

U.S. Case-Management and “One-Stop” Reentry Navigation Models: Evidence on Employment, Housing, and Recidivism

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Abstract: This narrative literature review synthesizes U.S. focused evidence (2018 to 2025) on case-management and one-stop reentry navigation models designed to improve employment, housing, and recidivism outcomes for people returning from incarceration. Drawing on 30 peer-reviewed studies, federal evaluations, and program reports identified through targeted searches in JSTOR, ProQuest Criminal Justice, PubMed, Google Scholar, and NCJRS, the review classifies interventions into five typologies (intensive case management, peer navigation, one-stop centers, hybrids, and vendor vs. public models). Drawing on federal evaluations, mixed-methods studies, and program reports, the review classifies interventions into five typologies (intensive case management, peer navigation, one-stop centers, hybrids, and vendor vs. public models) and maps inputs to short-term outputs, intermediate outcomes, and long-term impacts. It maps inputs to short-term outputs, intermediate outcomes, and long-term impacts. The review adopts a narrative synthesis approach, integrating findings across diverse study designs and weighing evidence toward stronger methodologies and longer follow-up periods. Findings show consistent short-term gains in service linkage (e.g., appointments kept, benefits enrollment, job-search starts) and modest employment and housing improvements where programs feature higher intensity, employer or housing partnerships, credentialing, interoperable data systems, and paid, supervised peer staff. Evidence on durable recidivism and sustained earnings is mixed. Stronger results occur in high-fidelity, longer-duration programs, while many effects attenuate by 12-24 months. Key mediators include contact intensity, linkage quality, and service scope; moderators include local labor markets, rural or urban context, and participant demographics. Cost-effectiveness data are limited and sensitive to assumptions about scale and follow-up duration. The review recommends policy levers such as multi-year, performance-tied funding, standardized peer-training and supervision, integrated data and intake systems, and employer and housing partnerships to translate linkage into lasting outcomes. It also advocates for more randomized and longitudinal studies, standardized outcome definitions, and routine fiscal modeling to strengthen causal inference and inform scalable investments.

Keywords: Recidivism, Reentry, Employment, Vocational, Reintegration .

INTRODUCTION

Each year tens of thousands of people in the United States return from jail or prison and face substantial barriers to stable employment, housing, and health conditions that jointly shape the risk of reoffending and the fiscal burden borne by federal, state, and local governments (Lappas *et al.*, 2022). According to Council of State Governments Justice Center's report titled “50 States, national statistics and program evaluations show that while overall recidivism has trended downward in some places, the population of returning citizens continues to present concentrated needs that, if unmet, translate into avoidable re-incarceration and public costs. The Bureau of Justice Statistics and related national tracking efforts remain the primary sources for measuring these patterns and underscore the continuing scale of the reentry challenge in the U.S., context (Umez, *et al.*, 2021; Duran, *et al.*, 2023).

Case management and one-stop reentry navigation describe structured approaches intended to coordinate services for people returning to the community. Case management commonly refers to individualized planning and coordinated referrals delivered by a trained practitioner who assesses needs, links clients to benefits and services, and

monitors progress (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023). Peer navigation uses trained individuals with lived experience to engage and support participants, and “one-stop” integrated service centers co-locate employment, housing, health, and legal assistance to reduce fragmentation and administrative friction for clients. These service models are typically evaluated based on their effects on core reentry outcomes, including employment, attachment to work and earnings, housing stability, avoidance of homelessness or unstable arrangements, and recidivism, rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration (Duwe, 2020).

The evidence base for reentry interventions in the United States is heterogeneous. Several recent national studies, including those by RAND and the Urban Institute, examine employment-focused reentry models (Holliday *et al.*, 2023; Cortina *et al.*, 2024). Large mixed-methods evaluations such as RAND's multi-cohort assessments of employment-focused reentry programs and federal Reentry Projects evaluations illustrate both promising short-term gains in service linkage and the challenges of demonstrating durable impacts on recidivism and earnings without consistent

implementation and long follow-up windows (Holliday *et al.*, 2023). Synthesizing this disparate U.S. literature is therefore essential for identifying which program features consistently align with better outcomes and for making realistic, evidence-based recommendations to policymakers (Cortina, *et al.*, 2024).

