

HEALTH CARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS

In most communities, health care is the [fastest-growing industry](#). By 2024, the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS) reports that this industry could see an increase of more than 2 million new jobs. Given this growth, careers in health care are in high demand for many adults seeking meaningful, living-wage employment, including men and women who have a history of incarceration.

However, health care is not seen as a “friendly” industry for people with criminal records, so education and training providers steer participants away or participants never pursue health-focused career pathway programs.

This perceived **absolute** barrier to health care employment for people with criminal records comes at a cost: people with aspirations to work in health care fields are diverted from these pathways and health care employers lose potential workers. While it is certainly true that there are barriers to health care employment, there are still employment opportunities to pursue in this industry. Here are some tips, drawing from the [National Employment Law Project](#) and [Department for Health and Human Services](#), for providers interested in learning more about these possibilities.

“Our need for workers in healthcare is almost insatiable. If we only look at the population that has a perfect education, the perfect physical abilities, the perfect background, we can’t meet [demand]. It’s a business rationale, it’s not just philanthropic or just a mission.” – [Pamela Paulk, Former Senior VP of Human Resources, Johns Hopkins Hospital & Health System, May 7, 2015](#)



TIPS

Develop an outreach and engagement strategy specific to your local health care employers.

- Reach out to health care employers in your community who have a high need for employees in areas that align with your training programs (e.g., community health, medical billing, informatics, etc.). The urgency of their need may open them to discussions about hiring qualified participants from your program and

making hiring decisions based on “job relatedness” as the primary hiring criteria instead of screening based on past criminal status. A providers ability to create a pipeline of qualified, vetted potential workers for an employer can be a big sell, especially for small businesses experiencing a great deal of turnover.

- Keep your health care employer outreach broad because the industry is diverse. In your local area there may be hospitals, physician offices, long-term care facilities, and/or health care service agencies. Your local or regional workforce board or chamber of commerce can help you identify relevant employers and identify their hiring needs and hiring requirements. These partners can also help you build relationships with target employers if they are not part of your employer network.
- Keep in mind that health care employers hire a range of occupations beyond patient care. Consider which employers have needs that your health-related program graduates can fill, like business administration and IT.
- Make your case for hiring people who have been incarcerated **specific** to the health care industry. Share research or testimonials that demonstrate that workers with criminal backgrounds are good health care employees. Local examples are most persuasive, but there are national resources to support your messaging:
 - Johns Hopkins University Hospital has been hiring people with criminal records for positions throughout their system for decades. A recent study found a low turnover rate and strong retention among people with records. <http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/NELP-Safer-Toolkit-Healthcare-Employer-Guide-Hiring-People-with-Arrest-Conviction-Records.pdf>
 - Evolv, a company that studies employee retention, conducted research which found that workers with criminal records were **more** productive than those without an arrest or conviction record. <http://www.businessinsider.com/a-criminal-record-might-increase-productivity-2012-12>
- The health care industry has come to recognize the link between a diverse health care workforce and a more effective and culturally competent workforce. As a result, cultural competency is in high demand as the nation becomes more diverse. <http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/21/5/90.full>

- Health care access for the “medically underserved” is a national imperative and priority for the health care industry. For the last decade, the [Transitions Clinic Network](#) has hired people with criminal records as community health workers for people who have recently been released from incarceration. The results of this hiring process provide a meaningful career for the workers, and the patients they serve have improved health outcomes.

Make sure career advising staff understand and can communicate the range of health care occupations for program participants to consider.

- Train your career advising staff to understand how to review labor market data so they can identify the diverse range of occupations available in their local health care industry. There are resources to help advisors identify these occupations:
 - The Bureau of Labor Statistics has tools that career advisors can use (<https://www.bls.gov/data/>)
 - National Association of Workforce Boards (<http://nawb.org>)
 - Your local workforce board will also have information to guide your search in your local area. Their business engagement team can also facilitate introductions to new employer contacts.

Make sure career advising staff understand and communicate the *specific* barriers to entry for people with criminal records.

- There may be barriers to entry for occupations in the industry, but it is important to clarify where the barriers exist and the extent of these barriers. For example, is the barrier at the state and/or federal level? If the barrier is a federal barrier, all states are equally impacted; if the barrier is at the state level, there could be more forgiving states. If a criminal conviction does make someone ineligible for licensure, are there waivers that a person can pursue? Is there a time period after which the prohibition expires? A resource to identify barriers in your state can be found at the [National Inventory of the Collateral Consequences of Convictions](#).

“I want to prove that I am worth the risk to give a (nursing) license,” Wilson said. “God has a plan for me. . . . But I hope it’s not air conditioning.” – Tim Wilson, person with a criminal history

Resources

The Consideration of Criminal Records in Occupational Licensing

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TheConsiderationofCriminalRecordsinOccupationalLicensing.pdf>

National Inventory of the Collateral Consequences of Conviction

<https://niccc.csgjusticecenter.org/>

Policies impacting employment after reentry

<http://www.ncsl.org/documents/cj/pew/ex-offenderreport.pdf>

Health care prohibitions at the state level compared to the federal level

<http://nelp.org/content/uploads/2015/03/Healthy-Balance-Full-Report.pdf>