

Roadmap for Promoting Health and Justice: Key Points

Introduction

The United States is in the midst of a heroin and prescription painkiller epidemic, a public health crisis of historic proportions that puts a spotlight on the health, community, safety and financial burdens created by drug and alcohol addiction. The impact is clear. More than 22 million Americans are living with an addiction to drugs or alcohol but only 2.5 million receive any treatment. And untreated addiction costs an estimated \$600 billion a year in related crime, lost productivity and healthcare spending.

Fortunately, an unusual bipartisan consensus is emerging – among Presidential candidates as well as federal, state and local policy makers from coast to coast – to promote serious reform of America’s drug policies and criminal justice system. Policymakers and ordinary Americans recognize that prevention and treatment for drug and alcohol addiction works to decrease crime, improve family and community situations, lower health care costs and save lives.

As we enter a presidential election year, our nation has an unprecedented opportunity to consider transforming its approach to people addicted to drugs and alcohol, shifting its primary focus from a criminal justice focus on punishment to a public health focus on prevention, treatment and recovery.

Recommendations to Transform the Nation’s Approach to Addiction

The *Roadmap for Promoting Health and Justice: A Smarter, More Effective National Drug and Alcohol Policy* is a guide for policymakers who understand the urgent need to reshape the nation’s drug and alcohol policies, in order to address addiction as a chronic disease that can be treated and prevented.

Developed by the Arthur Liman Policy Institute, a project of the Legal Action Center, the only

nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting for the civil rights of people with drug and alcohol histories, criminal records, and HIV/AIDS, the *Roadmap* provides a comprehensive and detailed set of recommendations for improving our national drug and alcohol policies to improve health and public safety and save lives and resources.

The *Roadmap* provides a comprehensive, detailed set of recommendations designed to accomplish three transformative goals.

- Treat drug and alcohol addiction as a chronic disease that can be addressed through policies that focus on health and well-being;
- Provide addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery services to 1 million more Americans in the next five years; and
- For people with criminal records related to their addictions, eliminate or modify the most significant re-entry barriers that prevent them from fully integrating into their communities.

In order to meet these goals, the *Roadmap* details a number of specific policy recommendations, which can be implemented in the near-term to generate both immediate and long-term benefits. Key policy health policy recommendations include:

- Ensure that private health insurance, Medicaid and Medicare provide coverage for the full range of proven substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery support services and medications;
- Invest in the prevention, treatment and recovery service infrastructure;
- Significantly increase the number of states actively enforcing the federal parity law as well as federal enforcement;
- Ensure that effective and innovative substance use education and prevention

programs and resources reach millions more young people;

- Make substance use screenings, interventions and referrals a standard part of primary health care for everyone;
- Pass the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) to increase access to medication assisted treatment; and
- Double the number of correctional facilities and other criminal justice working to enroll people in health care and/or connect them to care in the community upon release or as an alternative to incarceration.

After decades of fighting a “war on drugs” it is time to make meaningful changes to our nation’s criminal justice system in order to support individuals in recovery. Key criminal justice policy recommendations outlined in the *Roadmap* include:

- Ensure that federal and state law enforcement are able to divert people from the justice system before either arrest or pressing charges;
- Reduce barriers to employment and public housing for people with criminal records related to addiction;
- Restore Pell Grant eligibility for students in prison; and
- Pass the REDEEM act to reduce the TANF ban and expunge certain criminal records.

Now is the Time: Building on Recent Changes to Accomplish Even More

The recommendations outlined in the *Roadmap* build on a similar document released in 2008 – the *Roadmap for Smarter and More Effective Alcohol and Drug Policies*. A number of the 2008 *Roadmap*’s major recommendations have become the law of the land. The lead recommendation – inclusion of good coverage of substance use services in health care reform – was mandated in

the Affordable Care Act. The recommendation that government and the private sector roll back laws and practices that discriminate against people in recovery from addiction was included for the first time in the President’s 2012 National Drug Control Strategy, and the federal government and many states have taken important steps to reduce discrimination in employment, housing, higher education and nutritional assistance.

As we move into the 2016 election season, Legal Action Center urges policymakers, thought leaders, candidates and campaigns to review the *Roadmap* recommendations as they contemplate new approaches to addressing the nation’s addiction crisis.

In order to end the nation’s addiction crisis, policymakers must take a comprehensive approach – one that leverages the full potential of the healthcare delivery system, social and community based services and education as well as the courts and criminal justice system.

Improving our nation’s drug and alcohol policies will make our communities healthier, our families stronger, and our neighborhoods safer, while creating opportunities for people who were previously marginalized by addictions. The time has come for a dramatic new approach to addiction and the *Roadmap* points the way ... all we need to do is do it.

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