

1.9 Health Literacy Significance for Special Populations: Incarcerated Learners

jail – holds people awaiting trial and people with short terms;
run by local jurisdictions

prison – holds people convicted of a crime with longer
sentences; run by state or federal corrections departments

In Virginia, it can be challenging to determine what health care is available for people incarcerated in jails and prisons as different institutions use different care providers and processes. Most often, care is provided by outside contractors. If you wish to provide health literacy instruction to incarcerated learners, it is best to assess their needs and interests first to select lesson content. Try to connect with someone in administration at the facility where you teach who can inform you as to what care is available, what learners need to do to access it, and what health and health communication concerns are common at that facility.

General Facts on Health of Incarcerated People *(from research review by Fazel and Baillargeon, 2010)*

- Worldwide, “mental disorders and infectious diseases are more common in prisoners than in the general population,” and “research has highlighted that women, prisoners aged 55 years and older, and juveniles present with higher rates of many disorders than do other prisoners” (p. 956). Fazel and Baillargeon state that data on prison health comes primarily from wealthy countries.
- The researchers estimate that 1 in 7 prisoners has a treatable mental disorder. Common mental health disorders among prisoners per their review of research are psychosis, depression, personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and alcohol and drug abuse/addiction.
- A survey conducted in the U.S. showed higher rates of hypertension, diabetes, asthma, and arthritis in prisoners than in the general population (p. 959).
- Suicide is the leading cause of death in prisons.
- The number of prisoners over age 50 in the U.S. is going up. Among them, there are high rates of alcohol misuse, depression, and liver disease.



- In the U.S., incarcerated persons are provided with care through multiple delivery methods, including prison/jail employees and outside managed care companies.
- Upon release, prisoners have high rates of poor health, especially in the weeks immediately following release, and emergency department use.
- Prisoners have high rates of unmet oral health needs.

Possible Topics for Health Literacy Education

- Practicing the procedure for requesting primary and emergency medical and dental care in their facility (Instructors will need to inquire at individual facilities as to what the procedures are.)
- For learners with shorter sentences, processes for obtaining health insurance and affordable physical health, mental health, or dental care in the local community upon re-entry into the community
- Information on infectious diseases often present in jails and prisons, such as HIV, tuberculosis, and Hepatitis C
- Information on stress management
- Information on oral health
- Information on grievance processes, if available, to report problems obtaining medical care/medication (Instructors will need to inquire at individual facilities as to what the procedure is.)

Armor Correctional Health Services provides medical care at many Virginia Department of Corrections facilities.

- Per Anita Prince, Assistant Superintendent of Academic Programs for the Virginia Department of Corrections, in Virginia “there is considerable health education that goes on in the *prisons* for staff and students.”
- *Jails* in Virginia are not run by one overseeing entity. Jail health care is provided by various contractors. It is unclear what if any health education is provided inmates in the many jails in Virginia.

The following might be useful webpages for gaining insight into health of incarcerated people in the U.S.:

- **National Commission on Correctional Health Care website:** This website hosts the *CorrectCare* journal, which provides insight into many issues of correctional health and health care.



- **Health Issues Specific to Incarcerated Women:**
The research brief “Health Issues Specific to Incarcerated Women: Information for State Maternal and Child Health Programs” was published in 2000.

Resources

Health Issues Specific to Incarcerated Women: Information for State Maternal and Child Health Programs

This 2000 research brief by K.M. Baldwin and J. Jones is made available on the website of The Women’s and Children’s Health Policy Center at the John Hopkins School of Public Health.

<http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/womens-and-childrens-health-policy-center/publications/prison.pdf>

The Health of Prisoners

Seema Fazel and Jacques Baillargeon published this review in *The Lancet* (volume 277, issue 9769, pages 956-965) in 2001.

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)61053-7/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)61053-7/fulltext)

Accountable to No One: The Virginia Department of Corrections and Prisoner Medical Care

This 2003 report was published by the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia.

<http://www.acluva.org/publications/medicalreport2003.pdf>

Improving the Oral Health of Prisoners to Improve Overall Health and Well-being

This 2009 article by Henrie M. Treadwell and Allan J. Formicola was published in the *American Journal of Public Health* (volume 95, issue 10, pages 1677-1678).

<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2005.073924>

