

Whatcom County Jail Inmate Survey Results

August 2022

Public Health, Safety, and Justice Initiative Stakeholder Advisory Committee

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Methods



Methods

- Inmate surveys conducted on July 16, 2022 at the Jail and Work Center
- The Jail Educator gave paper surveys to inmates in 15 housing units through a hatch at the unit door
 - Inmates restricted to individual cells were not accessible for this survey
 - Housing units surveyed included inmates classified as general population, medical/mental health, sex offenders, inmate workers, and work-crew
- Returned an hour later to collect surveys
- Participation was voluntary
- No incentives offered

About participants

Surveys completed:

100

Daily census:

329

% of total population:

30%

About participants

Location:

Work Center = 62%

Jail = 38%

Population:

General Population = 78%

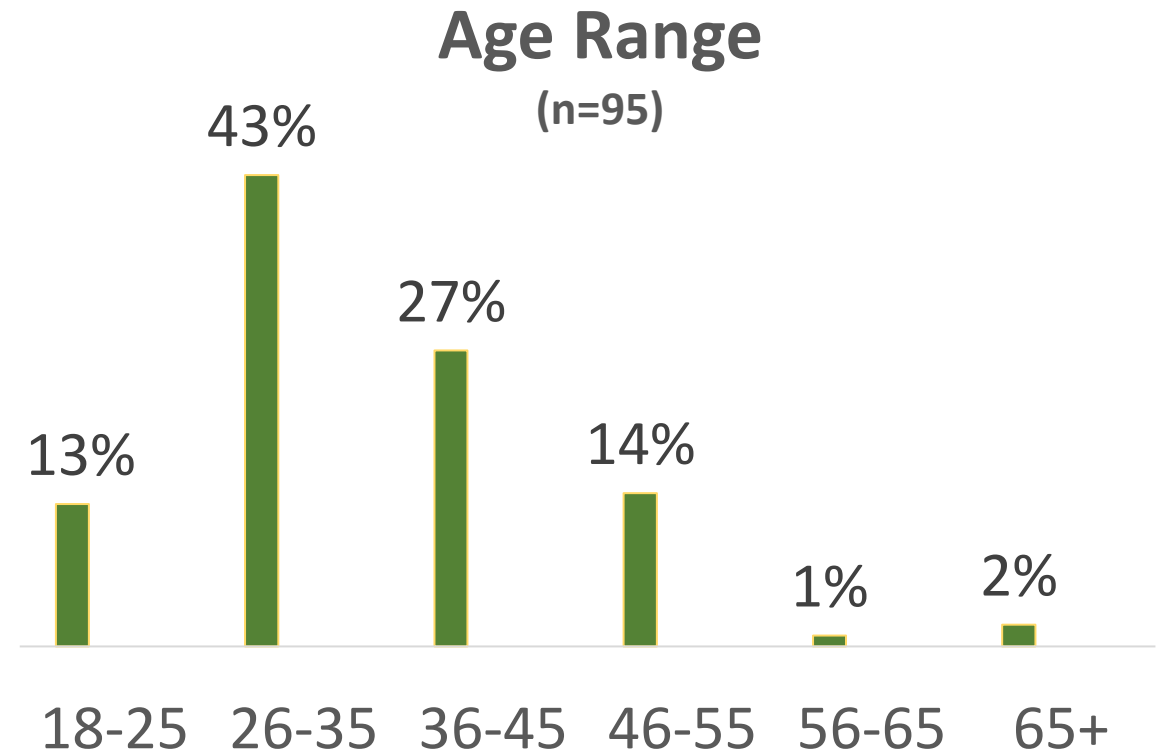
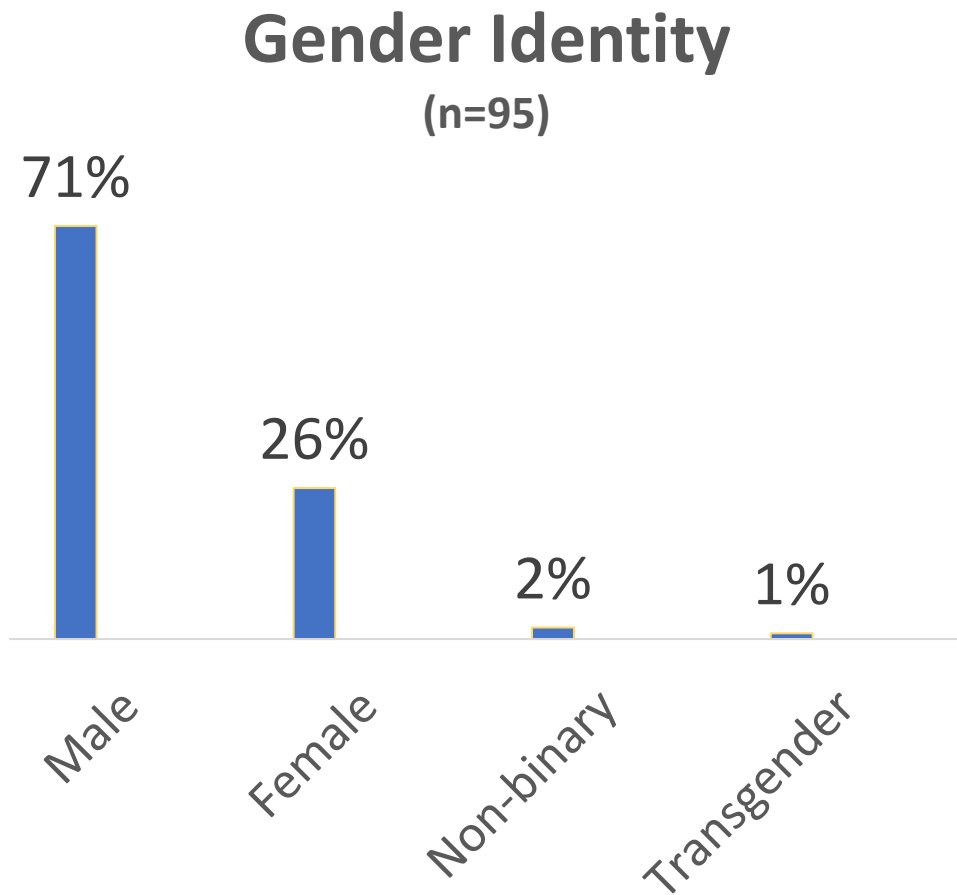
Sex Offender = 12%

