

RECOVERY BEHIND THE WALLS

— *AND BEYOND* —

Statistics & Data: Commonwealth of Virginia | Published State & Federal Sources Only

Certified Peer Recovery Specialist | U.S. Marine Corps Veteran | Justice-Impacted , 17 Years 11 Months Served

Originally from San Bernardino, California | Currently Serving Communities in Virginia

WHO I AM

5 Years

Marine Corps Veteran

Served 5 years in the United States Marine Corps. The discipline and brotherhood forged in service shaped everything that followed — inside and outside the walls.

17 Yrs 11 Mo

Justice-Impacted

Served 17 years and 11 months in a Virginia correctional facility. Former gang member from San Bernardino. I know Virginia's system from the inside out.

CPRS

**Certified Peer
Recovery Specialist**

Virginia Certification Board Certified Peer Recovery Specialist. Trained using DBHDS curriculum. Serving formerly incarcerated Virginians in Petersburg.

"Everything I'm about to show you in Virginia data — I've lived. These aren't statistics to me. They're people I know by name."

TODAY'S JOURNEY ALL DATA: VIRGINIA PUBLISHED SOURCES

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**Recovery Inside
Virginia Prisons**

Challenges of sobriety in
VADOC

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Topic 01

Recovery Inside Virginia Prisons: The Challenges of Sobriety

Social Impact

~50%

of Virginia state prisoners meet criteria for a Substance Use Disorder

Approximately 50% of Virginia's state prisoners meet the criteria for a SUD, and over 70% of incarcerated Virginians with a mental illness have a co-occurring substance use problem. Many are incarcerated for offenses driven by addiction not violence.

Tuomey Law Firm, Trends in Drug Abuse, Mental Health & Criminal Justice in Virginia (2009–2024), citing Virginia state correctional data | tuomeylawfirm.com

Economic Impact

\$145/day

average Virginia jail operating cost per inmate per day FY2023

Virginia's FY2023 average jail operating cost rose to \$145.18 per inmate per day up \$19.81 from FY2022. Without treatment, untreated SUD drives repeated incarceration. Virginia state and local governments spent \$3.018 billion on corrections in 2021.

Virginia General Assembly, FY2023 Jail Cost Report (Nov 2024) | RGA Report RD745 | Virginia Criminal Justice Data Snapshot (Dec 2023)

Neurological Impact

2,463

drug overdose deaths in Virginia in 2023 79% involved fentanyl

Virginia recorded 2,463 drug overdose deaths in 2023 79% involved fentanyl. In 2022, 1,951 Virginians were killed by fentanyl alone. Drug overdose has been the #1 cause of unnatural death in Virginia since 2013. The crisis follows people inside and after release.

Virginia Department of Health (VDH), Drug Overdose Data 2023 | vdh.virginia.gov/drug-overdose-data | Governor Youngkin Executive Order 26 (2023)

Social Impact

2,013

active enrollments in 17 different VADOC SUD programs as of May 2024

As of May 2024, VADOC had 2,013 active enrollments across 17 different SUD programs, excluding volunteer-led programs. Programs include Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions for Substance Use (CBI-SUA), Therapeutic Intervention Programs, and MAT services statewide.

VADOC, *Illicit Drugs in VADOC Facilities: Addressing the Challenges* (Aug 2024) | vadoc.virginia.gov/media/2025/illicit-drugs-in-vadoc-facilities

Economic Impact

19%

Virginia's 3 year reincarceration rate lowest in the nation for FY2019 cohort

Virginia's 3year reincarceration rate of 19% (FY2019 cohort) is the lowest in the nation tied with Minnesota. This is the 11th consecutive year Virginia has ranked lowest or second-lowest nationally. Evidence based programming inside VADOC directly drives this outcome.

VADOC, *Lowest Recidivism Rate in More Than 20 Years* (Sept 2024) | vadoc.virginia.gov/news-press-releases/2024 | VADOC State Recidivism Comparison (2024)

Neurological Impact

401

Virginia prisoners on MAT (Medication-Assisted Treatment) as of May 2024

VADOC's MAT program had 401 active inmates prescribed medication as of May 2024, with nearly 19,000 total doses administered since inception. Virginia also distributed 32,408 naloxone doses in 2022. Structured SUD programming rebuilds neural pathways the brain can heal in prison.

