



Health Instead of Punishment Convenings

Human Impact Partners and the Vera Institute of Justice are partnering to host a series of national and regional Criminal Justice and Public Health Convenings to change the paradigm of the U.S. criminal justice system. Over the last 40 years, the criminal justice system has expanded to such a degree that, today, mass incarceration has stretched the social and economic fabric of communities, contributing to diminished educational opportunities, fractured family structures, stagnated economic mobility, limited housing options, restricted access to essential social entitlements, and reduced neighborhood cohesiveness. In turn, these collateral consequences have significantly deepened health inequities along racial and socioeconomic gradients. At the same time, lack of attention to health inequities – such as insufficient investments in addiction and mental health services – contributes to cycles of arrest and incarceration, and stigma for vulnerable populations.

There is a pressing need for health and justice system leaders to work together in the pursuit of health equity, public safety, and social justice. To achieve HIP's goal of transforming the policies and places people need to live healthy lives and Vera's goal of helping governments improve the quality of justice they deliver, we believe it is necessary for criminal justice reformers and public health practitioners to build alliances, work together strategically on research initiatives, and communicate effectively about the impact that the criminal justice system has on health and health equity.

To begin this work, in the fall of 2015 HIP and Vera will bring together approximately 30 experts from these two fields at a convening to: 1) develop a vision and core principles for a criminal justice system that works to improve population health and wellbeing at every step; and 2) develop an agenda for collaborative work to achieve that vision. The convenings will build relationships between people working at the intersection of public health and criminal justice – leaders and advocates who have not necessarily collaborated to-date. This work will be carried out, initially over a three year period, at a series of regional and national convenings as well as through workgroups that will be led by HIP, Vera, and/or other partners and that will meet regularly by phone.

Ultimately, this work will result in improved health and wellbeing for adults and children, families and communities by cultivating new partnerships that develop: communications strategies that raise awareness of the link between criminal justice policy and public health; strategic research initiatives that inform policy decisions in state and local justice systems; and public health champions committed to advancing criminal justice reform.

Outcomes of the first national convening include:

- 1) Developing an alliance of criminal justice reform advocates and public health professionals from across the country who are willing to work together to achieve common goals.
- 2) Publishing a joint vision for what a criminal justice system looks like that promotes public health and wellbeing.
- 3) Creating a blueprint of actionable strategies that criminal justice reformers and public health professionals can take together to advance health equity and justice.

Outcomes of collaborative projects after the first convening and of subsequent regional and national convenings include:

- 1) Implementing various activities that solidify collaborative relationships between public health and criminal justice reformers in different geographic regions.
- 2) Advancing criminal justice policy changes that improve reduce health inequities through joint research projects.
- 3) Deploying a communications strategy to share success stories across HIP and Vera's networks that illustrate why such collaborations are necessary to advance criminal justice and public health goals.

Lead organizations

Given our prior and ongoing commitment to this work, we are well poised to lead these convenings and move the vision and strategies that arise from the first national convening forward. HIP's *Health Instead of Punishment* program uses research (including Health Impact Assessments), advocacy, and capacity building to bring the power of public health science to criminal justice reform campaigns. Vera's [Justice Reform for Healthy Communities](#) aims to raise awareness of the link between public health and mass incarceration, partnering with colleagues from across the nation to apply the tools of public health, including epidemiology and health policy, education, and ethics to address the challenges posed by mass incarceration.

Advisory Committee and Participants

HIP and Vera have convened an Advisory Committee to help us plan and carry out this work. The Advisory Committee consists of: Kirsten Levingston, Ford Foundation; David Liners, WISDOM; Glenn Martin, JustLeadershipUSA; Nicole Porter, Sentencing Project; and Gabriel Sayegh, Drug Policy Alliance.

Our preliminary invitation list includes people with the following perspectives:

- Criminal justice reform advocates who already incorporate some level of public health messaging, have done a health impact assessment in their work, or somehow incorporate health ideas as part of their strategy.
- Public health experts who have done work at the nexus of incarceration and population health and health inequities.

In addition, we would like representation from the following:

- Grassroots organizations that organize formerly incarcerated individuals, the families of those currently incarcerated, and/or victims of crime and violence;
- Legal professionals and law enforcement professionals advocating for criminal justice reform;
- Public health agencies, non-profits and academics focused on criminal justice reform;
- Agencies and organizations that provide services to the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated;
- Influential journalists focusing on U.S. criminal justice reform issues; and
- Funders interested in a public health approach to criminal justice reform.

Draft Agenda for the 2015 Convening

- Community-building Activity – Guiding questions: What is your focus in criminal justice reform? How might a public health lens be used?
- Stories from the field – Three stories of criminal justice reform campaigns where the health frame made a difference.
- Visioning – Envisioning a criminal justice system that promotes health and equity for those inside and outside of the system, and those who work in the system.
- Joint Goals – What are joint goals (big hairy audacious goals) for the group to move toward this vision?
- Strategies – What strategies could we use to move the vision and goals forward? E.g., research, framing/messaging, advocacy, organizing, media/social media, implementation and monitoring of policies that have passed

Cost

The first national convening is expected to cost \$60,000.