



# **Contra Costa County In-Custody Survey Findings**

COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD  
PROGRAMS & SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE  
FY 23-24

Prepared by the Office of Reentry & Justice | February 2024

## Introduction

On behalf of the Community Advisory Board's (CAB) Programs and Services Subcommittee and in collaboration with the Office of Reentry & Justice (ORJ), a fourteen-question survey was distributed to all individuals held in the county's jail facilities by the Contra Costa County's Sheriff's Office. The purpose of the survey was to better understand the needs, challenges, and barriers to achieving successful reentry for the county's incarcerated population. More specifically, the results from this survey will be used to inform the CAB's budgetary and policy/programmatic recommendations to the Community Corrections Partnership (CCP). A better understanding of the needs and obstacles that individuals face following incarceration as well as their future direction is critical to the CAB's support of agencies' efforts to meet the needs of individuals returning to the community.

Survey overview:

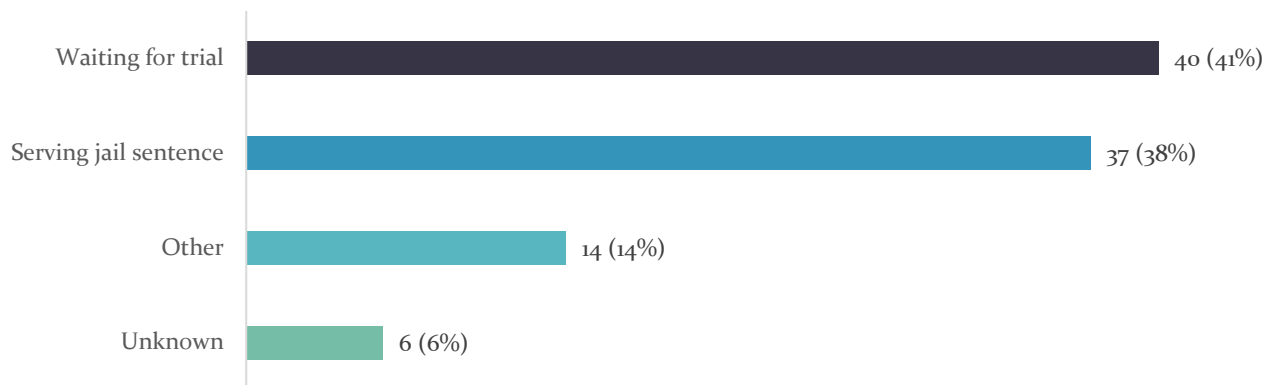
- With assistance from the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office, hard copies of the survey were distributed on August 8, 2023, to the jail populations at the Martinez, West County (Richmond), and Marsh Creek (Clayton) detention facilities. A Spanish language version of the survey was also made available.
- Individuals had one week to complete the surveys at which point the completed surveys were collected and submitted to the ORJ for analysis.
- 97 responses were received representing 97 unique justice-involved individuals currently incarcerated in the county's jail facilities.
- Of the 97 responses received, 13 included only one of the two survey pages.
- While a good number of respondents expressed no need for reentry service supports, the primary themes across all responses included concerns surrounding housing and employment.

## Respondents

Survey responses were received from 97 individuals currently incarcerated in the Martinez (57%, 55), West County (25%, 24), or Marsh Creek (18%, 17) detention facilities. One (1) individual declined to identify the facility housed at the time of the survey.

