

New Polling Shows Public Support for Health-First Approach to Substance Use and Building More Rehabilitative Criminal Legal System At Large Has Grown Significantly

Now more than ever, Americans of all political stripes, ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds strongly support policies designed to improve lives, families, and communities harmed by substance use disorder (SUD) and overly punitive criminal justice policies.

Recent polling conducted by the Legal Action Center makes clear that there has never been such broad and deep bipartisan support for change.

	2019	2024
SUD should be treated more as a health problem than a criminal problem	67%	75%
Govt should spend more on SUD treatment, prevention, and recovery services	50%	59%
SUD treatment should be readily available/accessible to all	71%	80%
Equitable health insurance coverage of substance use and mental health issues (parity) should be enforced	62%	73%
Reentry programs to support people leaving jail/prison should be provided	69%	76%
People inside jail/prison should be regularly screened and treated for SUD	65%	72%
Alternatives to incarceration and programs that divert people from jail/prison to treatment should be expanded	61%	69%
Criminal records should be sealed when a person has no further convictions and an appropriate period of time has passed	46%	61%
Voting rights of formerly incarcerated should be restored	54%	58%
Syringe services that reduce disease transmission should be expanded	56%	67%

**Please note that the language used in the 2019 polling was “addiction to opioid and other drugs” and “drug addiction” while in the 2024 polling “substance use” and “substance use disorder” was used. Message testing conducted with the 2024 polling showed that “drug addiction,” “drug and alcohol addiction,” and “substance use disorder” elicited nearly identical responses from participants when asked if they viewed the issue as a problem (96% said “drug addiction” is a problem, 96% said “drug and alcohol addiction” is a problem, and 95% said “substance use disorder” is a problem).*

Expanding Access to Addiction Treatment & Preventing Fatal Overdose

Republican, Democrat and Independent voters across the nation are ready to support candidates who work to promote health-first over punitive responses to SUD and ensure that everyone can access affordable and comprehensive prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

In a time of intense political polarization, there is no political divide when it comes to addressing SUDs. Americans are united in their support for bold action that will change the future health and wellbeing of our nation.

- Three-quarters (75%) of Americans agree we need to treat SUD more as a health problem and less as a criminal problem (including 64% of Republicans, 86% of Democrats, and 72% of Independents; and 76% of Latino/Hispanic, 71% of Asian, 82% of Black, 75% of White, and 69% of Mixed/Other respondents).
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Americans know someone who is struggling or has struggled with SUD, a dramatic increase in just four years when less than half of those polled (44%) knew someone affected by SUD.
- SUDs affect people across the political spectrum (65% of Republicans, 65% of Democrats, and 64% of Independents know someone affected by SUD) and from all ethnic backgrounds (61% of Latino/Hispanic, 42% of Asian, 64% of Black, 66% of White, and 69% of Mixed/Other respondents know someone affected by SUD).
- Respondents nearly universally view drug addiction as a problem (98% Republicans, 96% of Democrats, and 93% of Independents; and 98% of Latino/Hispanic, 94% of Asian, 96% of Black, 97% of White, and 93% of Mixed/Other respondents), and majorities say they would support candidates that favor policies to change the tide.

Would you be more likely or less likely to support a candidate who favors the following policy proposal?	More Likely					Less Likely	Makes No Difference
	Party affiliation		Ethnic background				
	Republicans	Democrats	Independents				
	Latino/Hispanic	Asian	Black	White	Mixed/Other		
Make SUD treatment readily available and affordable to all who need it	80%					4%	15%
	72%		86%		79%		
	81%	70%	81%	80%	82%		
Expand the number of SUD treatment professionals, so care is available in all communities - urban, suburban, and rural	76%					4%	18%
	68%		86%		72%		
	80%	67%	80%	76%	78%		
Ensure people taking medications for opioid addiction are not discriminated against when seeking health care	75%					5%	18%
	66%		82%		73%		
	74%	65%	82%	74%	73%		
Ensure opioid settlement funds are used solely for substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery services	73%					4%	19%
	64%		81%		70%		
	75%	64%	72%	74%	77%		

Increase number of facilities that provide services to prevent overdose, including Naloxone	70%					6%	20%
	58%		82%		68%		
	71%	63%	76%	70%	68%		
Protect confidentiality of SUD treatment records to prevent discrimination	74%					5%	19%
	66%		82%		71%		
	77%	60%	74%	75%	69%		
Ensure health insurers cover SUD care at levels equal to coverage for other health conditions such as cancer or diabetes (parity)	73%					8%	17%
	62%		85%		70%		
	75%	63%	71%	75%	68%		
Ensure Medicare recipients have access to affordable, comprehensive SUD treatment	77%					5%	16%
	65%		86%		77%		
	76%	68%	84%	77%	78%		
Change federal Medicaid rules to allow states to provide health coverage for people nearing release from jail/prison to initiate and sustain community-based SUD care	70%					8%	18%
	55%		82%		67%		
	74%	65%	74%	69%	73%		
Regularly screen individuals in jail or prison for SUD and provide treatment to all who need it	72%					6%	20%
	65%		82%		65%		
	74%	63%	77%	71%	76%		

Building a More Equitable and Humane Criminal Legal System & Strengthening Public Safety

Likewise, the majority of Americans favor supporting candidates who work to increase reentry programming, alternatives to incarceration, diversion to treatment, and other policies that will help break the cycle of incarceration, poverty, poor health, and reincarceration.

- More than three-quarters of Americans (83%) think the large number of people in jails and prisons is a problem (including 74% of Republicans, 89% of Democrats, and 83% of Independents; and 81% of Latino/Hispanic, 94% of Asian, 89% of Black, 80% of White, and 87% of Mixed/Other respondents).

Would you be more likely or less likely to support a candidate who favors the following policy proposal?	More Likely					Less Likely	Makes No Difference
	Republicans		Democrats		Independents		
Party affiliation	Latino/Hispanic		Asian	Black	White	Mixed/Other	
Provide legal programs that help individuals leaving jail/prison reenter society	76%					5%	16%
	65%		86%		75%		
	81%	64%	82%	76%	88%		
Automatically seal criminal records once a person has completed their sentence and had no additional convictions for an appropriate period of time, so they are better able to secure jobs and housing	61%					17%	17%
	48%		74%		57%		
	63%	45%	63%	62%	55%		
Expand alternatives to incarceration for crimes involving substance use and mental illness, including community-based treatment	69%					11%	17%
	57%		79%		65%		
	66%	59%	67%	70%	77%		
Restore voting rights to individuals who have completed their jail/prison terms	58%					15%	21%
	46%		71%		53%		
	60%	48%	71%	57%	67%		

The online nationwide survey of 3,055 respondents was conducted by Prime Group and fielded June 13 – 28, 2024. The credibility interval for the sample is +/- 1.8 percentage points. [See the associated slide deck here.](#)