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# Report says Alabama next to last in prison health care spending

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The Pew Charitable Trusts released a report today on medical care in prisons, a national overview of a state responsibility that is posing major challenges in Alabama. <http://s.al.com/MiuNP>

The report says Alabama spent \$3,234 per inmate on health care in 2015, less than any other state except Louisiana. Indiana, Nevada and South Carolina were the other three states that spent less than \$3,500.

The median spending for states was \$5,720 per inmate. California spent the most, \$19,796. New Hampshire did not provide information for the report.

The numbers cover spending on medical, dental, mental health and substance abuse care.

Alabama's spending grew by 1 percent from 2010 to 2015, according to the report. The median growth among states was 2 percent during that time.

The report says higher spending is not necessarily an indicator of good care or of waste, while low spending is not necessarily a sign of poor care or efficiency.

The quality of care in Alabama prisons is the subject of a federal lawsuit that's been unfolding for more than three years. How to provide and pay for care that meets constitutional standards is a problem for a system that faces the overarching concerns of overcrowded, understaffed and aging prisons.

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The Alabama Department of Corrections is in the process of responding to U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson's ruling in June that mental health care in state prisons was "horrendously inadequate."

Under a plan filed in court last week, lawyers for the state proposed doubling mental health staffing in prisons, adding 125 full-time employees at a cost of at least \$10 million a year. The proposal said the plan can't go forward without more money from the Legislature.

Plaintiffs in the case, including the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program, will get a chance to respond to the state proposal.

The SPLC and ADAP sued the state in 2014 on behalf of inmates over medical care, mental health care and the care of disabled inmates. Thompson divided the case into several parts. He heard weeks of testimony in a non-jury trial on the mental health claims but has yet to do so on the medical care claims.

Today's Pew report is based on two 50-state surveys conducted by Pew and the Vera Institute of Justice, as well as interviews with more than 75 state officials.

The first survey examined spending, prison population demographics, health care delivery systems and staffing.

The report says Alabama did not provide information for some categories, including the age distribution of the prison population and a breakdown of caregivers by profession.

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Alabama did not participate in the second survey, which concerned the monitoring of health care, tracking of disease prevalence and services to continue care after release.

The report says Alabama is one of 20 states that provides most prison health care through contracted services. In 17 states, most of the care is given by state-employed providers, the report says.

Eight states are considered hybrids of the two approaches, while four states, Connecticut, Georgia, New Jersey, and Texas, pair their corrections department with a state medical school or affiliated organization.

Alabama had 25 full-time health care employees per 1,000 inmates, less than the median of 40 for states. The female share of the prison population in Alabama, 8.4 percent, matched the median for states.

[See the full report.](#)

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