Medical/Mental Health = 10%

Participant Demographics

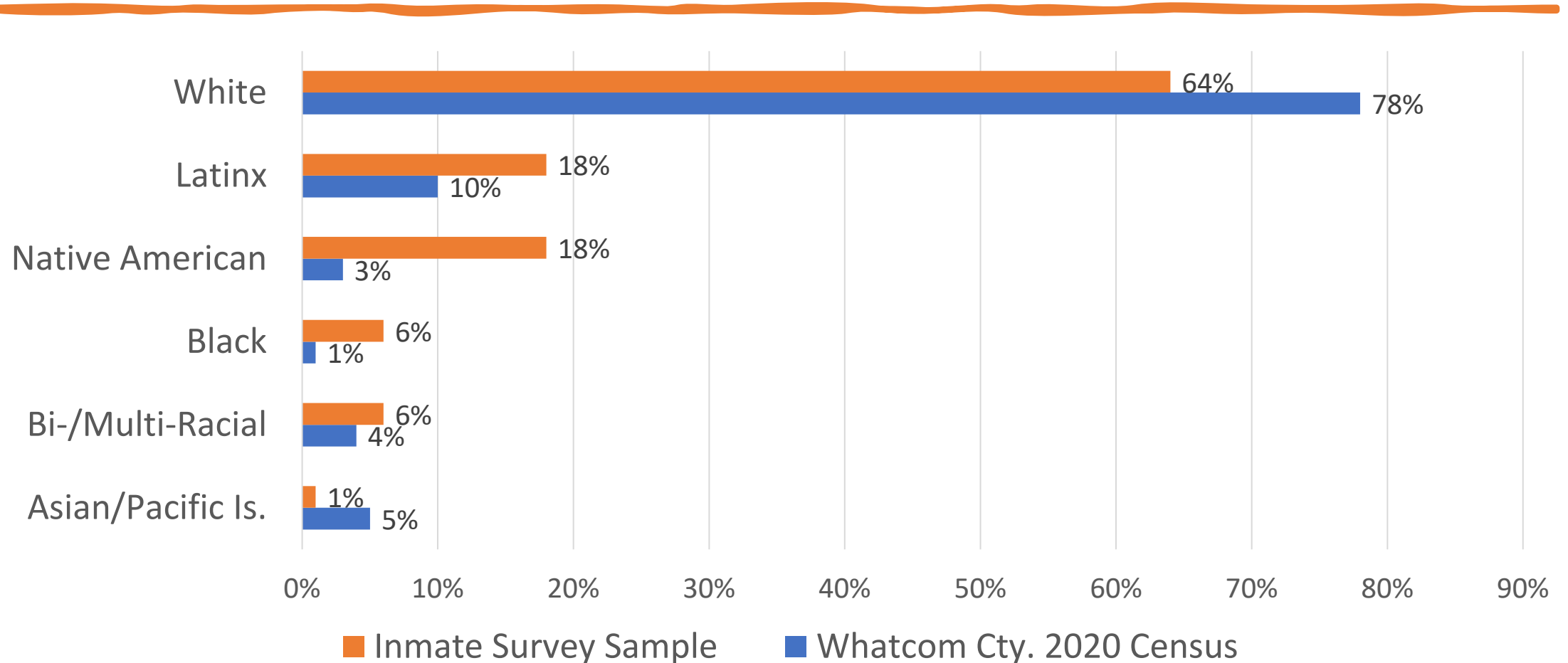


Gender & Age Range



Race/Ethnicity

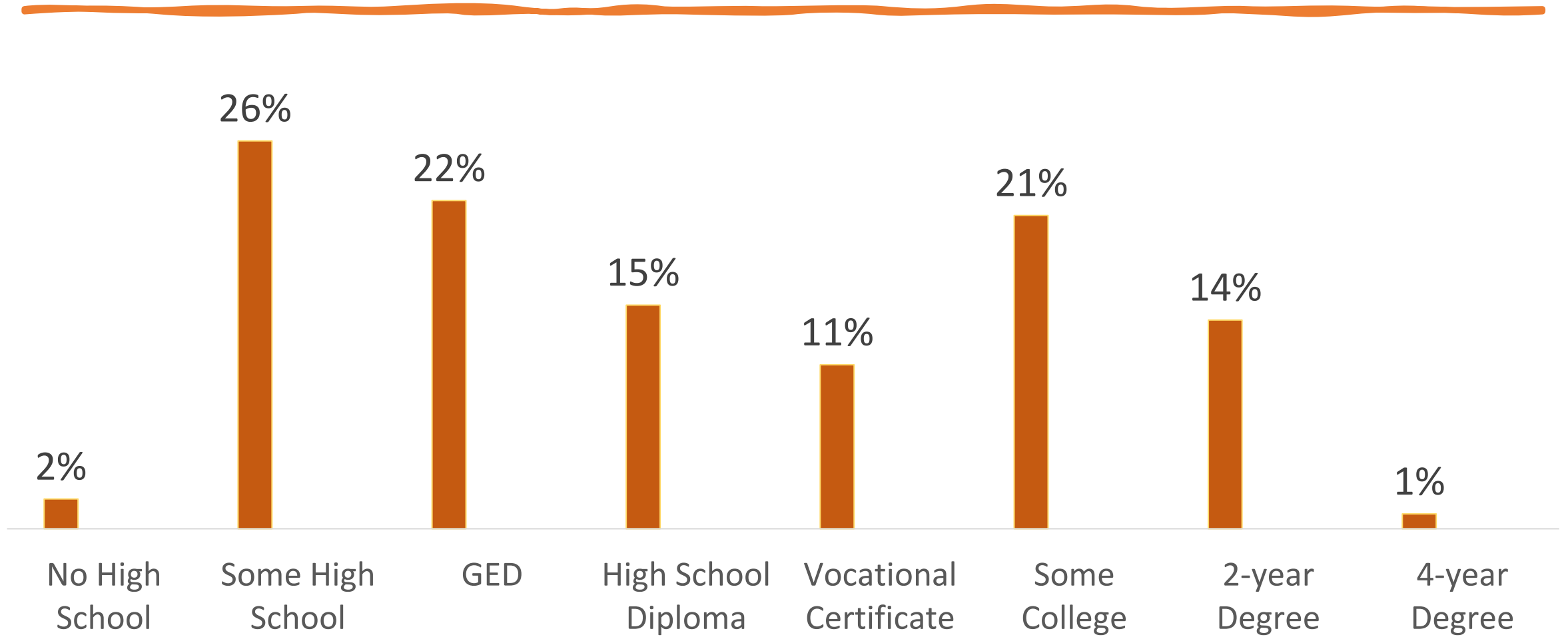
(n=95)



Note: 9 respondents marked more than one race/ethnicity so the total is greater than 100%

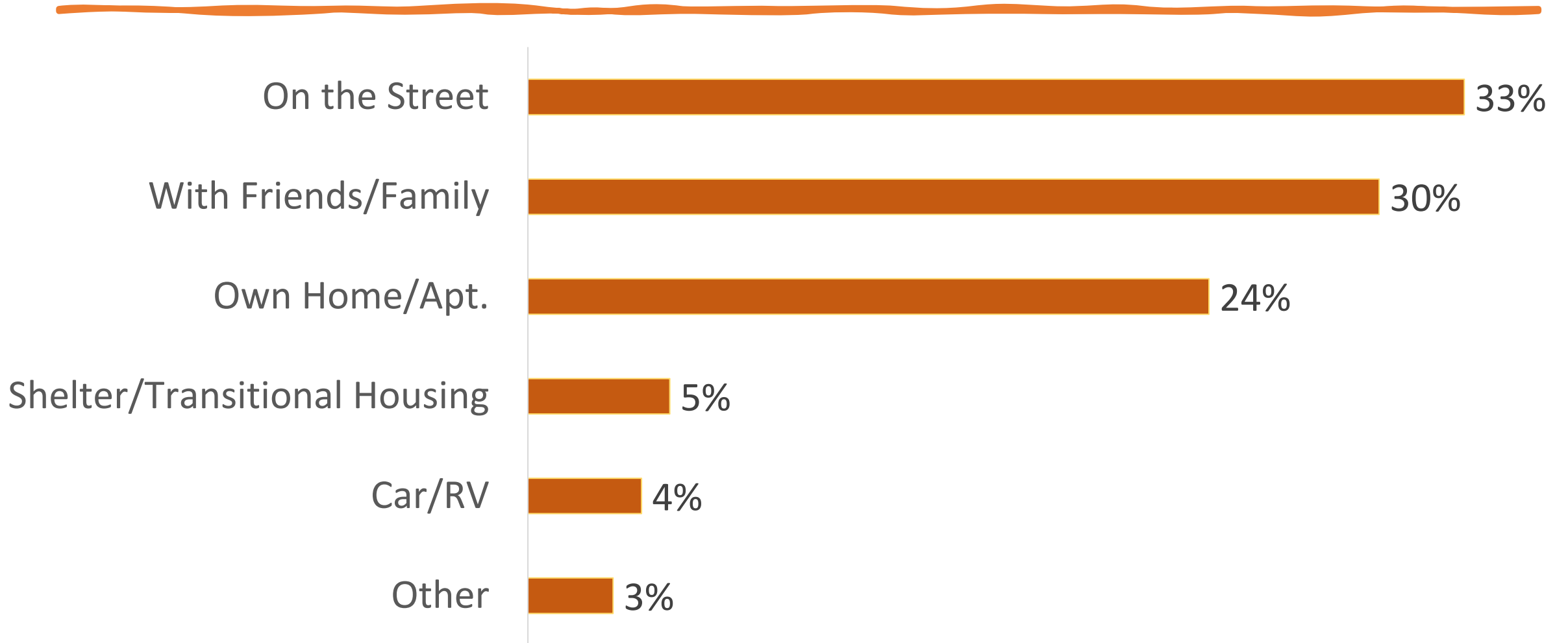
Education

(n=96)



