



Resolution on COVID-19 and Justice-Involved Populations

An official statement from the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice (formerly the American Orthopsychiatric Association)

The Global Alliance is committed to applying principles of social justice to policy development, community action, and systems change related to behavioral health and well-being. In keeping with our values, we are gravely concerned about the lack of action and oversight directed at those who are incarcerated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Broad community approaches, such as the closure of schools and non-essential businesses and the enactment of stay-at-home orders, are inadequate without steps to reduce the impact of the pandemic for vulnerable populations. Social distancing measures can only be effective if applied to all systems in society, including jails and prisons.



In the United States, 2.3 million people are incarcerated. We know that mass incarceration undermines health and health equity for individuals, families, and communities. The following risk factors are particularly concerning, since many have also been identified as high-risk for COVID-19:

- Two-thirds of people incarcerated in the U.S. have at least one chronic health condition.
- 11% of individuals who are incarcerated are over the age of 55.
- Over half of people who are incarcerated have a mental health disorder, and an estimated 65% have a substance use disorder.
- Of those incarcerated, many have not been convicted of a crime but rather cannot afford to pay court-imposed fees or make bail. Only half worked in the 2 years prior to incarceration, and of those employed, the median annual income was \$6,250.

In addition to those who are incarcerated, there are 420,000 people working in U.S. jails and prisons. Compared to the general public, staff have disproportionately high rates of chronic conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes, as well as mental health concerns.

Justice-involved populations are also facing overcrowding, inadequate space for social distancing, poor sanitation, substandard health care services, and a lack of resources (including personal hygiene and cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment [PPE]). In short, **jails and prisons act as vectors for the COVID-19 pandemic in our communities because of (1) the conditions, (2) the ways in which the population is constantly changing, and (3) the daily risk of exposure for staff who come to work each day, returning to their families and communities.**

The Global Alliance supports efforts that focus on solutions to the challenges in the justice system exacerbated by the pandemic. Short- and long-term impacts on individual health and community systems will continue for years to come. We understand that efforts toward prevention, mitigation, and containment of COVID-19 can only be successful when the right to health is achieved for all. Our immediate recommendations include:

- (1) reducing populations at risk by limiting the use of detention (e.g., decreasing admissions, increasing the number of people released from jails and prisons);
- (2) ensuring release strategies are supported by testing, the capacity to quarantine properly, resources to meet basic needs (i.e., housing, food, access to hygiene, healthcare, and employment), community supports (e.g., virtual services and access to technology), and reduced barriers to public benefits; and
- (3) providing appropriate support for correctional officers and other staff, including PPE, access to testing, and mental health services.

The Global Alliance recognizes that the tragic consequences of the pandemic demand a shift in understanding risk and in creating policy responses that support building healthy communities. We must strategically engage allies in upgrading systems and available resources; address the drivers of mass incarceration (e.g., racial disparities in arrests and pre-trial detention, mandatory minimum sentencing laws, incarceration for inability to pay bail and court fees); and reduce the barriers to future successful reentry. The stakes are enormous. We must not delay.

<p style="text-align: center;">Additional Resources</p> <p>COVID-19 Supplemental Funding</p> <p>The Marshall Project</p> <p>Restore Justice</p> <p>Sentencing Project</p> <p>ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) “Covid-19 Model Finds Nearly 100,000 More Death Than Current Estimates, Due to Failures to Reduce Jails”</p> <p>Physicians for Human Rights (USA) “Building our Response on Covid-19 and Detention”</p> <p>Robert Wood Johnson Foundation</p> <p>Research-to-Policy Collaboration “Mitigating the impact of coronavirus”</p> <p>Vera Institute of Justice</p> <p>US Department of Justice (2013) https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Public/244831.pdf</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Relevant articles from the <i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i></p> <p>Veeh, C. A., Tripodi, S. J., Pettus-Davis, C., & Scheyett, A. M. (2018). The interaction of serious mental disorder and race on time to reincarceration. <i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i>, 88(2), 125–131.</p> <p>Roos, L. E., Afifi, T. O., Martin, C. G., Pietrzak, R. H., Tsai, J., & Sareen, J. (2016). Linking typologies of childhood adversity to adult incarceration: Findings from a nationally representative sample. <i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i>, 86(5), 584–593.</p> <p>Gust, L.V. (2012). Can policy reduce the collateral damage caused by the criminal justice system? Strengthening social capital in families and communities. <i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i>, 82(2), 174–180.</p> <p>Barbarin, O. A. (2010). Halting African American boys' progression from pre-K to prison: What families, schools, and communities can do! <i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i>, 80(1), 81–88.</p>
<p>How you can help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join our Justice Reform Task Force. Learn more at https://www.bhjustice.org/task-forces-and-committees • Petition local policy makers for rapid changes such as reducing detention and supports for reentry. • Forge new partnerships for advocacy and community strengthening. • Advocate for the next stimulus package to include money allocated for justice-involved populations. • Volunteer with a local community-based organization supporting families affected by incarceration. 	

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