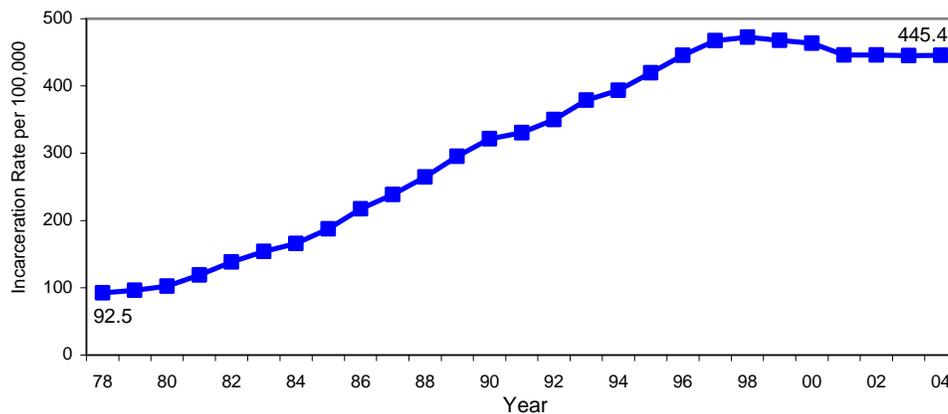


COMING BACK HOME: SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION FOR EX-OFFENDERS

According to national projections from the Bureau of Justice Statistics¹, if current incarceration rates remain unchanged, around one in every 15 individuals (or 7%) will serve time in prison. With these rates significantly related to both gender and ethnicity, it is also estimated that around one in three non-Hispanic Black males will be incarcerated at some point in their lives. In California, the prison incarceration rate has increased 382 percent since 1978 (Figure 1). At the same time, the number of ex-offenders returning to the community has also increased, with over 118,000 individuals released in 2004 (compared to 9,210 in 1978)².

Figure 1
CALIFORNIA'S PRISON INCARCERATION RATE HAS GROWN OVER THE PAST 27 YEARS



SOURCE: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Data, 2005

What challenges do these individuals face when returning home? According to information collected from local arrestees who had previously served time in prison³, the three greatest problems faced upon release included:

- **Employment:** Ex-offenders often face the stigma of incarceration, are barred from holding some jobs, often lack diplomas or other degrees, have low literacy skills, and are faced with stiffer competition for a shrinking number of blue collar jobs.
- **Housing:** Finding a safe place to live can be a challenge for anyone in a tight housing market, but it can be even tougher for those with limited financial resources who lack references and a job.
- **Substance abuse:** Alcohol and other drug use have been identified as the number one health problem for incarcerated individuals, with three in four convicted inmates having alcohol/drug involvement at the time of the instant offense. If treatment needs are not addressed, this cycle will continue.

With only two in five of these arrestees reporting having received services in prison, and one in four receiving assistance upon release, it is essential that we address the needs of these individuals and their families as they return home. If not, our communities will pay the price with increased recidivism rates and decreased public safety. Some current local efforts include the San Diego Reentry Roundtable and SB 618, both of which strive to increase family integration, reduce recidivism, and improve public safety.

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics (2006). *Criminal Offender Statistics Summary Findings*. Available on-line at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.crimoff.htm.

² California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (2005). *California Prisoners and Parolees 2004*. Sacramento, CA: Author.

³ Twenty-one percent (21%) of local arrestees interviewed as part of the SAM project reported previously serving time in prison.