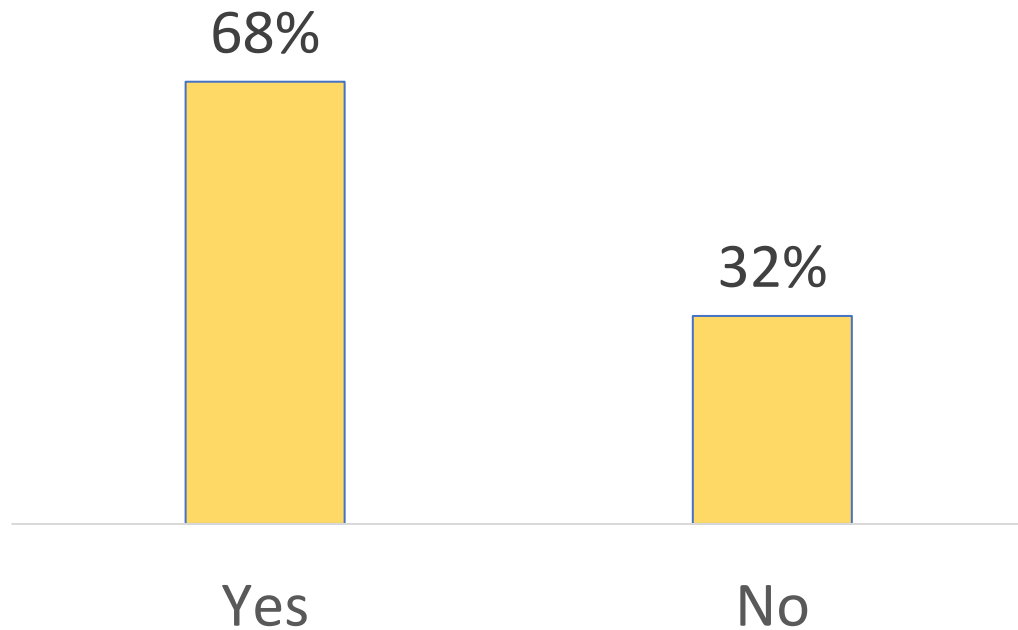
Living Situation Before Jail

(n=99)

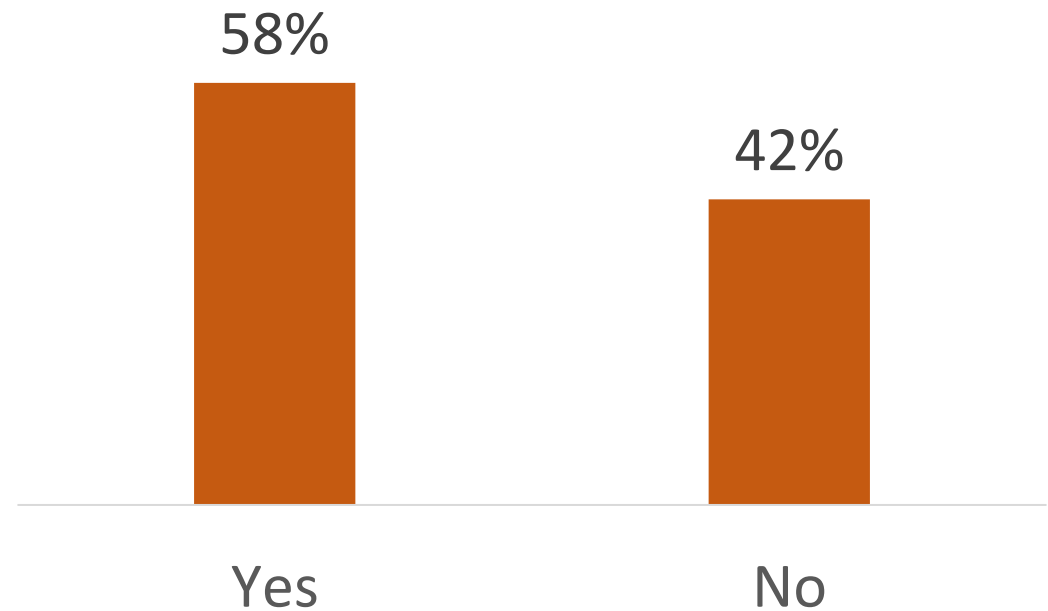


Behavioral Health Issues

Ever Received Services for
Addiction/Substance Use
(n=98)



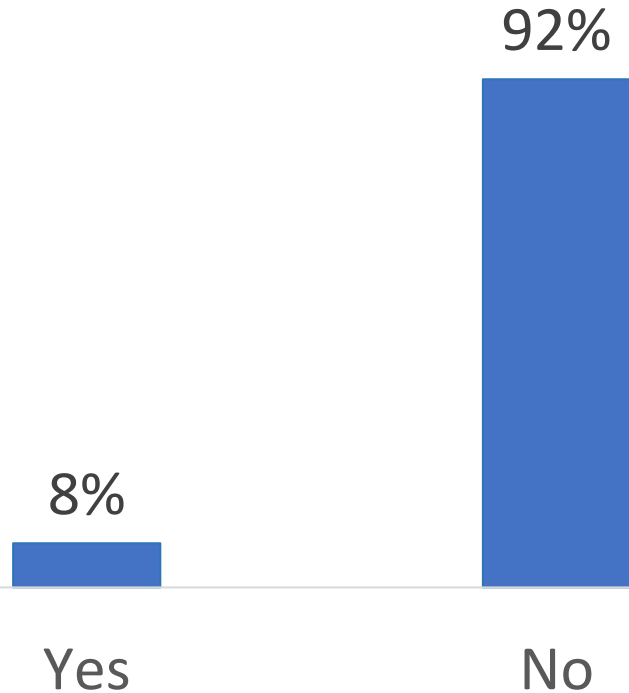
Ever Received Services for
Mental Health
(n=93)



Times in Jail

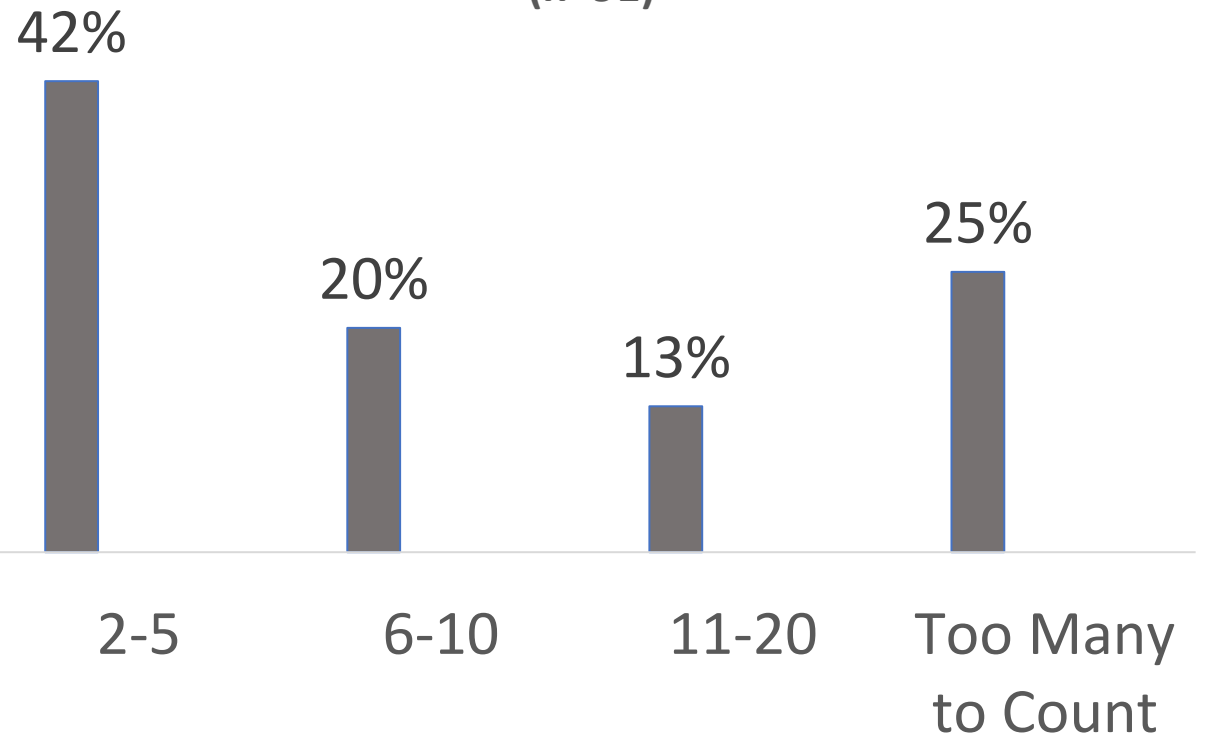
1st Time in Jail?

