with state and local partners to promote additional federal cross-agency communication. The Council is examining ways to increase outreach to federal regional and subregional staff, expand the “points of contact” network to include selected local reentry coordinators, and promote the strategic dissemination and use of the Reentry MythBusters and other information relevant to individuals reentering the community after incarceration.

Expand Prerelease Procedures

SSA continues to work with federal, state, and local corrections officials to establish prerelease agreements for Social Security benefits and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for replacement Social Security cards. To increase the quality and continuity of its prerelease services within states, SSA is committed to obtaining and confirming statewide agreements where possible. Currently, SSA has active statewide prerelease agreements with 31 states. SSA aims to expand the number of statewide agreements and convert verbal agreements to formal, written

agreements. SSA is also exploring opportunities to develop agreements with municipal and local correctional facilities.

VA has also built a web-based system that allows prison, jail, and court staff to quickly and accurately identify veterans among their inmate or defendant populations. Called the Veteran Reentry Search Service (VRSS), the system also prompts VA field staff to conduct outreach to identified veterans, so that reentry planning can begin prior to release. Twenty state corrections departments are already using VRSS to identify veteran inmates, with more planning to do so.

Identify and Remove Barriers to Benefit Access

To improve reentry outcomes for individuals and their families, Reentry Council agencies are conducting detailed reviews of their agency’s regulations, which may result in unnecessary collateral consequences of criminal convictions. Agencies are also having discussions with outside experts, researchers, service providers, and individuals involved in the criminal justice system to develop strategies for removing or reducing the effects of additional barriers to access.

Key Resources (Federal Benefits Coordination)

Reentry Council

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/firc/>

Social Security Administration

- **NEW SSA reentry web page “Benefits After Incarceration: What You Need To Know”**

<http://www.ssa.gov/reentry/>

- **“Entering the Community After Incarceration— How We Can Help”**

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-prerelease.htm>

- **SSI Spotlight on Prerelease Procedure**

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-prerelease.htm>

Health and Veterans Snapshots

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/firc/snapshots/>

Office of Child Support Enforcement

- **NEW Changing a Child Support Order guide**

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/state-by-state-how-to-change-a-child-support-order>

- **NEW Child Support Reentry web page**

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css/resource/reentry>

Office of Family Assistance

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/>

Reentry MythBusters

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/mythbusters/>