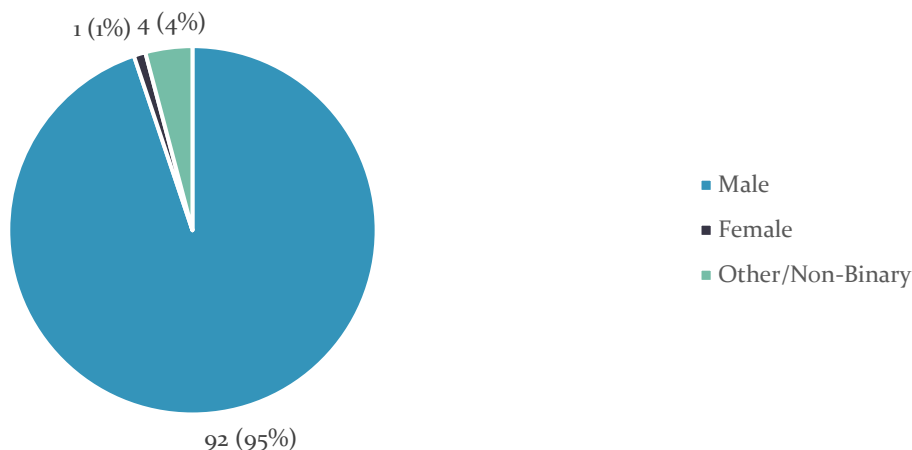
County Detention Facility	n (%)
Martinez	55 (57%)
West County (Richmond)	24 (25%)
Marsh Creek (Clayton)	17 (18%)
Unknown	1 (1%)

Survey respondents were asked which option best described their reason for serving time in the county jail. Forty (41%, 40) respondents indicated they were waiting for trial, 37 (38%) reported they were serving a jail sentence, 14 (14%) described another reason for being in a jail facility, and 6 (6%) declined to answer.



*Figure 1. Reason for Serving Time in County Jail*

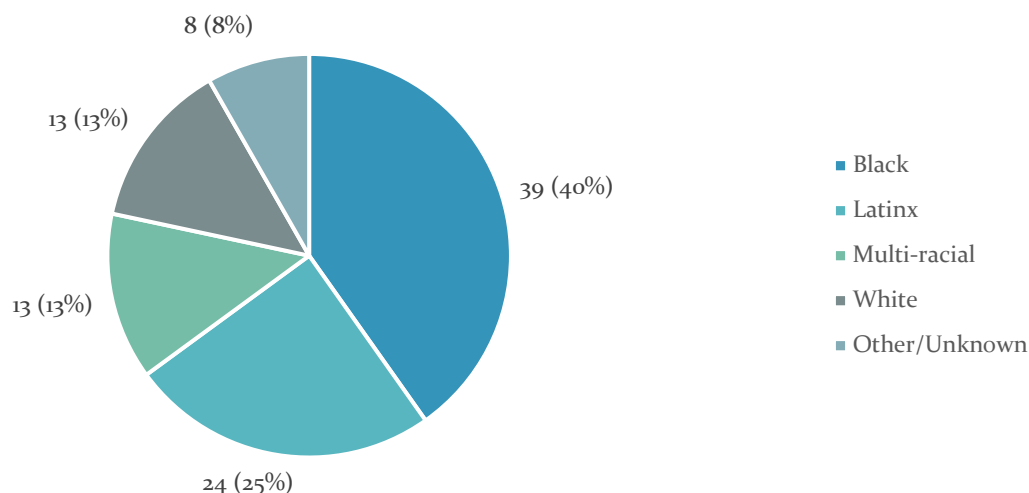
Figure 2 below presents the distribution of respondents by gender identity. The majority of respondents were male 92 (95%) followed by 4 (4%) other/non-binary respondents and 1 (1%) female.<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 2. Proportion of Respondents by Gender Identity*