(n=99)



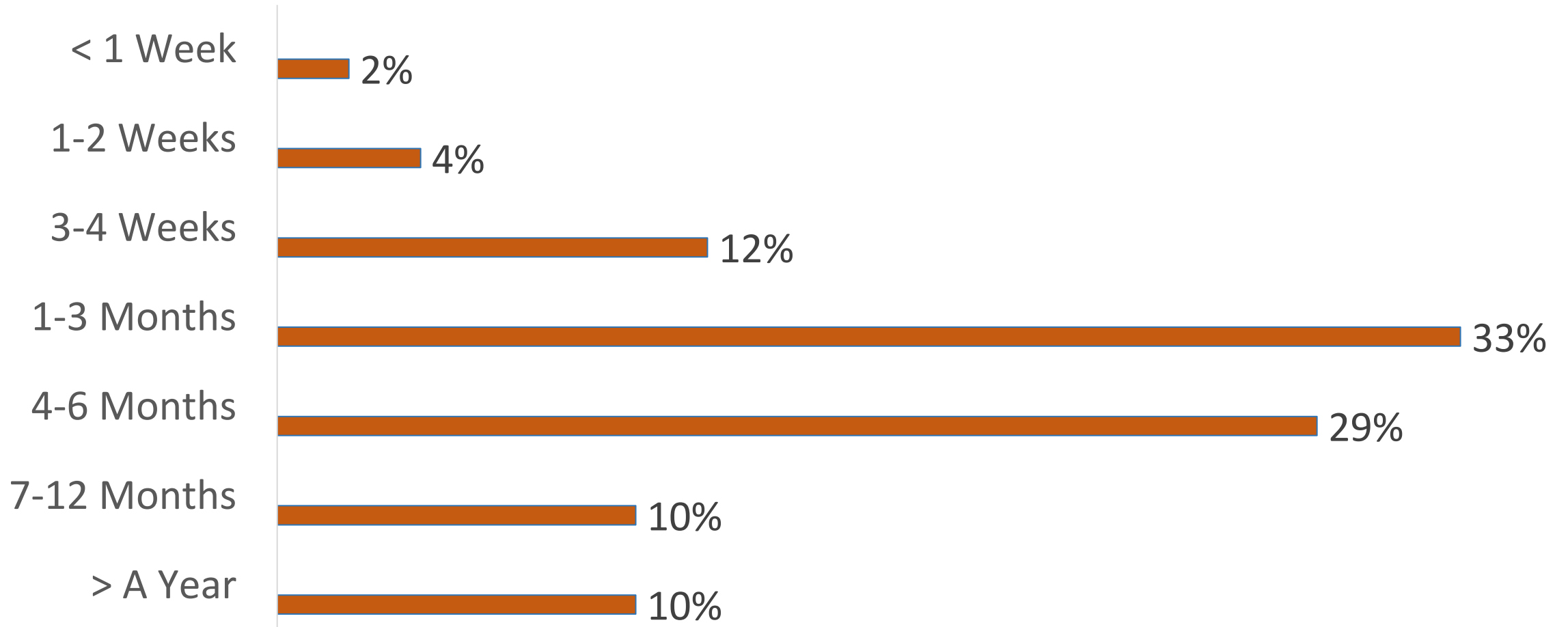
Times You Spent More Than a Day in Jail

(n=91)



How long in jail (this time)?

(n=100)



Time in jail has been longer because...

(n=96)

-
- 68% – Delays with court system (COVID-related, attorney delays)
 - 63% – Not being able to pay bail
 - 19% – Mental health issues (waiting for evaluation)
 - 19% – Dealing with drug/alcohol problems
 - 11% – Discrimination (race/ethnicity, gender, other)
 - 1% – Immigration status
 - 13% – Other
 - Awaiting inpatient bed
 - Awaiting caseworker assignment
 - Waiting on Drug Court
 - Cases in multiple counties
 - Unable to meet probation demands without transportation/phone
 - Lost important info
 - Going to prison
 - Prior history
 - Fighting a case

During your time in jail, how
have things changed for you?



Employment

(n=97)

○ 41% I was unemployed before and am still unemployed

○ 3% I was employed and am still employed

↓ 35% Lost job

↑ 14% Have a new job lined up for when I get out of jail

↑ 4% Gained job skills

Other:

3% - On SSI/SSDI

2% - Lost customers/contract

1% - Retired

1% - Lost tools of the trade

3% - Plan to look for new job upon release

1% - Plan to start school upon release

1% - Own my own business

Education

(n=87)

- **66%** I have not done any educational activities while in jail
- ↓ **5%** I had to drop out when I went to jail
- ↑ **10%** I am working toward a degree while in jail
- ↑ **5%** I have participated in some educational classes with a teacher while in jail
- ↑ **1%** I have pursued vocational training for a job while in jail
- ↑ **22%** I have done some things to educate myself while in jail
 - 10% - Study independently (read, tablet work, podcasts, radio)
 - 2% - Bible study
 - 1% - The Kite Program & educational programs
 - 1% - Listen to other inmates

Education Comments

6% There are no educational programs in jail

2% Requested to start GED program, waiting

1% *The only program here sends you packets, does not help everyone, I have IEP*

1% *I wish we can sign up online at any college, especially with tablet and wifi access*

Housing

(n=90)

- 36% I was homeless before and am still homeless
- 18% I had a home before and I still have a home
- ↓ 43% Lost housing I had
- ↑ 11% Have new housing lined up for when I get out of jail

Other:

3% - Lost vehicle, parking, possessions

3% - Need help (reentry support)

2% - Awaiting housing program placement

1% - *I wish we could apply online and have a release date for landlords*

1% - *Got resources for housing but have no phone time to set up if I had a release date*

Relationships

(n=95)

Family

- 36% No change in my family relationships
- ↓ 38% Increased conflict with family members
- ↓ 6% Lost family support (or have none)
- ↑ 9% Decreased conflict with family members

Friends

- 7% No change in my friendships
- ↓ 32% Lost friends or chose to end friendships
- ↑ 17% Made new friends

Other / Comments

2% - *Lost the ability to communicate with friends and family*

1% - *Everything fine*

1% - *Complications*

1% - *Getting married*

1% - *My boyfriend in here too*

1% - *Met people to get/use drugs with - better connections*

1% - *My first son is being born in a few days, missing the birth due to attorney's mess up, my fiancé is leaving me now because I am here*

Finances

(n=95)

- 35% No change in my finances
- ↓ 45% Lost benefits (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, from job)
- ↓ 36% Went into debt because of legal fees
- ↓ 6% - Lost job/income
- ↑ 3% Got signed up for benefits for when I get out of jail

Other / Comments

1% - *I keep getting more in debt from my way over high child support*

1% - *Brigid Collins was the best outreach and I even could have access to it*

1% - *I need to be released to continue back to work, I will strive, work hard to get up enough money, might take years but I am dedicated for my financial future, home for my baby.*

1% - *Damaged credit*

1% - *Mom pays commissary other than that I'm indigent. Wish to have some cash when released so I won't steal again from non-Christians.*

Physical Health

(n=95)

↓ 42% Physical health has gotten worse

○ 29% No change in physical health

↑ 22% Physical health has improved

Any Other Changes?

(n=36)

19% - Weight gain – positive for some/negative for others.

