

Findings from Allegheny Health Network’s (AHN) Rethinking Incarceration and Empowering Recovery (RIVER) Clinic pilot study demonstrate that linking patients to treatment with medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) could increase treatment retention and lower rates of opioid overdose and emergency department (ED) utilization in incarcerated populations with opioid use disorder (OUD).¹

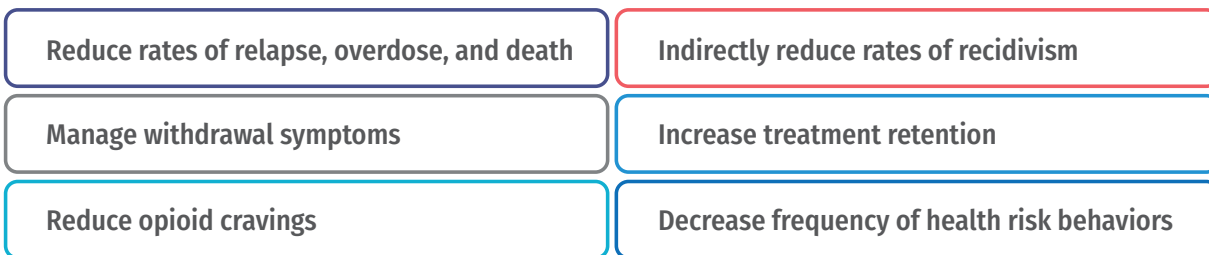
What

AHN’s RIVER clinic provides low barrier health services, like treatment for OUD, to individuals with OUD leaving the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ).¹

Why

As of June 2020, an estimated 85% of the prison population had an active substance use disorder (SUD) or were incarcerated for a crime involving drugs or drug use. Providing comprehensive SUD treatment to incarcerated individuals can reduce recidivism and help these patients get on a path to recovery.²

MOUD has been shown to^{3,4}:



Note: Potential benefits of each medication may vary.



Reentrants who are released to the community without treatment face increased risk of experiencing a fatal opioid overdose within the first two weeks of release that exceeds the risk for the general population **27 times**.⁵

How¹

Through an existing relationship with the ACJ, AHN providers can offer healthcare within the jail, providing a warm handoff to care in the community at release. Services provided by the RIVER clinic include:

- In-jail assessment and transition to care
- Primary Care
- MOUD
- Treatment for hepatitis C
- Expanded access to psychiatry
- Social Determinants of Health assessments
- Trauma-informed care
- Connections to social services
 - Insurance
 - SUD programs
 - Employment
 - Legal aid
 - Housing
 - Phone
 - Transportation

RIVER physicians are always available for point-of-care telemedicine visits (tele-bridge appointments), and rapid access to medical care and MOUD. The RIVER team also provides outreach in front of the ACJ or in hotspot community neighborhoods two days per week in addition to operating a physical clinic two days per week.

To provide this level of care, AHN has a number of significant community partnerships with other outreach organizations, shelters, substance use programs, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and more as well as a partnership with a local pharmacy for rapid delivery of injections.

Study Details¹



Objective

Assess outcomes for recently incarcerated patients who received a telemedicine MOUD bridge prescription.



Methodology

- Target population: recently incarcerated individuals
- Immediately after release from incarceration, patients with OUD were engaged by an outreach-based team, which included:
 - Community health workers
 - Social workers
 - Nurse navigators
- Those interested in MOUD were provided with an immediate telemedicine appointment with a clinician and an initial prescription of MOUD as appropriate, regardless of insurance status. An in-person follow-up appointment was subsequently scheduled.
- Retrospective chart review of patient records from September 2021 to April 2023



Demographics

- N = 50 recently incarcerated individuals
- Mean age = 39



Limitations

- Lack of comparison group
- Single study site



Results

For tele-bridge prescriptions:

- After tele-bridge, 84% came for in-person visits
- Average number of visits: 9
- Of tele-bridge patients, 58% had more than 5 appointments

ED utilization for tele-bridge patients

- Pre-RIVER (2019): 45 ED visits
- Post-RIVER (2021): 19 ED visits (58% reduction)

Opioid overdose

- 7% who came in for appointment (all nonfatal)
- 25% of those who did not come in (unknown fatality rate)

References:

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2. National Institute of Drug Abuse. Criminal Justice DrugFacts. June 2020. Accessed April 2024. <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/criminal-justice>
3. Over-Jailed and Un-Treated: How the Failure to Provide Treatment for Substance Use in Prisons and Jails Fuels the Overdose Epidemic. American Civil Liberties Union. Published June 2021. Accessed April 2024. https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/20210625-mat-prison_1.pdf
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5. Cooper J, Onyeka I, Cardwell C, et al. Record Linkage Studies of Drug-Related Deaths Among Adults Who Were Released From Prison to the Community: a Scoping Review. *BMC Public Health*. 2023. 23:826. Accessed March 2024. doi:10.1186/s12889-023-15673-0

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