

US to allow Medicaid to pay for drug treatment in prisons

February 22 2023, by Cara Murez



Soon, the federal government will allow states to use Medicaid funds to

treat prisoners for drug addiction and mental health services.

In an announcement made during a visit to the Camden County Jail in New Jersey on Tuesday, [Dr. Rahul Gupta](#), director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said states are being encouraged to submit proposals for how they would like to use that money, the *Associated Press* reported.

But the government will require that [mental health](#) and drug treatment be offered as part of allowing Medicaid funds in jails and prisons, the *AP* reported.

"Treating substance abuse disorder in prison and jails is smart," Gupta said.

Gupta said the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will release full guidance on the funds this spring, the *AP* reported.

By summer, all federal prisons will offer medications to treat [substance use disorder](#), he added.

"It's a smart move for our economic prosperity, for our safety and health of our nation," Gupta noted.

Medicaid is a joint federal-state health insurance program for low-income people.

Just last month, the government announced it would allow the state of California to use Medicaid services for some incarcerated people, the *AP* reported.

Allowing [drug treatment](#) in prisons and jails could help keep people alive, advocates say.

"We're really hopeful that this coverage will help people improve their [health outcomes](#) and avoid additional involvement in the criminal justice system," [Gabrielle de la Gueronniere](#), vice president for health and justice policy at the Legal Action Center, told the *AP*.

A majority of incarcerated people are addicted to drugs. Former inmates are also more likely to die in the first few weeks after release than the average non-incarcerated person, because their tolerance to drugs decreases while incarcerated, the *AP* reported.

The significance of the change depends on the state.

In New Jersey, where Gupta toured, 20 of the state's 21 counties already have medication-assisted treatment in jails, said [State Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman](#). About one-fourth of inmates in the Camden County Jail receive medication treatment, the *AP* reported.

There, the change will be in funding, which could also make a difference. An opioid addiction treatment called Sublocade has cost the Camden County Jail more than \$528,000 since 2019 for 170 people. The shot is administered every four weeks. Alternatively, a similar drug offered as a pill cost about \$664,000 for 3,100 people, the *AP* reported.

"It allows us to use those SAFE dollars to go further and to do more," said Adelman, referring to the state's SAFE program, which pays for the treatment.

One inmate, Rachel Parker, said she has gone through painful withdrawal symptoms and feared death after past incarceration. This time, she was able to get treatment and knows she'll have a prescription to continue that treatment at home, Gupta said during his visit.

More information: The National Institute on Drug Abuse has [more](#) on

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