17% - Not getting needed medical care

- *In some ways I'm a healthier weight but my seizures are getting worse and they do nothing for me about them.*

17% - Complaints about food (e.g., hungry)

14% - Dealing with pain &/or illness

- *More pain now than ever. I've had COVID twice since I've been in here.*

14% - Mental health is worse

11% - Mental health is improved

- *I am free, I am myself, I am clean, I am hungry.*

11% - Getting Subutex treatment for opioid addiction

17% - Other comments

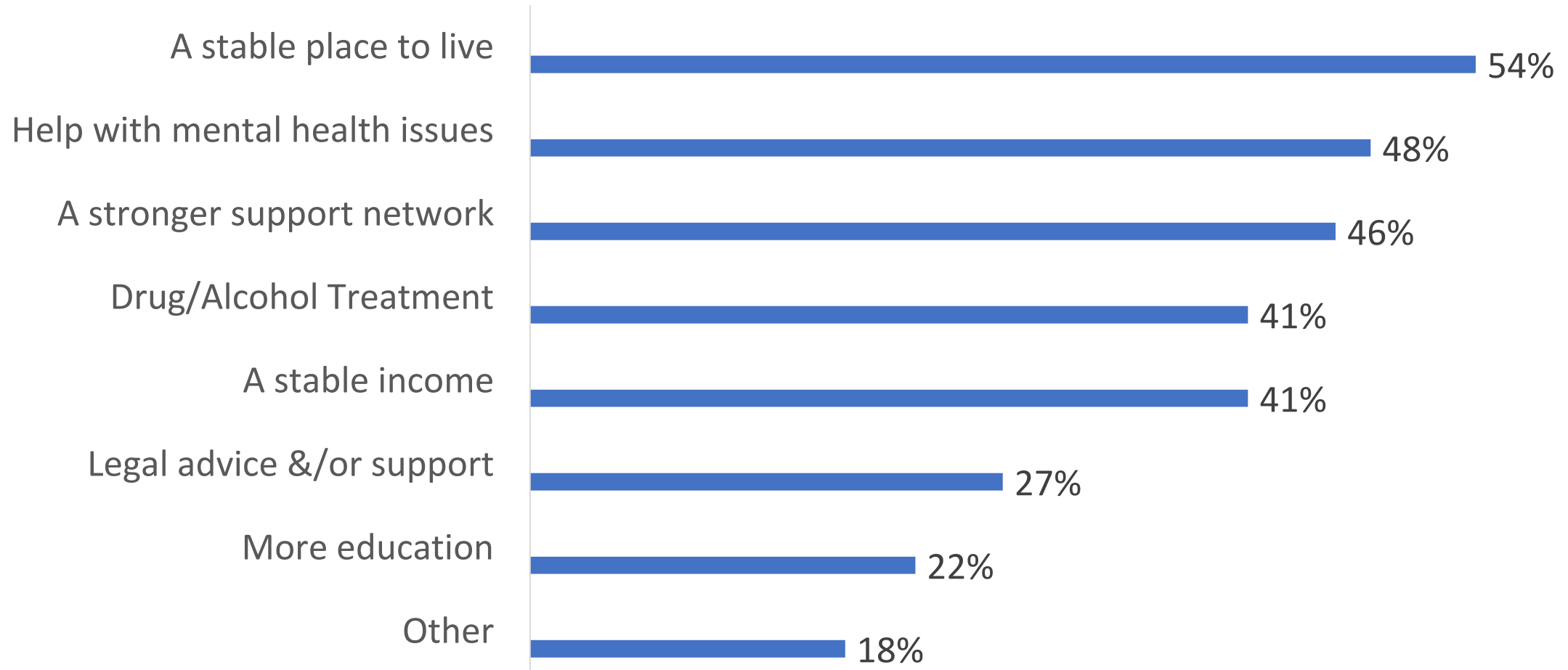
- *Haven't been able to communicate with people due to poor disability services.*
- *They are doing more with my medical problems.*

Services
(needed & received by inmates)



What Would Have Helped You Avoid Jail?

(n=96)



What Would Have Helped You Avoid Jail?

Other

7% - If case were handled differently

- *The state dropping no contact order when girlfriend asked*
- *Fair treatment from the legal system and how men are treated in Washington State*

3% - Making better choices

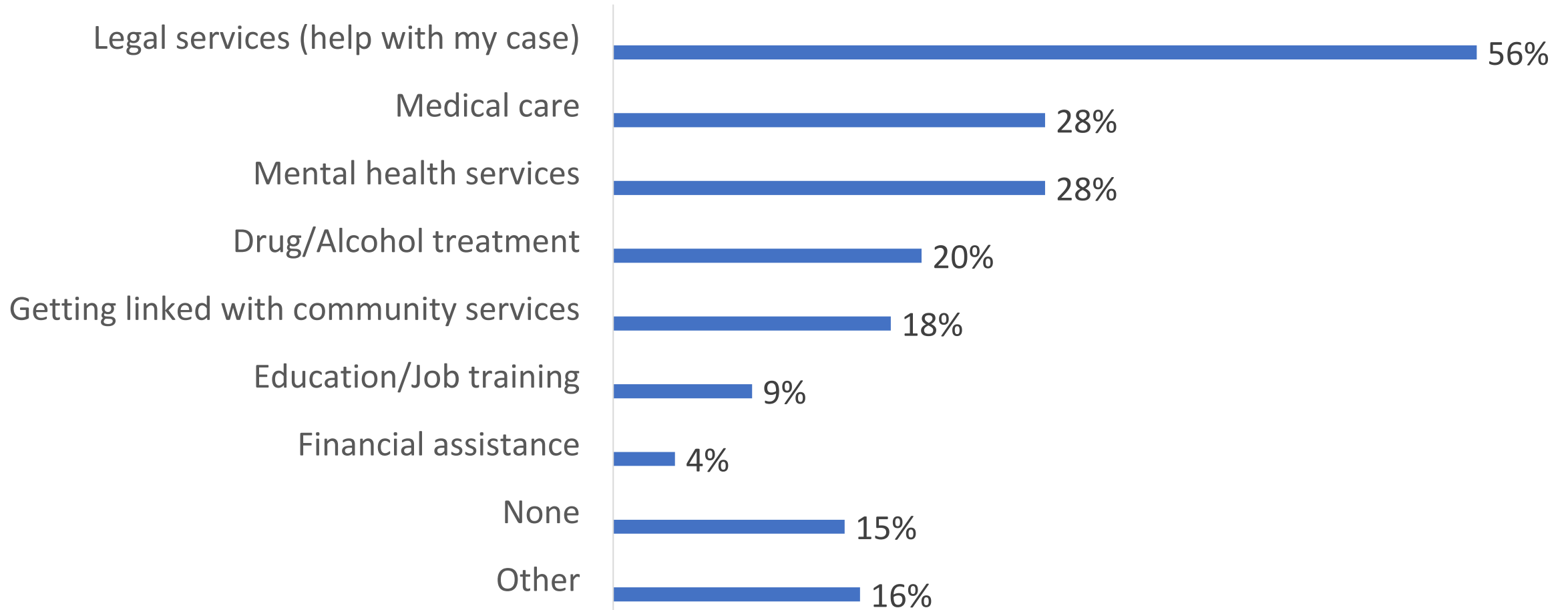
- *Not being stupid*

2% - Housing

5% - Other

Which Services Are You Getting in Jail?

(n=79)



Services Received in Jail

Other / Comments

6% - Waiting for needed services

- *I am waiting to be contacted by mental health*
- *I need help with my case*
- *Haven't heard from my public defender once*
- *Asked for help with community services but haven't gotten any yet*

3% - Poor medical care

1% - Other

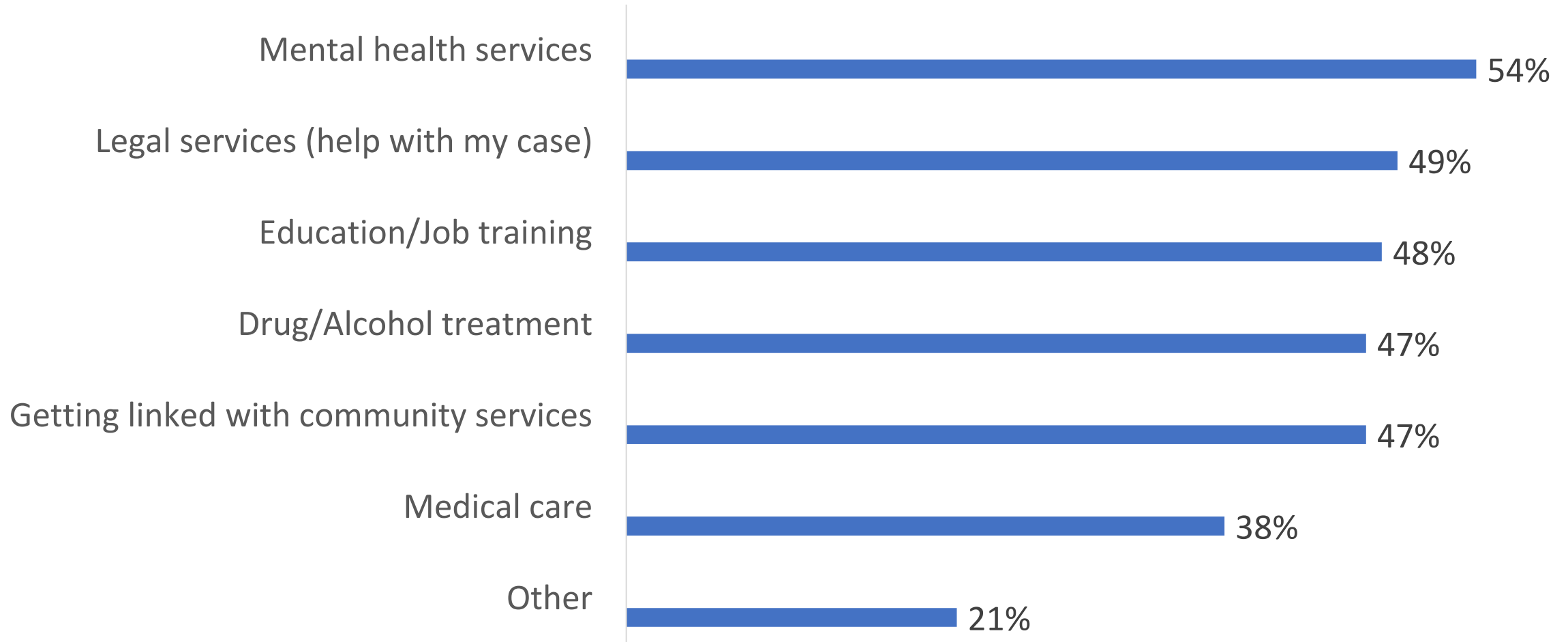
- *Family services - parenting (Brigid Collins)*

