

# REHABILITATING CORRECTIONS IN CA: THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF PROPOSITION 47



Reforming California's sentences for low-level crimes would alleviate prison and jail overcrowding, make communities safer, strengthen families, and shift resources from imprisoning people to treating them for the addictions and mental health problems at the root of many crimes.

## What is Prop 47?

The Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act - Prop 47 - takes steps to rehabilitate a broken criminal justice system by making six low-level, non-violent crimes into misdemeanors. The crimes are:

- having drugs for personal use
- forgery of less than **\$950**
- check fraud of less than **\$950**
- shoplifting goods worth less than **\$950**
- petty theft for less than **\$950**
- receiving stolen property of less than **\$950**

Prop 47 would redirect the money saved by not sending people to prison and jail toward mental health and substance abuse treatment, truancy and dropout prevention, and victims services.

## Our predictions

The passage of Prop 47 would lead to better health for Californians.

**There will be fewer people in prisons and jails.**

- **3,000** fewer people will be sent to prison each year for low-level crimes such as drug possession and petty theft

- **thousands** fewer people will be sent to jail each year for these offenses
- **9,000+** people currently in prison and thousands more in jail for drug possession or petty theft will be eligible for resentencing, potentially resulting in release from prison to county supervision
- **tens of thousands** of people who have served their sentences but have a felony conviction on their record could have their record cleared
- **40,000** people every year will be convicted of a misdemeanor instead of a felony

Remember, the crimes we are talking about are non-serious and non-violent. The prison population in California has soared since the 1980s because we have been locking people up for these low-level offenses.

**Families will stay together or at least be closer to each other, leading to better health outcomes.**

- **10,000** children could have an incarcerated parent released or closer to the family

**Crime will decrease.**

- Treating substance abuse and mental health problems with up to **\$195 million** each year, people will be able to overcome the problems that get them involved in the criminal justice system
- Many mental health and substance abuse interventions have been shown to reduce recidivism by at least **10%**. Drug courts, in which judges can

sentence people with substance abuse problem to treatment, reduce recidivism by **12%** on average

**People will be better able to succeed.**

- Without a felony on their record people will be better able to find a job
- Those who find jobs after release from prison are half as likely to return to prison

## Our priority recommendation

If Prop 47 passes, implement mental health and substance abuse funding according to best practices, including ensuring that the full amount of funding goes toward programs and services identified in Prop 47.

More detailed findings are available at <http://www.prop47impacts.org>.

# CONSEQUENCES OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM

Someone who is convicted of a minor, non-violent offense like those listed above can be charged with a felony and has a higher likelihood of serving a longer sentence and even potentially going to prison.

## Currently, people who need help are unlikely to get it



Despite the fact that **1 in 4** state prisoners has mental health problems, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation spent less than **6%** of their **\$10 billion** budget on mental health treatment. . . and



**4 out of 5** people in prison who could benefit from substance abuse treatment do not receive it.

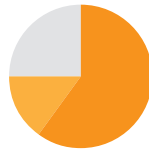
## Additional Punishments

A felony charge makes it far more difficult to get a job, get housing, further your education, and receive benefits.

*"It used to be you do the crime, you do the time, but it's no longer like that. The felony conviction on your record lasts for a long time. You can't get a job, you can't get housing, and you recidivate."*

—Focus Group Participant

There are **3,000** laws that create more than **4,800** punishments limiting employment, housing, and other benefits for those with a felony on their record in California.



**60% to 75%** of people formerly in prison are unemployed up to one year out of prison.

## Public Safety



According to the most recent statistics, more than **6** of every **10** people leaving California prisons returns within **3 years**.

## Incarceration is Harmful to Health

Every year in prison decreases one's lifespan by almost two years.

People in the criminal justice system are disproportionately mentally ill and disproportionately likely to have substance abuse issues.



Nationally, people in prison and jail are:

**6 times** as likely to have a mental health disorder and

**20 times** as likely to have a substance abuse disorder as the general population.

These are people who would benefit greatly from mental health and substance abuse programs.

## Minorities are disproportionately arrested and charged with crimes.



**13%** of U.S. drug users are african american, but



**36%** of U.S. drug-related arrests are african american and



**46%** of U.S. drug-related convictions are african american.

## Families

Overwhelming evidence suggests that your family will suffer, too. Children of mothers arrested for a felony were **5 times** more likely to be placed in foster care than mothers arrested for a misdemeanor. Each year a spouse is imprisoned increases the odds of separation or divorce by **32%**.

*"People don't understand that when you lock someone up, it makes their family go through that mental turmoil, that trauma every day. Locking someone up tears families up. It makes them go crazy."*

—Focus Group Participant