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Information Regarding Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

Hello:

Thank you for contacting us with concerns about substance use disorder treatment within the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation & Reentry (“ADCRR”). We are sorry to send you a form letter but it is the only way we can answer you quickly, given the large number of letters we receive.

As you may know, our office represents the class in the case *Jensen v. Thornell* (formerly called *Jensen v. Shinn*, and *Parsons v. Ryan*). *Jensen* is a federal lawsuit that challenged medical care, including treatment for substance use disorder, as well as mental health care and conditions in maximum custody isolation units in Arizona state prisons. On April 7, 2023, the Court issued an Injunction (a Court Order) that that requires ADCRR to fix these problems. A copy of both orders should be available to you on your tablet or in your law library. There should be no charge for you to review these orders.

Who can receive treatment for substance use disorder (SUD)?

The Jensen Court Order requires all individuals newly admitted to an Arizona state prison to be **screened for** substance use disorder (SUD), and **evaluated for treatment** if SUD is indicated. The Court has given ADCRR up to 18 months to fully implement their substance use treatment program expansion.

Some people will be able to receive medication treatment before the full expansion of the treatment program. For example, all individuals offered treatment for Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) must also be evaluated for opioid use disorder (OUD), and treated if OUD is indicated. If a newly admitted person is prescribed medication for opioid use disorder, ADCRR must offer to continue treatment. Also, all people currently incarcerated in an Arizona state prison with a documented history of overdose, or who are determined by medical staff to be at imminent risk of an opioid overdose, can be offered medication for opioid use disorder.

Under the Order, the ADCRR must begin offering substance use disorder treatment, including counseling and medication at three prisons by October 7, 2023. After that, they must initiate programs at three more prisons every six months. By October 2024, all prisons should have fully functioning treatment programs. In the meantime, if a person is prescribed treatment at one prison complex and transfers to a prison complex that does not yet have a program, their medications must be continued. ADCRR has not yet identified publicly which prisons will be the first three to implement treatment programs.

What treatment does ADCRR offer for SUD?

ADCRR treats SUD with *Buprenorphine* or *Naltrexone*. Buprenorphine is a synthetic opioid approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat opioid use disorder. It reduces cravings and improves the quality of life for patients undergoing addiction treatment. Naltrexone is also FDA approved, and it is used to treat both alcohol use disorder and opioid use disorder. It blocks the “high” and the sedative effects of opioids, and reduces and suppresses cravings.

If a pregnant or post-partum person diagnosed with opioid use disorder is currently being treated with Methadone, they should be offered to continue that treatment. If they are not currently taking medication, they will also be offered Buprenorphine or Naltrexone.

If you have a question or request about SUD or treatment for it, you should file a Health Needs Request (HNR) and ask your doctor. If you cannot resolve your question or request after that, appeal the response to your grievance. Prison Law Office will consider asking prison medical officials about your SUD concern if you send us the highest level response you received about the issue (urgent cases are an exception). Exhausting your remedies is also usually required before you can file your own formal legal action about a medical issue.