Comments

- *Need treatment/Re entry program, not prison*
- *The jail keeps making excuses and blaming COVID but even before COVID there was no help*

Services You Need More of or Wish You Had While in Jail

(n=94)



Services You Need More of or Wish You Had in Jail

Other / Comments

14% - Specific Community Services Needed

- 7% - Housing
- 3% - Family / DV Services
- 2% - Documents & Benefits (SSI, ID, birth certificate)
- 2% - Medical / Dental

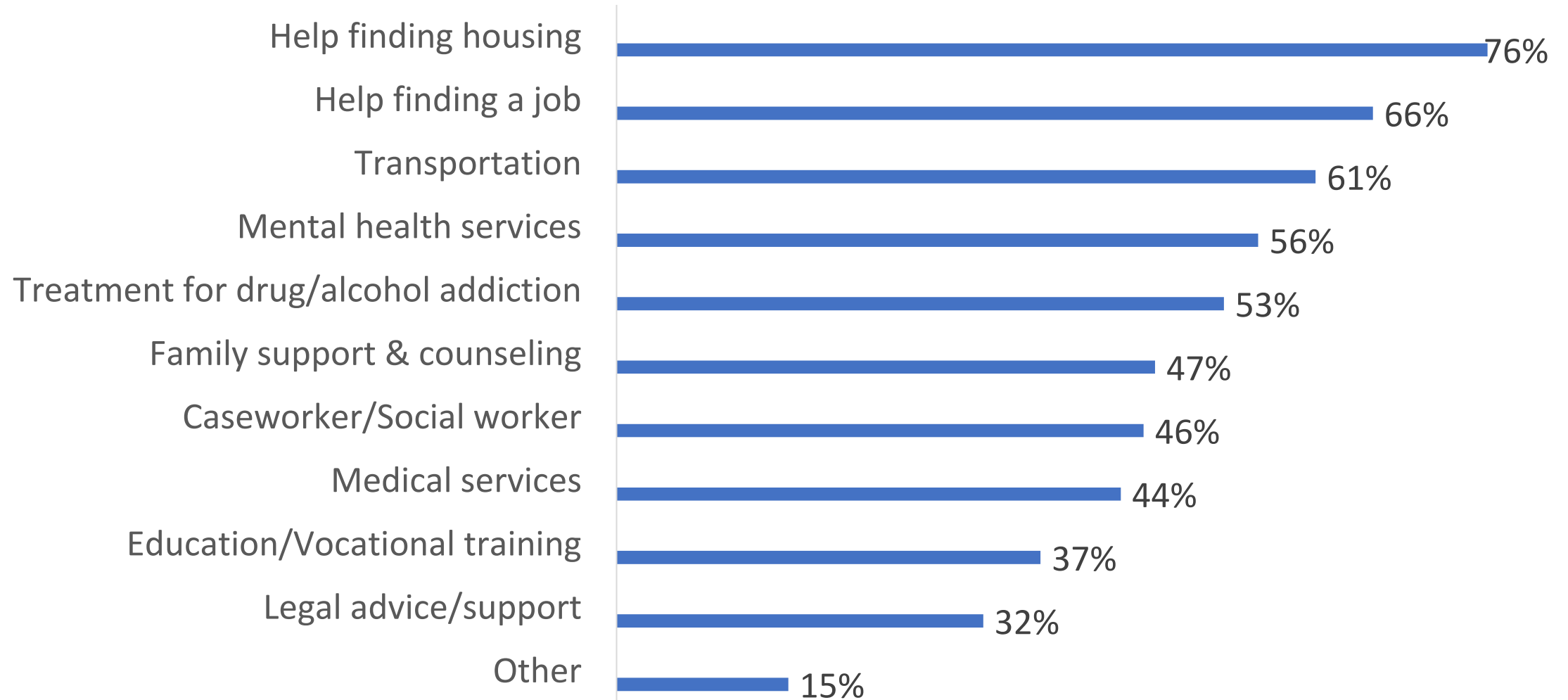
4% - Other

- *...Better diet, fresh air, more rec time and games*
- *...Work to make money and gain skills. Outside rec time. In person and electronic visiting.*
- *More communication.*
- *Having things set up while I'm in here instead of just giving me a list.*

3% - Services Are Not Available

Community Support Needed to be Successful When You Get Out of Jail

(n=95)



Community Services Needed for Success

Other / Comments

3% - All of the above (for others who need them)

- *I'm all set up but I'm circling em all on behalf of others cuz I remember when I needed this all*
- *Help rebuild people so they can help rebuild the county*

3% - Specific Community Services Needed

- 2% - Money / Benefits
- 1% - Dental

6% - Other

- *A stable place to live, eat, work, worship, and thrive*

Comments

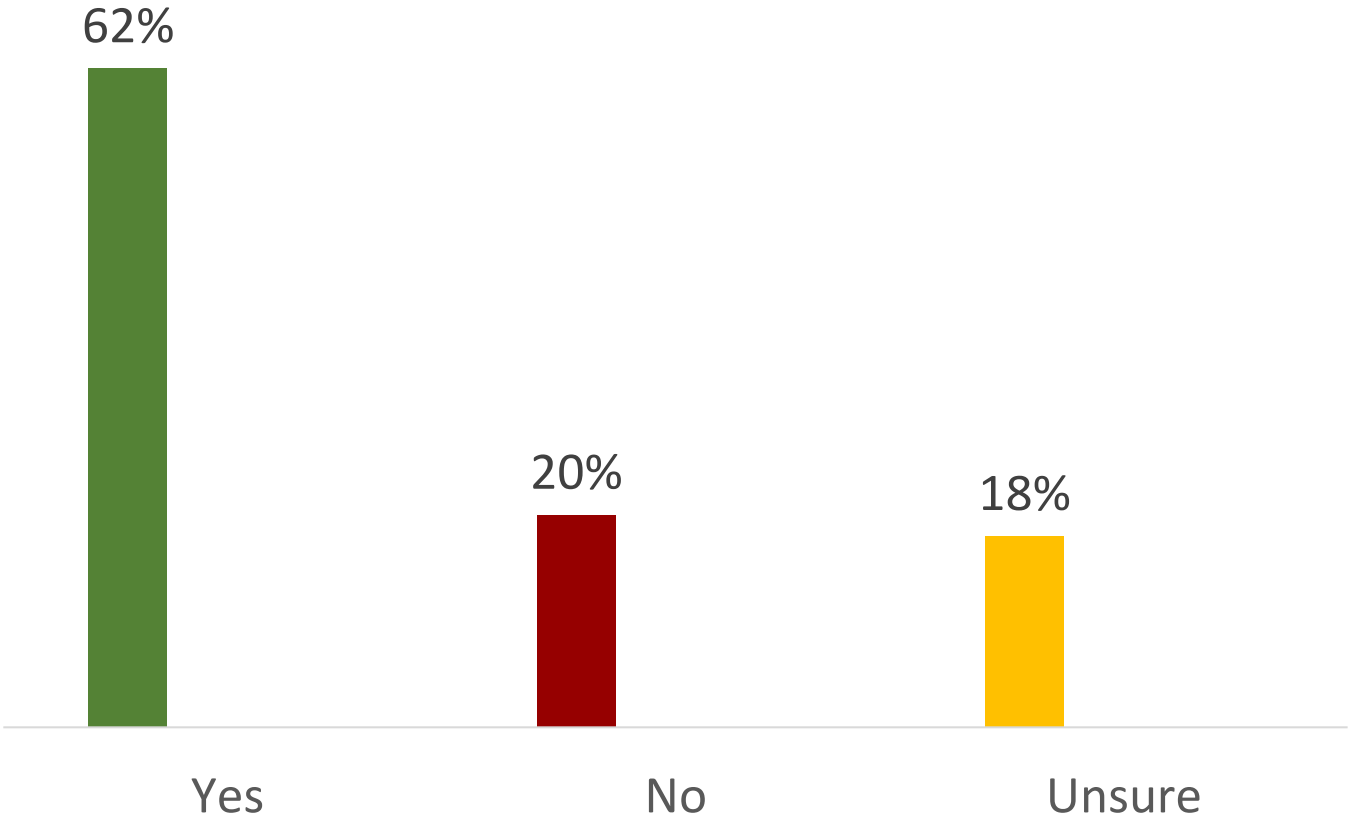
- *Not all are by choice, and some aren't needed, but wise to look into.*
- *If you ask the re-entry lady for help, she will ask how long you've been locked up and if it's longer than 90 days she will tell you that you don't qualify for any housing assistance which is the most backwards thing I've ever heard.*

