



Chelan County Regional Justice Center

Frequently Asked Questions

Chelan County Regional Justice Center at a glance:

Built in 1984, the jail is owned and operated by the Chelan County Board of County Commissioners. It currently has contracts with Douglas County and the cities of East Wenatchee, Wenatchee, Cashmere, Entiat, Leavenworth and Chelan. It operates on an annual budget of \$13.7 million.

- Total bookings in 2025: 3,924 (25% increase, or 787 bookings, over 2024)
- Average daily population: 140 people
- Average daily number of people on elevated medical care: 12
- Total staff: 71 full-time employees

What is currently the No. 1 challenge at the jail?

The majority of people booked into the Chelan County jail are very sick – and unwilling or unable to care for themselves. Staff is working around the clock with people deeply impacted by the fentanyl crisis, mental health issues and the severe detox process that occurs for the majority of people booked into the jail.

- 60 percent of all bookings admit to using drugs or alcohol within the last 48 hours.
- 60 to 70 percent of new bookings are immediately housed in a medical sensor cell.
- The jail averages 10 to 15 people a day who are staying in medical sensor cells, where they receive a higher level of care because of detox protocols put in place.

How do drugs get into the jail?

Many people who are using these highly addictive drugs will stop at nothing to smuggle narcotics or opioids into the jail. They put them in their orifices, stuff them in small holes in clothing, attempt to break outside windows and have friends tie drugs to a string, ask people to soak letters in drugs and mail them to them, and even quickly consume all the drugs they have while being arrested. (All of these examples are real.)

The fentanyl crisis has added a severe threat level to all correctional settings. The drug is so addictive that people will risk everything for the chance to bring drugs into the facility with them. The detox is so painful, lasting one to 10 days, that some people would rather attempt suicide than go through detox.

Even with all the protocols, new equipment and hard work the regional jail has put in place to combat this issue, people still are willing to take drugs if available to them; free will is not taken away from someone incarcerated in a jail.

What has the jail done to combat the smuggling of drugs into the jail?

Chelan County has put much effort and money into preventing drugs from getting into the jail population:

- Since 2020, the jail has undergone a massive security camera upgrade. Cameras are now in every cell, both in the segregation and the general population cells. The only areas without cameras are near the toilets for privacy.
- The jail's Drug Interdiction Program includes the use of a body scanner, mail screener and a narcotics-detecting K9. Initiated in 2022, Chelan County was one of the first to use a K9 in a county-operated jail. The dog is trained to detect six odors: heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, fentanyl, marijuana and buprenorphine. He routinely searches mail and the cells. In 2025, the dog had 159 deployments, 20 indications and three drug seizures.
- In 2026, the jail changed its mailroom policies. Because of an increase in "soaks," where an envelope or letter is soaked in a narcotic, the incarcerated no longer receive physical mail at the county jail. The mail is scanned and available digitally via a tablet.

What has the jail done to care for an increasingly sick population?

Today's correctional settings have evolved over the last five years into medical triage, detoxification and mental health and treatment facilities, which jails were never designed to be. But the county jail has stepped up to these challenges:

- In 2023, the jail also hired additional nurses to provide 24-hour care at the jail. Today, the jail has seven professionals on its medical team.
- In 2024, the jail initially installed 12 medical sensors in individual booking cells. By 2025, the jail had 68 medical sensors. The sensors alert staff to sudden changes in breathing and heart rate, assisting staff in responding quickly to someone in distress. The county, with the help of Douglas County, has invested nearly \$500,000 in the sensors and their installation and maintenance.
- In 2025, the jail installed Narcan inside all its general population cells so the incarcerated, if they see someone in distress, can administer the medication quickly. (For people without opioids in their system, Narcan poses no significant side effects and it is not addictive.) Corrections deputies also carry the medication, which reverses an opioid overdose. In some cases, multiple doses of Narcan are necessary to revive someone.

- Medical intake assessment screenings have always been completed on every individual booked into the facility; after 24-hour nursing was implemented a nurse, when available, will complete the medical intake assessment. There is a current list of individuals that need to be cleared at the hospital before being booked. An assessment at the time of booking may lead to the arresting officer taking the individual to the hospital for medical/mental health clearance prior to acceptance.

What is the death rate at the jail?

From 1992 to 2026, seven people have died while incarcerated in the county jail. In that time period, 175,662 people have been booked into the jail, for a death rate of 0.003 percent. Of those deaths, four were suicides and three died because of pre-existing health-related conditions.

How many people are saved every year at the jail?

It's hard to say how many lives are saved every year at the Chelan County Regional Justice Center. The people incarcerated at the jail are being monitored, they are being transported to medical appointments and they are receiving necessary medications. In 2025:

- 49 ambulance transports to Central Washington Hospital
- 158 outside medical appointments
- 752 people were seen at the in-person sick call at the facility
- About 300 medication deliveries were made daily
- 2,000 withdrawal protocol assessments were made (50.9 percent of bookings)
- Staff saved 12 people by administering Narcan
- Six suicide attempts and 72 people were put on suicide watch
- 859 internal mental health reviews with in-house staff
- 142,356 meals were served