The topic matters at the national level for several reasons. First, the fiscal implications are substantial. Incarceration and repeated justice system contact impose significant costs on public budgets, while successful reentry that leads to employment and housing stability can reduce those costs and increase tax revenues over time (Sawyer *et al.*, 2025). Federal funding streams and policy initiatives, including the Department of Labor and Bureau of Justice Assistance reentry grants and strategic solicitations, reflect congressional and agency interest in evidence-driven investments that reduce recidivism and strengthen local labor markets. Second, improving reentry outcomes supports workforce resilience, enabling returning citizens to obtain stable employment, which benefits individuals and families and addresses employer labor needs in many U.S. regions. Third, equitable reentry supports community welfare and public safety (Cortina *et al.*, 2024). Marginalized populations and communities of color often bear a disproportionate burden of reentry failures, so identifying models that work across diverse U.S. settings is a civil-rights as well as a public-safety priority. (Goger, *et al.*, 2021)

Given this landscape, a narrative literature review focused on U.S. case-management and one-stop reentry navigation models serves two complementary purposes. Methodologically, a narrative synthesis is well-suited to the heterogeneity of program designs, outcomes, and evaluation methods found in U.S. reentry research. It allows the reviewer to integrate rigorous experimental results, quasi-experimental studies, and high-quality program evaluations alongside federal and non-profit implementation reports to produce policy-relevant conclusions. Substantively, a U.S.-focused review can draw on authoritative domestic sources, including National Institute of Justice (NIJ) program summaries, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), RAND and Urban Institute evaluations, Department of Labor program assessments, and recent systematic reviews of reentry interventions, to create a coherent picture of what the American evidence base currently supports. Recent systematic syntheses and national program summaries

highlight both encouraging signals for specific employment and navigation approaches and critical gaps, such as limited cost-effectiveness data and few long-term follow-ups, which this review will explicitly examine. (Lacoe *et al.*, 2019). This review presents an up-to-date synthesis suitable for decision-makers to seek reliable, implementable guidance for enhancing employment, housing, and public-safety outcomes for returning citizens.

Key Definitions

Case Management: A structured, client-centered approach in which a trained practitioner assesses the needs of individuals returning from incarceration, develops individualized service plans, coordinates referrals to services (e.g., employment, housing, health care), and monitors progress over time.

One-Stop Reentry Navigation: A model that co-locates or tightly coordinates multiple reentry-related services (e.g., job placement, housing assistance, legal aid, behavioral health) within a single access point or network to reduce administrative burden and improve service linkage.

Peer Navigator: An individual with lived experience of incarceration who is trained to support returning citizens by providing mentorship, emotional support, and guidance in navigating reentry services. Peer navigators often enhance trust and engagement, especially among populations distrustful of formal institutions.

Employment Outcome: Refers to measurable indicators such as job placement, employment retention, earnings, or participation in job training or credentialing programs following release.

Housing Outcome: Includes indicators such as stable housing placement, avoidance of homelessness or unstable arrangements, and retention of housing over time.

Recidivism Outcome: Defined variably across studies but generally includes rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration within a specified follow-up period (e.g., 6, 12, or 24 months post-release).

METHODOLOGY

This narrative literature review synthesizes U.S.-focused evidence on case-management and one-stop reentry navigation models, drawing exclusively from previously published studies and reports. No primary data collection was conducted.

