



Thirty percent of Rhode Island inmates return to prison after one year. Can Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) help reduce recidivism?

Strategic Goal

Governor Gina Raimondo wants to reduce the three-year recidivism rate from 52 percent to 44 percent by 2020. What are some low-cost ways to meet this goal?

Assessment

RIPL analysis shows that individuals who enroll in SNAP post-release are 7.4 percentage points less likely to recidivate than their non-SNAP counterparts within the first six months. However, only 40 percent of individuals enroll in SNAP post-release, even though nearly all qualify.

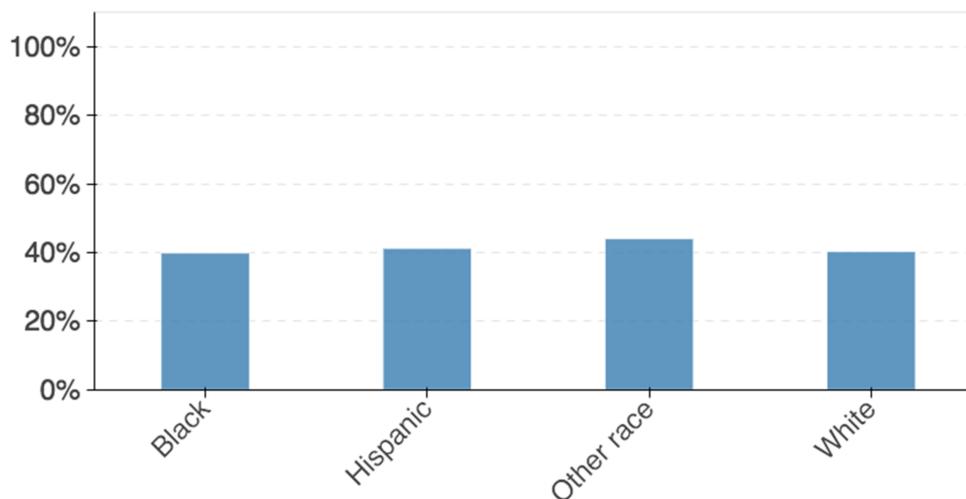


Figure 1: Percent of individuals who enroll in SNAP within three months post-incarceration

Understanding the Challenges

Currently, inmates may receive help to complete a SNAP application while incarcerated but, once released, they must visit a Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) office to complete their enrollment and receive a benefits card (EBT card). However, the myriad challenges individuals face upon release, lack of accessible transportation and wait times may delay or derail enrollment.

RIPL, in collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (DOC) and DHS, developed Connect for Success to ensure all inmates have activated EBT cards post release.

We began by conducting field work to design a likely-successful program:

- We designed a mock-pilot to mimic SNAP enrollment and benefit distribution.
- We surveyed over 100 inmates right before release, and then tested ways to distribute gift cards as mock EBT cards.

- Our survey results showed that 70 percent of prisoners plan to enroll in SNAP upon release; nearly double the number who end up enrolling.
- We found that individuals are anxious to leave, and may miss cards if they are not distributed with exit materials.
- When offered the opportunity to get a \$5 gift card from a nearby building upon their release, only 4 percent did so.

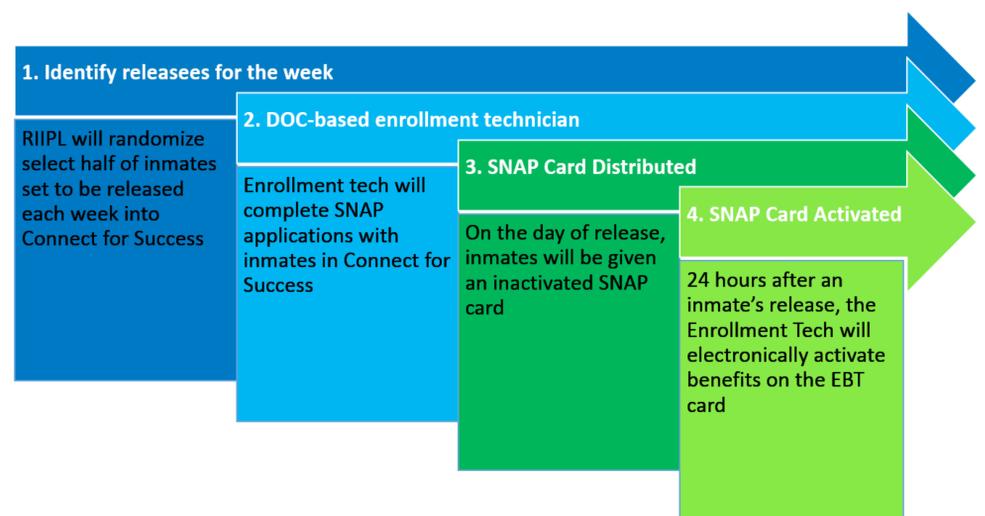


Figure 2: Connect for Success Process Map

Design and Test Improvements

Based on our field work, Connect for Success follows the process below to maximize connecting releasees with benefits.

RIPL is proposing to run a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) of Connect for Success in partnership with policymakers to test its ability to help formerly incarcerated individuals enroll in benefits they are eligible for and reduce their one-, two-, and three-year recidivism rates.

RCTs are an important tool for measuring the outcomes of a policy. First, they allow us to prove impact and measure success. Second, they allows us to rule out any negative, unintended consequences before taking a program to full-scale. Third, they allows others to learn from our trial and scale a proven-successful program in their own state.

Conclusion

Through Connect for Success, we hope to lower recidivism rates by three percentage points – or 30 percent of the Governor’s goal, at almost no cost. Fact-based policy is a powerful tool for alleviating poverty and improving policy effectiveness efficiently.