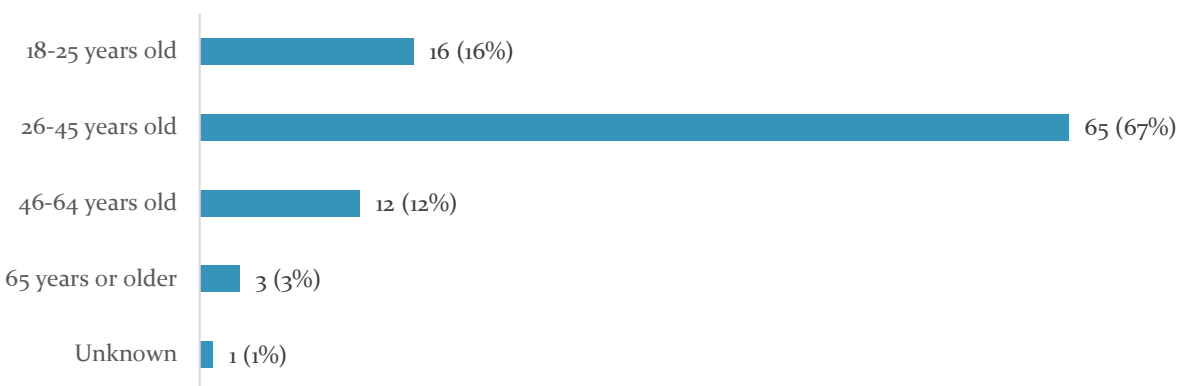
<sup>1</sup> The gender distribution of the average daily population (ADP) across all detention facilities during Q1, FY 23-24 indicates that 90% of those held in custody are males while 9% are female. This survey, thus, under reports the experience of women.

When asked which race/ethnicity they most closely identified with, 39 (40%) survey respondents identified as Black, 24 (25%) identified as Latinx, 13 (13%) identified as multi-racial, 13 (13%) identified as White, and 8 (8%) respondents identified as other/unknown.<sup>2</sup>



*Figure 3. Proportion of Respondents by Most Closely Identified Race/Ethnicity*

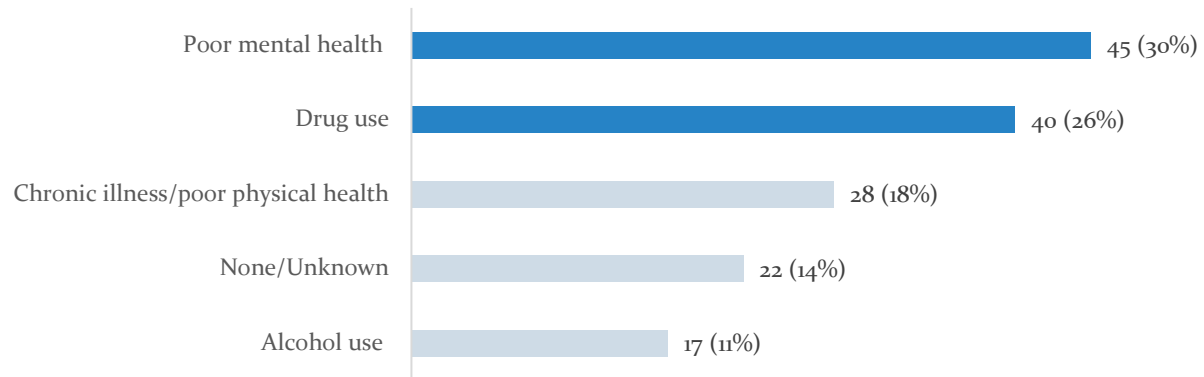
Figure 4 below highlights the age of survey respondents who ranged in age from 18 to 65 years old or older. The majority of respondents (n = 65, 67%) reported being 26-45 years old.