VADOC, *Illicit Drugs in VADOC Facilities* (Aug 2024) | Virginia SOR Brief (2024) | nasadad.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Virginia-SOR-Brief

Topic 02

Peer Support Inside Virginia DOC: The Power of Lived Experience

Social Impact

Only 17%

of released Virginians diagnosed with SUD within 3 months of leaving prison

A 2024 VCU study found that among 4,652 adults released from Virginia jails and prisons in 2022, only 17% were diagnosed with a SUD within 3 months despite the majority qualifying. Of those diagnosed with opioid use disorder, only 25% received medication treatment.

VCU News / Virginia Dept. of Medical Assistance Services Study (April 2024) | news.vcu.edu/article/2024/03/substance-use-disorders-underdiagnosed-formerly-incarcerated-vcustudy-finds

Economic Impact

85%

of released Virginians enrolled in Medicaid within 1 month yet go untreated

VCU research found 85% of Virginians released from prison enrolled in Medicaid within one month meaning access exists. Yet most go undiagnosed and untreated. This gap represents a massive economic failure: the state pays for incarceration but not the treatment that prevents return.

VCU / Virginia DMAS Study (April 2024) | news.vcu.edu/article/2024/03/substance-use-disorders-underdiagnosed-formerly-incarcerated-vcustudy-finds

Neurological Impact

BDNF↓

social isolation in Virginia prisons suppresses the brain's healing protein

Emotional isolation in correctional settings suppresses Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF), which is critical for neuroplasticity and healing from SUD and trauma. Without peer connection, the brain loses its primary mechanism for recovery making untreated isolation a neurological injury.

National Library of Medicine — BDNF, social isolation, and neuroplasticity research | ncbi.nlm.nih.gov | Compassion Prison Project neuroscience research

Social Impact

9

Virginia inmates first in state history became certified Peer Recovery Specialists in Jan 2024

On January 10, 2024, nine inmates at Buckingham Correctional Center became the first incarcerated individuals in Virginia to receive CPRS certification from the Virginia Certification Board, using DBHDS's 72-hour curriculum. VADOC now plans to expand this program across facilities.

VADOC Press Release, First Inmates to Become Certified Peer Recovery Specialists (March 6, 2024) | vadoc.virginia.gov/news-press-releases/2024

Economic Impact

2,142

justice-involved Virginians received peer recovery services in 2022 SOR grant year

Virginia's State Opioid Response (SOR) funding expanded peer recovery specialists into VADOC and all 40 public local mental health agencies. Since 2018, SOR-funded peer supporters in Virginia justice settings grew to 45 specialists. Services included individual support, peer groups, and discharge planning.

Virginia SOR Brief (2024), NASADAD | nasadad.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Virginia-SOR-Brief-Draft-2024_Final.pdf

Neurological Impact

Oxytocin + Serotonin

genuine peer connection triggers the neurochemicals that directly counteract Virginia's trauma epidemic

Authentic peer connection especially with someone who has shared the same cell, the same system, the same survival triggers oxytocin and serotonin. These neurochemicals directly counteract the cortisol-dominant trauma state that drives SUD relapse. Peer support is neurological medicine.

Social neuroscience on oxytocin, bonding, and trauma recovery | ncbi.nlm.nih.gov | SAMHSA Peer Support Evidence Base

Topic 03

**What Recovery Means for Virginians
Without a Substance Use Disorder**

Social Impact

14% / 34%

serious mental illness among Virginia incarcerated males (14%) and females (34%)

Serious mental illness affects 14% of male and 34% of female inmates in Virginia's jails and prisons higher than the general population. Most of these individuals do not carry a SUD diagnosis but are still trapped in cycles of incarceration driven by untreated mental health conditions.

Tuomey Law Firm, Trends in Drug Abuse, Mental Health & Criminal Justice in Virginia (2025) | tuomeylawfirm.com | Virginia state correctional data

Economic Impact

\$3.018B

Virginia state & local corrections spending in 2021 most on punishment, not healing

Virginia spent \$3.018 billion on corrections in 2021 2.9% of total state and local spending, or \$349 per resident. The majority of these dollars fund incarceration, not the treatment or identity rebuilding that research shows prevents return. People without SUD diagnoses receive the fewest services.