Thoughts About Building a New Jail



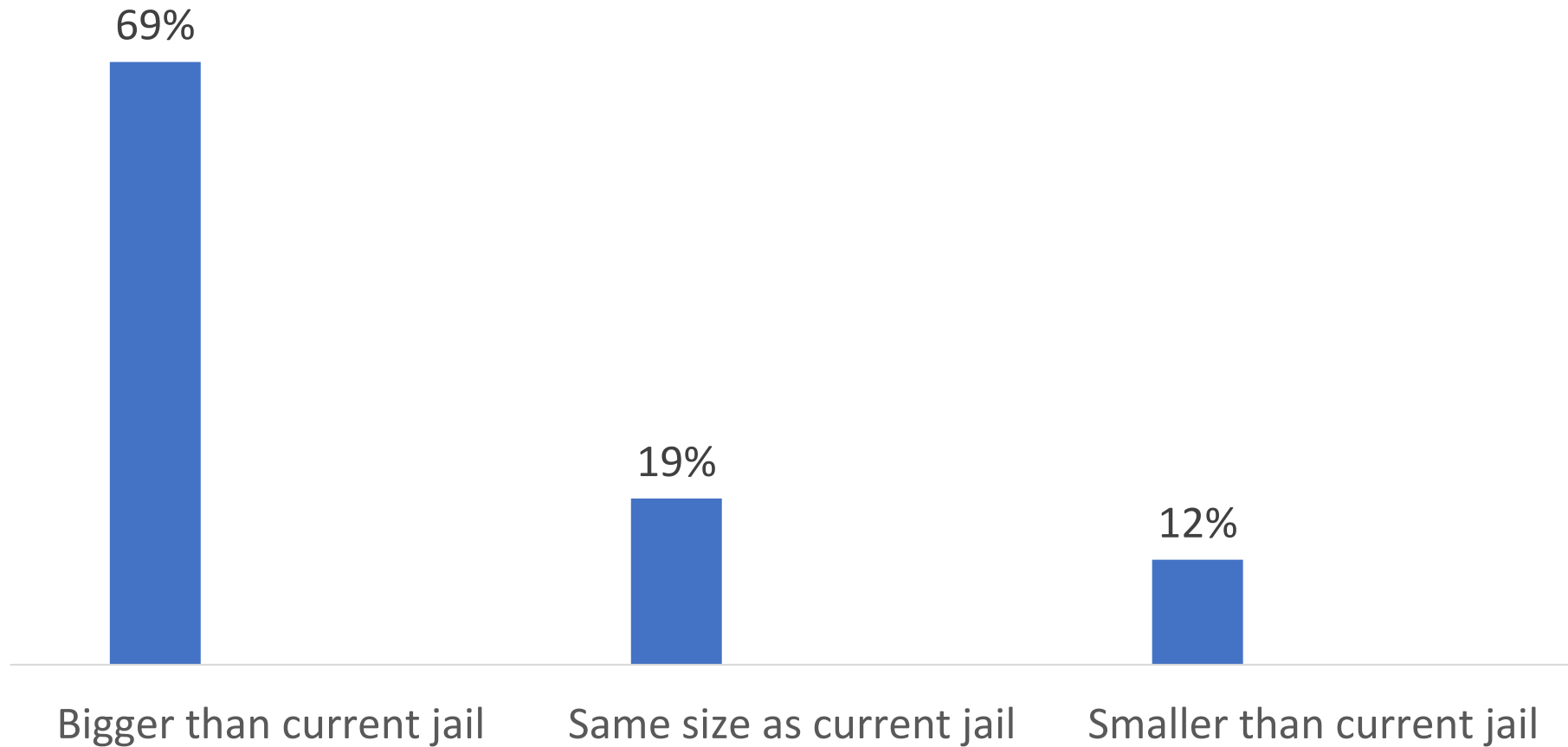
Does Our County Need To Build a New Jail?

(n=96)



If a new jail were to be built, what size should it be?

(n=85)



Why a New Jail Should be Bigger

(n=50)

34% - It is currently overcrowded

20% - Make space for more services

- *To hold more vital things that are important to rehab success: treatment, detox, education/school, and re-entry classes.*
- *Need gym equipment, schooling, counseling center.*

16% - Accommodate increasing populations (increasing crime rate)

- *More people are getting in trouble.*

10% - Make outdoor recreation space available

- *Maybe so we could have some outdoor rec area. I haven't seen the light of day in 4 months.*

8% - Building is in bad shape

- *This jail is condemned! We have black mold on the walls and water stains.*
- *Outdated, very unhygienic, its like a dungeon.*

8% - Separate people with different needs

- *For different mind states/level of offenders status: min, med, max.*

6% - Combine Jail and Work Center into one facility

10% - Other

Why a New Jail Should be Same Size

(n=7)

- *So we have room for crime but not too much room that we lock up petty criminals.*
- *The goal is rehabilitation, not to make us better criminals.*
- *The jail downtown is falling apart. They don't need a bigger jail, they need less incarceration.*
- *Needs to have more people actually helped that need it and not just released, also release more people instead of as high as bails.*
- *Because the staff ratio to inmate is important i.e., Subutex.*
- *It needs to be updated...*
- *If not smaller*

Why a New Jail Should be Smaller

(n=10)

- *Build a mental health drug rehab first.*
- *We need more solutions, jail should not be a mental hospital. It's sad.*
- *Housing people in jail is not a cure, it is a cop out to helping people. Rebuild the people to rebuild the county.*
- *Petty crimes would be released.*
- *Maybe it could help give alternatives rather than constantly incarcerating citizens for any reason possible.*
- *Stop putting so many innocent people in jail. Reel in the crooked cops. This many people should not be in jail.*
- *I think the county keeps arresting a lot of people that should not be incarcerated and this is even known at time of arrest.*
- *Workers can't keep up with their job description.*
- *Educate more.*

Why We Should Not Build New Jail

(n=5)