*Figure 4. Current Age of Respondents*

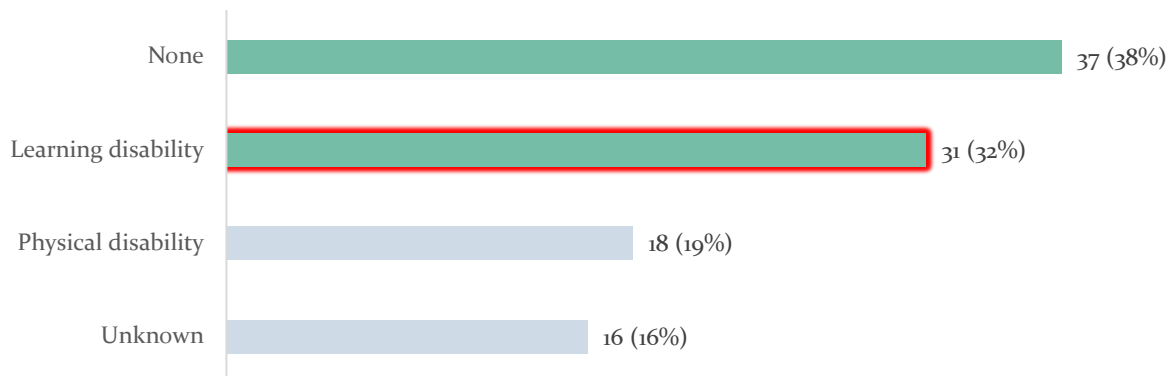
<sup>2</sup> The racial distribution of the ADP across all detention facilities during Q1, FY 23-24 indicates that 42% of those held in custody are Black, 36% are White, and 22% are of other or unknown background. This survey, thus, over reports the experience of White individuals and cannot represent the experience of Latinx individuals.

In addition to general demographics, survey respondents were also asked about any health conditions and disabilities they might struggle with. When asked about health conditions, poor mental health and drug use were the most frequently selected answers (Figure 5).



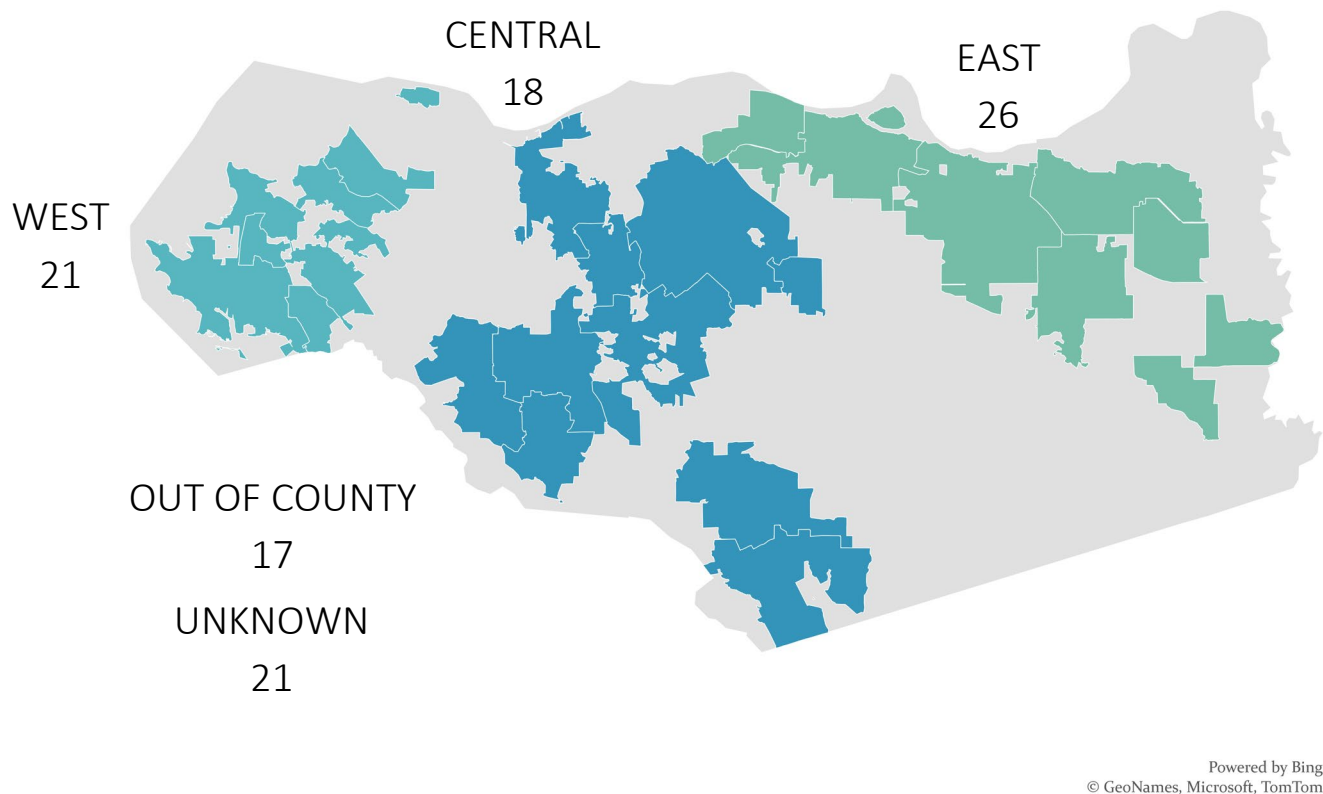
*Figure 5. Proportion of Respondents Struggling with a Health Condition(s)*