Literature was identified through targeted searches across JSTOR, ProQuest Criminal Justice, PubMed, Google Scholar, and NCJRS using Boolean strings such as “reentry navigation AND employment,” “intensive case management AND recidivism,” and “peer navigator AND reentry outcomes.” The search was limited to English-language sources and focused on studies that evaluated reentry interventions with clearly defined models and reported outcomes related to employment, housing, or recidivism. Studies were selected based on relevance and contribution to key themes rather than exhaustive coverage. Each source was coded for design type, sample characteristics, intervention typology, implementation fidelity, outcome domains, and cost data where available. Findings were weighted toward studies with stronger designs and clearer outcome reporting. Studies were mapped to a logic model linking inputs (e.g., case management, peer support) to outputs (e.g., service linkage), intermediate outcomes (e.g., employment, housing), and long-term impacts (e.g., reduced recidivism, fiscal savings). Mediators such as service intensity and linkage quality, and moderators including demographics and local labor markets, were extracted to explain outcome variation. While this methodology supports a comprehensive and policy-relevant synthesis, it is limited by its reliance on secondary sources, potential publication bias, and the absence of pooled effect sizes or systematic review protocols. For a full discussion of limitations, see Section 11.0.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This review adopts a simple logic-model framework that links one-stop reentry navigation and case-management interventions to short-term outputs, intermediate outcomes, and long-term societal impacts. At the input/output level, one-stop and case-management models provide coordinated service linkage (benefits enrollment, referrals to health and behavioral-health care, job placement referrals, and skills or credentialing pathways), active client engagement, including peer navigation and administrative simplification through co-located or closely coordinated providers. These short-term outputs are expected to increase service uptake and program fidelity, which in turn produce intermediate outcomes such as measurable improvements in employment attachment, earnings, and housing stability, which are the proximal mechanisms for lowering the risk of rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration.

Framing the intervention chain in this way highlights observable indicators such as service contacts, enrollment rates, job starts, housing exits to stable placements, that link program activity to the ultimate policy goal of reduced recidivism and fiscal savings (Kennedy, 2021).

Three classes of mediators explain how reentry navigation produces desired intermediate and long-term effects. First, service intensity and duration, thus, frequency of case-manager contacts, caseload size, and program length influence the depth of problem-solving and continuity of care. Higher intensity and sustained engagement have been associated with better linkage to employment and support in recent program evaluations. Additionally, linkage quality, that is, the strength of formal partnerships with employers, housing providers, and health systems, determines whether referrals convert into stable jobs and housing rather than short-term placements. Again, service scope, whether programs include legal aid, benefits assistance, mental-health and substance-use treatment, and credentialing pathways, affects the ability to address multiple, interacting barriers to reentry. Recent U.S. evaluations emphasize these mediating dimensions as key to translating service delivery into durable outcomes (Goger, *et al.*, 2021).

Multiple moderators contribute to effect heterogeneity in the U.S settings and populations. Individual-level moderators include race/ethnicity, gender, age, and criminal history severity. Studies frequently report differential impacts across these groups, making equity analyses essential for national-scale recommendations. Contextual moderators include urban versus rural service availability, local labor-market demand, state policy environments, for example, collateral-consequence laws and Medicaid/benefits eligibility rules and parole/supervision conditions that may either enable or constrain program participation. Finally, implementation context, such as funding stability, data-sharing arrangements across agencies, and workforce capacity, moderates whether fidelity to navigation models can be maintained during scale-up. U.S. syntheses and state evaluations document these moderators as critical to understanding when and where navigation models realize employment, housing, and recidivism benefits (Christian, 2022).

Operationalizing this framework for a narrative review means (a) mapping studies to the logic-model layers (inputs → outputs → outcomes), (b)

extracting measures of mediators (intensity, linkage quality, scope) and moderators (demographics, place, policy), and (c) weighing evidence by study design and follow-up length. This approach centers policy-relevant indicators such as service uptake, job placement rates,

housing retention, and 6–24 month recidivism metrics so the review can identify which navigation features have the strongest, most replicable links to the national goals of improved employment, reduced corrections costs, and safer communities (Rossman, *et al.*, 2020)