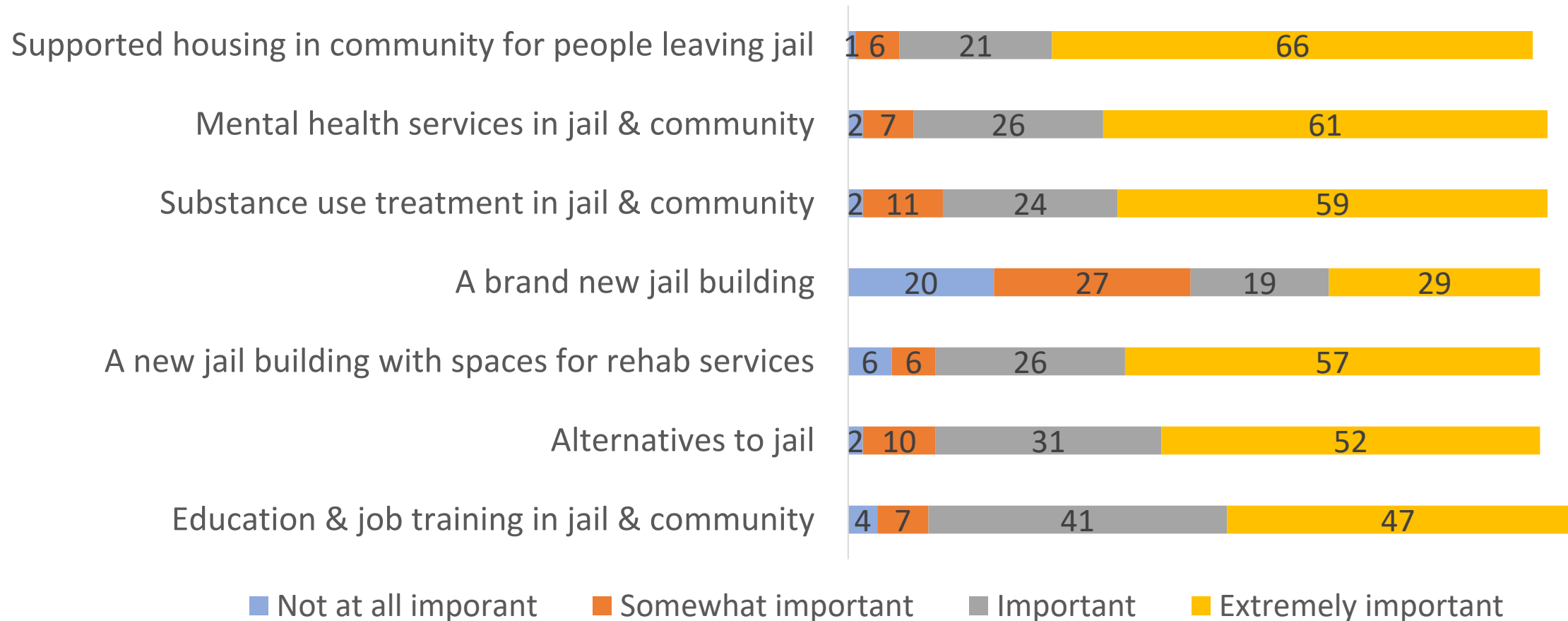
- *Jailing people for property crimes or drugs is wrong. Should be reserved for monsters!*
- *Funds should go towards prevention not prosecution.*
- *Don't need new jail. Need programs to keep people out of jail and getting the help they need.*
- *They just need to run this jail better, more med staff so we can get meds everyday.*
- *This place is historical and should stay where it is.*

Criminal Legal System Priorities

Imagine that you are in charge of the county budget and you have to prioritize how you spend the money that is available. Your main goal is to keep the community safe and healthy. Where do you think the county's money should be spent?

How important is each of these priorities?

(n=95)



Other Priorities / Comments

(n=20)

30% - Emphasize need for housing

- *Housing can be key to end crime for some grownups ready for change.*
- *Housing coupled with job training/placement with goal of permanent housing made available.*

25% - Negative statement about the system or jail

- *...Incarceration is a failed idea.*

15% - Desire for job / job training

- *Offer convicted criminals a place to work (like farm or production) instead of jail.*

15% - Want alternatives to incarceration

- *Continued mental health and drug treatment and different means of serving sentences.*

25% - Other

- *Disability services*
- *Free medical*
- *Counseling for families to help understand why people become repeat offenders in this system.*
- *An end to unwanted no contact orders that destroy families and demoralize men.*

Additional Comments

The final question asked for “Anything else you would like us to know.” There were 59 responses. These open-ended comments were grouped by topic and are presented in the following slides. Many respondents commented on multiple topics and each topic is counted separately.

Additional Comments

(n=59)

27% - Complaints about jail food; hungry

22% - Criminal legal system is unjust

- I know this isn't a Whatcom only issue but cash bail criminalizes being poor. If I had money to bail out, I would still have a job and home and be a productive member of society. Because I'm poor I'm stuck, lose everything which works to keep me poor.*
- The Whatcom County judicial system is unfair and completely biased. The point system is broken and the lack of help for felons almost guarantees reoffending.*
- In this county its guilty until proven innocent because some of us have a record. We basically get charged twice cause of our past. Sometimes it seems like the public defenders don't want to put in the work for us to get better deals. And our court dates get pushed out months apart, with no sign of progress.*
- I have been incarcerated for 21 months due to backup of court systems and cases. My bail is 1.5 million. I am seriously innocent of the charge pressed on me and I feel it was way too easy for the legal system to just put a charge on me and then leave me stuck in here until I can prove my innocence...*
- ...what surprised me, and sickens me ... is them using Covid (when there isn't, and hasn't been, a Covid mandate since March) to take away our speedy trial rights. We don't get our court paperwork, we don't have to sign anything, the public defenders won't answer our calls, we aren't told about omnibus and trial...*

Additional Comments

(n=59)

17% - Suggested improvements for the criminal legal system

- *I think our county should put more effort into creating programs like Lake Whatcom Center/Opportunity Council.*
- *The tablets if used right can help inmates... Maybe offer a free subscription monthly if they do x amount of self help... Incentives for better behavior.*
- *They should offer sweatshirts and underwear and bras and a workout program.*
- *Prices for store and media should be more reasonable (they would make more money) -Our religious nights should be similar to in prison (i.e., more materials available and to be sent in) - We should be able to access an open line phone so we can call outside services that aren't able to answer collect (banks, churches, etc.) -More access to substantial legal help -Print out of all available services.*
- *To be able to have access to more books!*
- *Outdoor time for appropriate individuals, a functioning garden grown by inmates, group/one on one counseling. The tablets help with mental health, anything that would make being incarcerated not cause more mental health issues.*
- *To put services in will help inmates learn new ways to help stay out.*

Additional Comments

(n=59)

12% - Compliments/Expressions of gratitude

- *I think you are doing the best you can with the limited staffing and resources you have.*
- *Thanks for taking our needs/wants into consideration.*
- *I have really enjoyed the school in jail program and appreciate the effort taken to provide that program to inmates.*

10% - Consequences of incarceration

- *If you go to jail for 90 days or less and you lose your job and house. There is no help when you are released. You are just left to the streets. Getting back on your feet once you are homeless with nothing is extremely difficult. How can you keep your job when you can't do work release till you are sentenced? But it takes months to get sentenced since you only get 1 court date a month if you're lucky.*
- *I've lost everything the last couple months.*
- *By the time I am freed it will be over two years of my life and my kids lives that I cannot get back.*
- *I have been in 1 year and I have lost my property my house and my wife. You make me totally depend on being in jail because I have nothing left so it is my home and I have always owned my own house but I have lost it. Because all my bills come in and I am unable to pay so I lose it.*

Additional Comments

(n=59)

8% - Need outdoor recreation/exercise

- *I have not seen or felt the sun in three months!!! More consistent time outside rain or shine.*
- *Years in county jail without vitamins to buy and lack of sun isn't good. ... We need exercise equipment to possibly create healthy atmosphere.*

8% - Difficulty getting needed services

- *Receiving the right treatment for medical reasons is so hard most of the time... When treated medically here, I am usually asked how long do I think I will be incarcerated for before they decide next steps.*
- *I need treatment for mental health but they're saying my restitution is too high so I don't qualify.*
- *I don't get how jail is about rehabilitation if we don't have these services. Lacking these critical things will cause more crime.*

5% - Desire for work/wages

- *Lack of jobs for most inmates gives them no motivation. Jobs would give purpose and pride and get them ready for work life when released.*

5% - Treated as sub-human

- *You need to treat your inmates like people, not trash!*

Additional Comment

*... A lot of people who can't afford commissary here at the jail depend on the meals we are served. Most of the time the food is not cooked all the way. Financial assistance is very important cause half us people who come to Jail are homeless and unemployed and most of us don't have family / friends putting money on our account to buy better food. If there was some way we could pay for our food on EBT cards through Dept. of Social Health Services that would be so great. I also wish we had some counselors that would come talk to us about our mental health or past trauma from child abuse or family issues. I wish we could get a TV in this jail cause the work center has free TV and tablets! We have tablets, but like I said, a lot of us don't have financial assistance to pay for these things. I really hope we get this help cause we are humans. **We deserve second chances. We are humans. We need people who won't give up on us.***