When asked about any disabilities respondents struggled with, most reported they did not have a disability. However, one-third of respondents reported having a learning disability (Figure 6).



*Figure 6. Proportion of Respondents Struggling with a Disability*

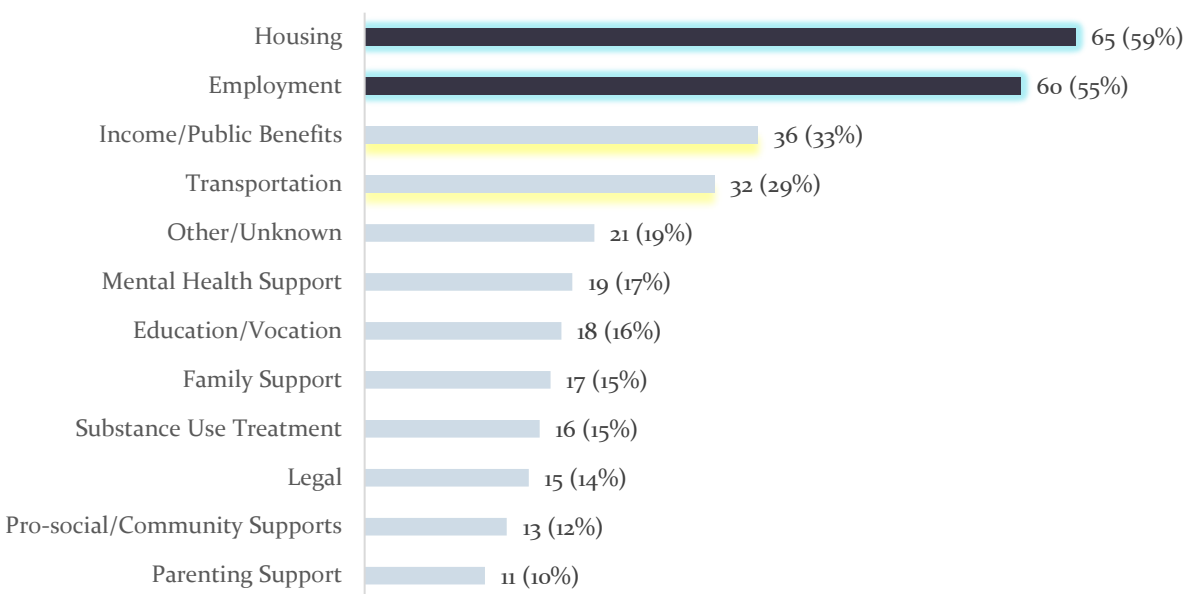
Survey respondents were asked about the region(s) of the county that they would be returning to following their release. Twenty-six (25%, 26) respondents reported they would be returning to East County, 21 (20%) to West County, 21 (20%) respondents did not know where they would be returning to, 18 (17%) respondents would be returning to Central County, and 17 (17%) would be returning to another county.<sup>3</sup>



*Figure 7. Counts of Responses by Regions Returning to Following Release*

<sup>3</sup> West County cities include: Richmond, San Pablo, El Cerrito, Pinole, Hercules, Crockett. Central County cities include: Martinez, Concord, Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill, Clayton. East County cities include: Bay Point, Pittsburg, Antioch, Oakley, Brentwood.