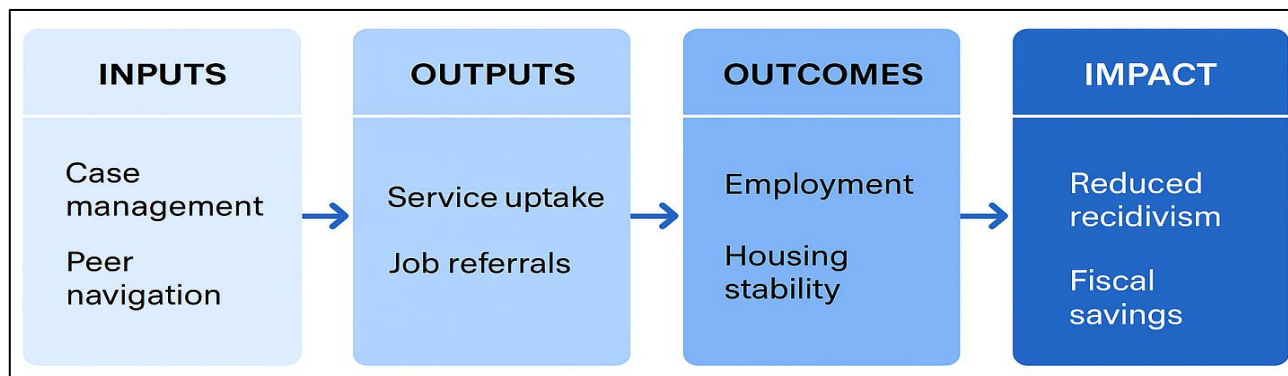


Figure 1: Logic Model of U.S. Reentry Navigation and Case-Management Interventions

This diagram illustrates the pathway from program inputs (e.g., case management, peer navigation, one-stop centers) through short-term outputs (e.g., service linkage), intermediate outcomes (e.g., employment, housing stability), and long-term impacts (e.g., reduced recidivism, fiscal savings). Mediators such as service intensity, linkage quality, and service scope, along with contextual moderators like demographics and local labor markets, influence the effectiveness of these interventions.

Typology of Reentry Case-Management & One-Stop Models

Reentry service models in the United States are heterogeneous but can be usefully grouped into five typologies: intensive case management (ICM), peer navigation/peer mentoring, one-stop integrated service centers, hybrid models, and vendor-contracted versus public-agency models. Each typology reflects different staffing, service mix, intensity, and implementation tradeoffs. Together, they form the practical menu policymakers consult when prioritizing investments that aim to improve employment, housing, and recidivism outcomes for returning citizens (Lappas, *et al.*, 2022).

Intensive Case Management (ICM)

ICM programs center on a professional case manager, often social work trained, who provides individualized assessment, active problem solving, and repeated follow-up to coordinate services across domains: benefits, health, housing, and employment. Typical caseloads are smaller than in standard probation practice to allow for frequent

contact and hands-on linkage; services often include formal needs assessment, warm handoffs to providers, and ongoing monitoring for 3 to 12 months or more after release. U.S. evaluations emphasize that ICM's strength is treating multiple, interacting barriers through persistent engagement, which increases service uptake compared with passive referral models, but the outcomes vary by intensity, fidelity, and local capacity. NIJ and recent federal summaries note that higher-intensity ICM is associated with improved short-term linkage metrics such as appointments kept and benefit enrollments, though durable employment and recidivism reductions depend on program length and local labor market conditions. These findings suggest ICM is most convincing to policymakers when paired with measurable implementation standards such as caseload targets, contact frequency, and cost metrics (Tsai, *et al.*, 2022).

Peer Navigation / Peer Mentoring

Peer navigation deploys individuals with lived reentry experience as navigators or mentors who engage participants, model successful reentry behaviors, and provide credibility that increases enrollment and retention. A 2023 report by the Urban Institute indicates that U.S. studies and program reports, including Urban Institute and community-level case studies, report strong acceptability and engagement effects for peers, particularly among populations distrustful of formal institutions. Peers also bridge cultural and informational gaps that professional staff sometimes can not. However, empirical evidence on whether peer navigation alone produces net

gains in employment or reduces recidivism is mixed. Many evaluations show improved process outcomes like attendance, trust and referrals, while rigorous outcome studies frequently point to the need to pair peers with professional case management and structural supports such as housing subsidies and employer partnerships to achieve durable impacts (Treitler *et al.*, 2025).

One-Stop Integrated Service Centers

A report by the Reentry Coordination Council (2022) asserts that one-stop centers collocate multiple services, including employment assistance, benefits enrollment, housing navigation, behavioral-health referrals, and sometimes legal aid in a single facility or tightly coordinated network, reducing administrative friction and repeated client travel. U.S. evaluations of Second Chance Act grantees and Department of Labor reentry projects document that one-stop approaches increase initial service linkage and simplify interagency referrals, particularly when centers adopt shared data systems and common intake protocols. One-stop models improve short-term outcomes, such as job search starts and housing placements, but face scalability challenges related to funding and physical access, rural barriers and cross-agency data-sharing constraints. Policy briefs and HUD analyses highlight that one-stop formats are attractive to federal funders because they concentrate impact per dollar and can be explicitly linked to workforce investment streams but require clear sustainability plans to translate short-term linkage into long-term employment and recidivism reductions (Ames, 2019).

