

Assessing the Health Impacts of Tuition Assistance for People who are Incarcerated in the State of New York

The Problem

Like the federal Pell grant program, New York State's Tuition Assistance Program, or TAP, provides grants to low-income residents to help them afford college. In 1995, TAP grant eligibility was eliminated for people in prison, causing enrollment to drop from 5% of the prison population to 1.7%.



- *Benefits for people who receive college education in prison:* Students have improved critical thinking skills, and improved chances of getting a job, reuniting with their families, finding their place in society, not committing new offenses, and not returning to prison.
- *Benefits for children:* Children of students in these programs have improved chances for higher family income, higher levels of education, reduced behavioral problems, and reduced chances of getting involved in the criminal justice system themselves.

What We Did

In 2015, HIP partnered with the Education from the Inside Out Coalition to understand the health and equity impacts of a proposed state bill that would repeal the ban on incarcerated people receiving financial aid for college education through TAP. The study drew on: published research; data from the Department of Corrections and college education programs in prisons; insights from formerly incarcerated students and their children through focus groups; and interviews with researchers, faculty, program administrators, and others.



What We Found

Expanding access to college education for people in New York prisons would improve the overall health and well-being of the communities that formerly incarcerated people return to, as well as individuals who receive the education, and their families. We found the following benefits:

- *Benefits for the state:* Every million dollars spent on building more prisons prevents about 350 crimes, but the same amount invested in correctional education prevents more than 600 crimes.
- *Benefits for communities:* People who participate in correctional education programs commit fewer crimes when they return to the community.

Impact

Although the proposed bill did not pass, local news sources covered the release of the report and advocates are using the findings and recommendations in ongoing advocacy efforts. A pilot study to reinstate federal Pell grants has been initiated by the Obama administration and Governor Cuomo recently proposed expanding funding for postsecondary education in state prisons.



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