Figure 8 below highlights the most critical area(s) of need for individuals returning to the community as reported by respondents. It is worth noting that this question sought to identify the 3 most critical areas of need for individuals returning to their community from custody. However, as a substantial number of respondents were not clear on how to prioritize their top 3 responses, this question was reframed to include all critical areas of need. Housing and employment were by far the most frequently identified needs. Sixty-five (59%, 65) survey respondents expressed housing as a critical area of need while another 60 (55%) selected employment. It is also worth noting that, while not as common as the critical needs surrounding housing and employment, the needs for income/public benefits and transportation were also common.



*Figure 8. Most Critical Areas of Need Following Release*

## Additional Survey Findings

Survey respondents were also asked to provide narrative responses to questions regarding their concerns or worries about returning home, supports or services that would help them reach their goals, supportive services needed in the jail settings and in the community, as well as to name programs, services, or organizations they are most familiar with that offer supports for their areas of need. The most common themes were identified for each response by drawing on a qualitative thematic approach to analysis. Two independent reviewers from the ORJ coded the survey responses for patterns and then met to negotiate consensus and achieve inter-rater reliability. This negotiation was a particularly challenging effort due to the short responses from many of the respondents as well as their limited literacy. As a result, some liberties in interpretation were



required in order to determine the respondents' answer to the question and to negotiate thematic consensus. The most frequently reported themes that could be identified for each question are described below.

It is worth noting that 13 surveys submitted to the ORJ for analysis included only one page and thus did not include the second page of narrative questions and their responses. As a result, narrative thematic analyses were conducted for only the 84 respondents where two pages of the survey were provided.

**Do you have any concerns or worries about returning home? If yes, what is your greatest concern or worry?**

While the majority of respondents mentioned having no concerns about returning home, others expressed concerns with housing. Individuals stated being worried about experiencing homelessness when returning to their community and also noted concerns regarding employment. Further, while not prevalent enough to warrant being identified as a common theme, a number of respondents were concerned about family and social environments from the perspective of both reconnecting with or a preference to distance from toxic and familiar settings. These competing family-related and/or environmental concerns speak to the complexity surrounding family relationships and positive, supportive community and home life. Lastly, a small minority of respondents spoke of concerns about retaliation or mistreatment upon return to their community further emphasizing a fear of harm, stigma and bias due to one's history of justice system involvement. These comments, while not common, were nonetheless alarming.



**What supports or services do you think are most needed in jail? Please describe.**

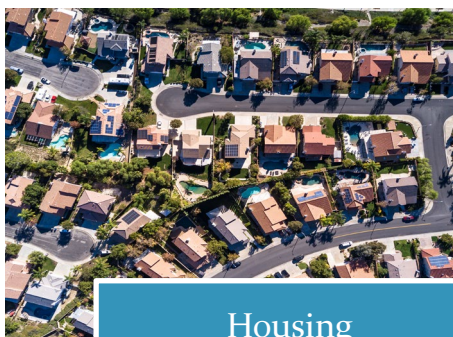
The key supports needed in-custody identified by respondents largely focused on reentry services and pro-social supports. For this analysis, responses involving positive community engagement such as social interaction with family and friends as well as support groups were captured under pro-social supports. Specific services mentioned most frequently were more programming in the jails, increased interaction with reentry service organizations and extended recreational time.



While a good number of other respondents reported no need for additional services while in-custody, others reported the need for behavioral health services to treat both substance use disorders and mental health challenges. Here, the most frequently mentioned relevant behavioral health supports were access to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings as well as supports to address mental health concerns.