Hybrid Models (ICM + Peer + Digital Tools)

Many contemporary programs combine elements of ICM, peer support, and technology-enabled navigation (case-management software, SMS reminders, virtual appointments). RAND and NIJ analyses identify hybrid designs as promising because they leverage the relational strengths of human navigators while improving reach and fidelity through digital casework tools and data dashboards. Hybrid models, for instance, use peers for engagement, ICM for clinical or benefits navigation, and digital systems to track referrals and employment outcomes. An arrangement that improves both cost-effectiveness and measurement (Russo *et al.*, 2022). This indicates that hybrids often outperform single-component models on process indicators. However, the efficacy of hybrid approaches for long-term recidivism is contingent on the quality of implementation, vendor

interoperability, and local workforce partnerships (Davis *et al.*, 2021).

Vendor-Contracted versus Public Agency-Run Models

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2023), reentry services in the U.S. are delivered either by public agencies, such as state Departments of Corrections and county reentry units, or by contracted vendors and community-based organizations (CBOs). Vendor models can offer specialized expertise and rapid deployment, while public agency models may achieve broader geographic coverage and steady funding. Federal evaluations note tradeoffs, such as contracted models often innovate but face sustainability challenges when grant cycles end. On the other hand, agency-run models institutionalize services but sometimes lack nimbleness and local credibility. Comparative evidence from Second Chance Act projects and the U.S Department of Labor reentry grants highlights that hybrid procurement, where government funds CBOs under performance-based contracts with clear outcome metrics, combines the benefits of both approaches (Lindquist, 2021).

Synthesis and Policy Implications

A cross the typologies reviewed, recent U.S. literature suggests that implementation details, such as service intensity, staff training, employer partnerships, interoperable data systems, and funding stability, play a critical role in determining whether reentry programs translate service linkage into sustained employment, housing stability, and reduced recidivism. Rather than asserting that specific models “work,” the evidence indicates that certain features are more consistently associated with positive outcomes, particularly in studies with stronger designs and clearer reporting.

For example, high-intensity case management programs with smaller caseloads and longer engagement periods have shown improved short-term employment and housing outcomes in quasi-experimental and observational studies (Tsai, *et al.*, 2022; Lappas, *et al.*, 2022). Hybrid models that integrate peer support and digital tools have demonstrated stronger process fidelity and engagement metrics, though long-term impacts remain less conclusive (Russo *et al.*, 2022; Davis *et al.*, 2021). One-stop centers have been linked to improved initial service linkage and benefit enrollment, especially when supported by shared intake protocols and formal partnerships, but scalability challenges persist (Ames, 2019).

Policy implications should therefore be framed conditionally. Where evidence exists, multi-year funding tied to performance metrics, standardized peer training and supervision, and integrated data systems appear to support better medium-term outcomes. However, durable reductions in recidivism and sustained earnings are typically observed only in programs with high fidelity, longer duration, and contextual alignment with local labor markets and housing supply. Federal and state policymakers may find narrative reviews that map program features to measurable outcomes, such as employment rates, housing retention, and 6–24 month recidivism metrics, more actionable than generalized claims of effectiveness.

Evidence on Outcomes (Employment, Housing, Recidivism)

Evidence from U.S.-based evaluations indicates that case-management and one-stop reentry navigation models are consistently associated with short-term gains in service linkage, such as increased appointment attendance, benefits enrollment, and job-search initiation. However, findings on durable employment, housing stability, and reductions in recidivism are mixed and appear to depend heavily on program design, implementation fidelity, and contextual factors. For example, randomized and quasi-experimental studies of high-intensity case management programs with smaller caseloads and extended engagement periods have reported modest improvements in employment and housing outcomes (Tsai, *et al.*, 2022; Lappas, *et al.*, 2022). Hybrid models that combine peer navigation with professional casework and digital tools have demonstrated stronger process outcomes and improved fidelity in several federal evaluations (Russo *et al.*, 2022; Davis *et al.*, 2021). Evidence for employment-related gains is strongest in programs that incorporate employer partnerships and credentialing pathways (Lacoe, *et al.*, 2024), though many effects diminish over time without sustained support.

Housing outcomes are less frequently reported and vary widely. Some evaluations suggest that one-stop and case-management approaches can reduce short-term housing instability, particularly when programs include direct housing assistance or formal partnerships with housing providers. However, longitudinal tracking beyond one year is limited, and stable housing tenure often depends on local supply and program resources (Stainbrook, *et al.*, 2024).

Recidivism outcomes remain the most contested. While some multi-component programs with sustained services have shown small to moderate reductions in rearrest or reincarceration, many studies report no significant long-term effects. The heterogeneity in study design, population, and outcome definitions (e.g., rearrest vs. reconviction) complicates synthesis. Federal syntheses caution that while navigation models improve proximal indicators linked to desistance, the evidence for consistent long-term reductions in recidivism across jurisdictions is limited (Martin *et al.*, 2022).

For a detailed discussion of implementation factors influencing these outcomes, see Section 6.0.

Employment Outcomes

Reviews and program evaluations find that reentry programs commonly increase short-term job search activity and placement but produce smaller and less consistent gains in sustained employment and earnings. Randomized and quasi-experimental evaluations included in recent syntheses report modest increases in employment participation in the 6 to 12-month window for higher-intensity models, for instance, in transitional jobs and intensive case management, but many studies show fade-out by 12–24 months unless programs include employer partnerships, credentialing, or earnings support. Large federal reentry evaluations, the Department of Labor reentry project assessments, and RAND program reports document reliable process gains in job referrals, registrations, and occasional medium-term employment effects where program fidelity and employer engagement were strong (Lacoe, *et al.*, 2024).

Housing Outcomes

Evidence on housing stability is sparser but suggests one-stop and case-management approaches can reduce short-term housing instability, particularly when programs include direct housing assistance or formal partnerships with housing providers. Evaluations documented improved rates of initial housing placement and benefit take-up. However, studies that track housing beyond a year are limited, and the translation of initial placements into long-term stable tenure varies with local housing supply and program resources. Program reports and urban-policy analyses underscore that housing effects are strongest when navigation models explicitly incorporate housing subsidies or guaranteed transitional housing components (Stainbrook, *et al.*, 2024).

Recidivism Outcomes

The strongest, most policy-relevant question of whether navigation reduces reoffending has produced mixed findings. Many well-designed studies and recent systematic reviews indicate small to moderate reductions in re-arrest or re-incarceration for some intensive, multi-component programs, especially where services are sustained and connect participants to stable employment and housing. Meanwhile, many evaluations indicate no significant effects on recidivism or effects that dissipate over longer follow-ups; heterogeneity by study design, population, and context is large. Federal syntheses therefore caution that while navigation improves proximal indicators linked to desistance, evidence that these changes consistently produce long-term reductions in recidivism across U.S. jurisdictions remains limited (Martin, *et al.*, 2022).

Mediators and moderators noted across U.S. studies explain much of the outcome variation. Higher contact intensity, smaller caseloads, formal employer partnerships, credentialing pathways, inclusion of peer navigators for engagement, and integrated data systems are repeatedly associated with stronger employment and housing outcomes and, in some studies, lower recidivism. On the other hand, program discontinuities, short duration, funding gaps, weak employer demand, and restrictive supervision conditions direct impacts. Evaluations from the Department of Labor reentry grants and RAND case studies highlight these implementation drivers and emphasize the need for fidelity metrics and longer follow-up periods in future evaluations (Lappas, *et al.*, 2022).

Cost and Fiscal Evidence

Economic evaluations remain limited but suggest potential net public savings when programs achieve meaningful, sustained reductions in reincarceration and increases in earnings. However, robust cost-benefit estimates are infrequent and sensitive to assumptions about program scale, follow-up length, and local costs of incarceration. Federal and independent reports emphasize the need for standardized costing and fiscal modeling in future U.S. evaluations to substantiate net budgetary savings. Conclusively, U.S.-focused narrative evidence indicates that case-management and one-stop navigation reliably improve service linkage and certain short-term outcomes in achieving durable employment, housing stability, and reduced recidivism, typically require higher intensity, integrated supports in

housing or employer commitments, and sustained funding (Cortina, *et al.*, 2024).

Implementation Factors

Recent U.S. evaluations show that the effectiveness of reentry navigation depends largely on implementation quality. Higher program intensity, smaller caseloads, and longer engagement periods are linked to stronger employment and housing outcomes, while light-touch referrals rarely sustain gains. Combining professional case managers with trained peer navigators, people with lived experience increases trust and retention, but peers need standardized roles, supervision, and workforce plans to ensure consistency. Interagency partnerships across employment services, housing providers, and parole or probation offices improve referral conversion when supported by shared intake protocols and data agreements. Similarly, employer engagement through credential alignment, hiring incentives, and fair-chance policies strengthens job placement and retention. Funding stability and supportive legal frameworks are equally critical. Short grant cycles and fragmented funding undermine continuity, whereas performance-based contracts with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) or hybrid public-private models sustain innovation when tied to outcome metrics. Policy obstacles, including collateral consequences, licensing restrictions, and delayed access to benefits like Medicaid, hinder participation. Aligning state and federal policies to permit immediate benefit access boosts uptake. Contextually, rural areas require virtual navigation, mobile outreach, or transport support, whereas urban programs can leverage denser labor and service markets (Lacoe *et al.*, 2019).

Equity and Subgroup Findings

Evidence from recent U.S. evaluations reveals that reentry navigation effects vary systematically by race or ethnicity, gender, age, and place, so equitable scale-up requires explicit design and measurement for subgroups. Black and Hispanic participants frequently face larger structural barriers, including housing shortages, employer stigma and collateral-consequence burdens that direct program impacts unless navigation includes targeted legal or benefits assistance and employer outreach. Several federal and independent reviews highlight persistent racial gaps in employment and recidivism outcomes when programs do not account for these barriers (Rempel, *et al.*, 2023).

Gender- and age-specific findings indicate women and younger adults often present different needs, like caregiving, trauma histories, or limited work experience and therefore benefit more from services that bundle childcare, trauma-informed care, or educational supports. Programs that ignore these differences show smaller gains for those subgroups (Clark-Moorman, 2021).

Geographically, urban sites typically show greater short-term placement and employer-linkage rates because of denser labor markets and service networks, while rural areas suffer lower placement and higher transport or digital-access barriers. Evidence recommends hybrid delivery, mobile or virtual navigation and local labor-demand alignment for rural scale-up (Cortina, *et al.*, 2024).

Implementation disparities also arise from procurement and funding choices. Interventions delivered by Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) with stable, multi-year contracts and culturally competent staff tend to yield better subgroup engagement than short-term, fragmented grants (Abrams, *et al.*, 2022).

Costs, Scalability, and Fiscal Implications

Evidence from recent U.S. evaluations suggests reentry programs *can* yield net public savings when they produce sustained reductions in reincarceration and higher earnings, but cost-effectiveness is highly variable across models, populations, and implementation quality. Rigorous federal evaluations, for instance, the U.S. Department of Labor's Reentry Project grants evaluation report modest employment gains for some programs and stresses that fiscal impacts depend on effect size, program cost, and follow-up length (La Vigne, 2023).

Correctional education and credentialing programs have the strongest, most consistent evidence for cost benefits. RAND summaries reveal that education reduces recidivism and improves post-release employment, producing taxpayer savings when programs are sustained and scaled. However, many employment or navigation models improve short-term linkage without clear long-term earnings or recidivism gains unless paired with employer commitments or housing supports (Davis, *et al.*, 2025).

Where modeled long-term savings are reported, they typically flow from avoided incarceration costs plus increased tax receipts from higher earnings. The magnitude varies widely in published estimates and is sensitive to assumptions

about duration of effects and local incarceration costs. Federal syntheses therefore call for standardized costing methods and routine fiscal modeling in program evaluations to make defensible budget-impact claims to state and federal funders (Welsh, 2022).

Scalability constraints in the United States include funding instability (short grant cycles), procurement fragmentation, limited housing supply, weak employer demand in some labor markets, and data-sharing barriers across agencies. Successful scale-up examples tie multi-year funding to performance metrics, embed interoperable data systems, and secure formal partnerships with employers and housing providers. Federal funding mechanisms and channels relevant to scale include the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Aligned workforce streams, Department of Labor (DOL) reentry grants, Second Chance Act grants administered through the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), state corrections budgets, and targeted philanthropic pilots, but each has tradeoffs for sustainability and reach (Moore, 2023).

Gaps, Limitations, and Prioritize Research Agenda

Despite growing U.S. evaluation activity, major evidence gaps limit confident policy translation. Few randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and a dominance of short follow-ups reduce causal certainty about durable effects on recidivism and earnings. Many evaluations report strong short-term linkage (appointments and enrollments) but lack standardized outcome definitions and fidelity metrics, making cross-study synthesis and fiscal modeling unreliable. Cost-effectiveness and budget-impact estimates are sparse and use divergent assumptions. Rural and small-jurisdiction evidence remains limited to urban studies. Subgroup analyses by race or ethnicity, gender, and geography are often underpowered or omitted, constraining equity-focused recommendations (Cortina *et al.*, 2024). Future research should prioritize longer-term evaluations, standardized outcome measures, and equity-sensitive designs.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Fund federal or state solicitations to award multi-year funding to models with the strongest U.S. evidence such as high-intensity case management, one-stop centers, and proven hybrid models which require clear fidelity metrics like caseload, contact frequency, employer or housing partnership plans,

interoperable intake or data systems, and embedded costing, in addition to 12–24 month follow-up evaluations. Make peer navigators paid, supervised staff with standardized training and competency benchmarks, and prefer performance-based contracts that include outcome and cost reporting to support sustainability and scale. These procurement and funding conditions are the levers most consistently linked to durable outcomes in recent U.S. evaluations.

Clearer federal guidance and conditional funding should raise employment rates for returning citizens, reduce reincarceration and corrections spending, and strengthen community stability measurable through employment or earnings, housing retention, and 6–24 month recidivism metrics. Target federal partners and funding channels include the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) or National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), State Departments of Corrections (State DOCs), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) streams, and Second Chance Act grants.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS REVIEW

This narrative review focuses on evidence from the United States (U.S.) and therefore, its conclusions are bounded by what U.S. studies and reports (2018 to 2025) have produced; generalizability outside U.S. contexts is limited. As a narrative synthesis, the review does not produce pooled effect-size estimates and cannot fully resolve heterogeneity across studies in design, outcome definitions (e.g.; rearrest vs. reconviction vs. reincarceration), follow-up length, or measurement timing. Few randomized controlled trials (RCTs) exist in the recent U.S. literature, and many evaluations use short follow-ups, reducing causal certainty about durable impacts on recidivism and earnings. Publication and reporting biases are possible. Programs with null or negative results are less likely to appear in accessible reports, and grey-literature quality varies. Cost and fiscal analyses are sparse and methodologically inconsistent, limiting firm budget-impact conclusions. Finally, subgroup and rural-specific evidence is limited, which constrains confident equity and place-based recommendations.

Steps Taken to Mitigate Bias

To reduce these limits we applied a transparent, reproducible approach. Predefined search strings and databases, explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria, and a 2018–2025 U.S. focused timeframe. We

extracted standardized fields (design, sample, outcomes, follow-up, implementation fidelity, and cost data) into a tabular extraction template and descriptively classified study rigor (RCTs/quasi-experimental/observational/qualitative). Findings were weighted toward stronger designs and longer follow-ups, and heterogeneity is reported rather than hidden.

CONCLUSION

This review finds that case-management and one-stop reentry navigation reliably improve service linkage, such as appointments, benefits enrollment, and initial job placements and can produce modest employment and housing gains. Durable reductions in recidivism and sustained earnings depend on higher-intensity and integrated supports like smaller caseloads, longer engagement, paid and supervised peer navigators, formal employer and housing partnerships, interoperable data systems, and multi-year funding. Policymakers should prioritize performance-tied, sustained funding, standardized peer training, and 12–24 month follow-ups with cost-effectiveness analyses. Scaled, evidence-driven implementation combined with rigorous evaluation is essential to convert short-term linkage into lasting public-safety and economic benefits.

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