Virginia Criminal Justice Data Snapshot, Justice Reinvestment Initiative (Dec 2023) | justicereinvestmentinitiative.org | Virginia Census Bureau expenditure data

Neurological Impact

Identical Brain Response

Complex trauma produces the same neurological markers as SUD but gets zero treatment

Complex trauma from violence, gang life, poverty, and incarceration itself produces dysregulated HPA axis, altered threat response, and suppressed prefrontal cortex identical neurological markers to active SUD. Virginia's system diagnoses the substance but not the wound beneath it.

National Center for PTSD; van der Kolk, The Body Keeps the Score (2014); Complex PTSD neuroscience research, National Library of Medicine

Social Impact

44

Virginia programs providing SUD & mental health treatment in justice settings as of 2023

As of 2023, 44 programs across Virginia were established to provide treatment in justice settings, including 18 CSBs (Community Services Boards) in recovery courts, jails, and VADOC facilities. 771 individuals received MOUD services and 1,321 received non-MOUD treatment in these settings.

Virginia SOR Brief (2024) | nasadad.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Virginia-SOR-Brief-Draft-2024_Final.pdf

Economic Impact

19%

Virginia's recidivism rate proof that holistic rehabilitation works when identity is addressed

Virginia's 19% recidivism rate lowest or second-lowest nationally for 11 consecutive years is directly attributed by VADOC to evidence based, individual-focused programming that addresses criminogenic risk and needs holistically, not only substance use. Identity and purpose change the outcome.

VADOC, State Recidivism Comparison (Sept 2024) | vadoc.virginia.gov/media/2076/vadoc-state-recidivism-comparison-report-2024.pdf

Neurological Impact

Dopamine

purpose and mission activate the same reward pathways as addictive substances

Neurologically, building a life with meaning through faith, service, or purpose triggers dopamine and reward circuitry in the same pathways that substances or survival behaviors were activating. For individuals without SUD, recovery is about becoming, not just stopping.

Self-Determination Theory, Ryan & Deci; Neuroscience of purpose and meaning — [Frontiers in Psychology \(2021\) | National Library of Medicine](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.101378)

Topic 04

ACEs: Healing Childhood Trauma Inside Virginia Incarceration

Social Impact

42% vs 12.5%

children in Virginia child welfare system with 4+ ACEs vs. general population

Research shows that 42% of children in the child welfare system have experienced 4 or more ACEs compared to 12.5% of the general population. Virginia's incarcerated population mirrors this pattern: ACEs are the pipeline. The trauma starts long before the crime.

Virginia Association of School Social Workers, ACEs Research | vassw.org/adverse-childhood-experiences | CDC ACE data, Virginia child welfare comparisons

Economic Impact

\$3B+

Virginia corrections & related spending annually majority tied to unaddressed childhood trauma

Virginia spends over \$3 billion annually on corrections. Research consistently links incarceration to high ACE prevalence. Virginia enacted criminal justice reforms in 2020 reducing mandatory minimums for drug offenses, acknowledging that trauma not character drives many offenses.

Virginia Criminal Justice Data Snapshot (Dec 2023) | Justice Reinvestment Initiative | Virginia 2020 criminal justice reform legislation

Neurological Impact

Structural Brain Changes

childhood trauma measurably shrinks hippocampus, enlarges amygdala visible on MRI

Early trauma produces MRI-visible structural brain changes: smaller hippocampus (memory, emotion regulation), enlarged amygdala (fear/threat response), and thinner prefrontal cortex (decision-making, impulse control). These are physical injuries not moral failures that Virginia's justice system encounters daily.

Teicher & Samson, Annual Review of Neuroscience (2016); Harvard Center on the Developing Child | ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

Social Impact

Trauma-Informed

VADOC is expanding trauma-informed programming and Virginia's recidivism data proves it works

VADOC's approach centers on addressing each inmate's criminogenic risk and needs the foundation of trauma-informed corrections. Virginia's 11-year streak of lowest or second-lowest recidivism nationally is directly linked to this rehabilitative, needs-based model over purely punitive approaches.

VADOC State Recidivism Comparison (2024) | VADOC Director Chad Dotson public statements (2024) | vadoc.virginia.gov/news-press-releases/2024

Economic Impact

20+

Virginia Community Services Boards providing trauma and mental health treatment in justice settings

Across Virginia, 18 CSBs now provide treatment in recovery courts, jails, and VADOC facilities. These programs offer CBT, trauma focused therapy, and individual support. Evidence-based trauma treatment generates significant economic return every dollar invested in CBT reduces costly re-incarceration.