**What supports or services do you think are most needed in the community? Please describe.**

Housing, reentry services and pro-social supports were the most frequently reported support/service areas that respondents most needed in the community. Respondents noted the lack of availability of low-income housing to reduce the homelessness crisis, and the need for more youth programs to prevent or intervene in youth justice system involvement that could further lead to involvement as an adult. Specific youth interventions mentioned included: violence prevention, youth diversion, and youth vocational programs as well as community events. Several respondents also stated that they did not believe there were any additional services or supports needed in the community.



Housing



Reentry Services /  
Pro-social Supports

**Please name the programs, services, and organizations you are most familiar with that offer support in your areas of need.**

The majority of respondents did not identify a program, service or organization that offered support in their areas of need. However, among respondents that were able to identify an organization, a broad range of agencies were identified. Here, the most prevalent organizations recognized were AB 109 funded programs, such as Rubicon Programs, Men & Women of Purpose, and Game Plan for Success (GPS).

## Summary & Conclusion

This survey, conducted among a sample of individuals held in all three detention facilities throughout Contra Costa County, is the first of its kind conducted by the Office of Reentry & Justice on behalf of the Community Advisory Board. While the sample of participants is not considered to be representative of the population of all individuals held in custody, the results and learnings

gleaned from this effort can be viewed as a steppingstone to inform reentry services and program needs as well as future surveys of the in-custody population. For example, future surveys might seek to distinguish between the needs of individuals who are awaiting trial compared to those who are serving a jail sentence, or between the needs of men compared to women. Further, while the survey was administered in both English and Spanish, future surveys might reach a more diverse population in custody if available in other languages.

Notably, critical concerns surrounding housing and employment needs upon return to the community are aligned with the findings of the AB 109 Providers Survey and speak to the common thread of need in these domains. Particularly for individuals with justice involvement, obtaining housing and employment is a challenge upon reentry. However, the challenge is even greater when there is insufficient low-income housing in the community. This issue is further complicated by the large proportion of individuals who self-reported a substance use or mental health disorder and may also be in need of housing that includes wrap around treatment or social services to maintain their stability.

Also worth noting is the high proportion of individuals (32%) who self-reported a learning disability. While this is not a diagnostic measure and is thus vulnerable to misinterpretation, the proportion of those who reported a learning disability is slightly higher than those who reported either a substance use or mental health disorder. In addition, learning disabilities are linked to substance use and other mental health conditions as well as to impaired social and cognitive functioning.<sup>4, 5</sup> In light of this, they can have a major impact on an individual's ability to successfully navigate their return to the community. Furthermore, this survey did not distinguish between a self-reported learning disability per se and an individual's level of literacy. While many of the respondents showed low literacy levels as evidenced by their responses, it is not clear whether these are the same individuals who reported a learning disability. Given the literacy level shown among respondents, programs to improve basic reading and writing skills are worthy of attention particularly as they can improve employability. This is an important area for further examination as, to date, no specialized programs or services are provided for this subpopulation of individuals.

And, finally, individuals in custody are seeking additional jail programming outside of their recreational time, particularly as it relates to pre-release, behavioral health and pro-social programming. This finding is also aligned with findings from the AB 109 Providers Survey.

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<sup>4</sup> [AIMS Public Health](#). 2021; Co-occurring intellectual disability and substance use disorders; 8(3): 479–484.

<sup>5</sup> London: [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#); Mental Health Problems in People with Learning Disabilities: Prevention, Assessment and Management. 2016 Sep. ISBN-13: 978-1-4731-2051-8

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ORJ would like to thank the individuals who took the time to participate in this study. Knowledge gleaned from their input will assist in assessing opportunities for program improvements for all individuals held in detention and those returning to the community. We'd also like to acknowledge our partnership with the County's Sheriff's Department and their efforts in facilitation of the survey.

This report was prepared by the Office of Reentry & Justice. For any questions regarding this survey and report, please contact Kimberly Aseo, Planner/Evaluator, at:  
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