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California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

It Has Poorly Administered the Integrated Services for Mentally Ill Parolees Program, and With Current Funding Cuts, It Must Find Ways to Transition Parolees to County Services

Background

To provide services to parolees who are seriously mentally ill and homeless as they re-enter their communities, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (Corrections) has been operating the Integrated Services for Mentally Ill Parolees program (program) since 2007 when the Legislature gave Corrections the authority to obtain treatment and services for these parolees. Over the years, the program has been modified with the goal of successfully reintegrating these parolees into the community, increasing public safety, and reducing the rates of recidivism. Corrections screens individuals for eligibility for the program and contracts for services, which could include food, clothing, shelter, and mental health services. It operates the program in eight counties.

Key Findings

- Corrections has inadequately overseen the program and has not ensured providers are operating the program correctly.
 - » Although it identifies various oversight activities in its contracts with providers such as status meetings and on-site reviews, it has rarely performed these activities.
 - » It reimbursed providers for parolee housing without verifying the invoices.
 - » It could have saved nearly \$3.7 million per year if it had ensured providers billed Medi-Cal for eligible services for program participants.
 - » Although it claims the program is mismanaged because of a lack of staff, Corrections has allocated available positions to other units.
 - » It cannot demonstrate that all program participants met the eligibility criteria related to severe mental illness and homelessness—the case files we reviewed did not always corroborate how the individuals had qualified for the program.
- Corrections' program data is not comprehensive and is inconsistent. Thus, neither Corrections nor we could determine if the program is effective and if efforts have lowered recidivism.
- Because the program is set to end in December 2020, Corrections will need to augment its existing efforts to transition inmates with severe mental illness and who risk homelessness to available county services as they get ready to start parole to ensure they safely re-enter their communities.

Key Recommendations

To safely integrate mentally ill parolees, increase public safety, and reduce recidivism, Corrections should focus initial efforts on and solicit input from the eight counties that will be losing the program, and take the following actions:

- Assign mentally ill parolees to parole agents who are trained and experienced in serving this population.
- Meet with and facilitate coordination among parole agents, providers, and county staff to identify and implement needed processes.
- Create a regular forum of experts to share information and create or update training as needed.
- Review processes for connecting mentally ill parolees to county services, define appropriate metrics and goals, establish a performance measurement system, and improve processes when needed.