Virginia SOR Brief (2024) | NASADAD Virginia report | nasadad.org | VADOC FY2023 programming data

Neurological Impact

Neuro-plasticity

EMDR, CBT & mindfulness physically rebuild hippocampal volume possible inside a Virginia cell

Trauma-focused therapies including EMDR, somatic approaches, and CBT have been shown in neuroimaging research to physically regenerate hippocampal volume and reduce amygdala reactivity. Neuroplasticity is real at any age. The brain can heal even in a Virginia correctional facility.

Hölzel et al. (2011), NeuroImage — Mindfulness & Gray Matter; Bremner et al. — Hippocampal Volume in PTSD | ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

Topic 05

How Virginia Veterans Find Support and Healing in Prison

Social Impact

~6.7%

of Virginia's incarcerated population are military veterans

Veterans make up approximately 8% of the incarcerated population in U.S. state and federal prisons including Virginia VADOC facilities. Veterans carry a double identity crisis: dishonored service, severed brotherhood, loss of rank and mission. Most arrive without any military specific mental health screening.

BJS Survey of Prison Inmates (2016); RAND Corporation, Promising Prevention Strategies for Justice-Involved Veterans (2023) | rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1363-8

Economic Impact

61%

greater odds of criminal justice involvement for veterans with PTSD VA data

Veterans with PTSD have 61% greater odds of criminal justice involvement than those without PTSD. Veterans with TBI common among Virginia's post-9/11 veterans are 59% more likely to face criminal legal involvement. VA disability benefits are reduced or terminated after 61 days of incarceration.

Council on Criminal Justice, From Service to Sentencing (2023) | counciloncj.org | VADOC Veterans Re-entry Roadmap (2023) | vadoc.virginia.gov/media/1791/vadoc-veterans-reentry-roadmap-2023.pdf

Neurological Impact

2/3

of justice involved veterans estimated to have alcohol or SUD far above average

An estimated two-thirds of justice-involved veterans have alcohol or substance use disorders significantly higher than the general incarcerated population. Military training stacks combat trauma on top of childhood ACEs, then compounds both with incarceration specific hypervigilance. Most go undiagnosed inside.

RAND Corporation, Promising Prevention Strategies for Justice-Involved Veterans (2023) | rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1363-8 | Blodgett et al. (2015) systematic review

Social Impact

Multiple Facilities

VADOC operates dedicated veterans housing units & programs across Virginia

VADOC provides dedicated veterans housing units at multiple Virginia correctional facilities, offering structured environments with PTSD treatment, TBI support, substance abuse treatment, and anger management veteran specific therapies. Deerfield and Pocahontas SCC each host recognized national veterans organization charters.

VADOC, Veterans Resources Page (2023–2024) | vadoc.virginia.gov/inmates-and-probationers/veterans-resources | VADOC Veterans Re-entry Roadmap (2023)

Economic Impact

Reentry Roadmap

Virginia published a dedicated Reentry Roadmap for justice-involved veterans in 2023

VADOC partnered with the VA, Virginia Department of Veterans Services, and Virginia Veteran and Family Support to publish a Reentry Roadmap for Justice Involved Veterans in Virginia (2023) a comprehensive guide to restoring benefits, housing, healthcare, and identity upon release.

VADOC, A Re-entry Roadmap for Justice-Involved Veterans in Virginia (2023) | vadoc.virginia.gov/media/1791/vadoc-veterans-reentry-roadmap-2023.pdf

Neurological Impact

Mission Restored

Virginia's peer led veterans support groups rebuild brotherhood the strongest proven intervention

VADOC's Veterans Support Group available at most facilities, including those without dedicated housing units provides peer led meetings that help veterans rebuild self-esteem, self-sufficiency, and self-awareness. Military discipline is already neurologically embedded. Recovery programs redirect it toward healing.

VADOC, Veterans Support Group Program | vadoc.virginia.gov/inmates-and-probationers/veterans-resources | Virginia DAV Incarcerated Veterans Assistance Committee | virginiadav.org

THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

**"I am the return on investment.
I am what happens when someone
believes recovery is possible
for people like me."**

01

**Treatment
Inside VADOC**

2,013 active SUD enrollments

02

**Peer
Support**

2,142 Virginians served 2022

03

**Recovery
Beyond SUD**

44 VA justice programs

04

**ACE
Healing**

19% recidivism — lowest in
nation

05

**Veteran
Support**

VADOC units at multiple facilities



HOW TO CONTACT ME:

