

35th National Black Nurses Day on Capitol Hill Health Equity, Reckoning & Wellness: NBNA's Renewed Call to Action

Criminal Justice Reform and Health Inequities

The National Black Nurses Association supports comprehensive efforts to improve health within the criminal justice system and its devastating effects. Black medical neglect towards incarcerated black and brown individuals is a longstanding historical tragedy. NBNA calls on the 118th Congress to address criminal justice reform as a public health crisis. Criminal justice Reform and Health Inequities disproportionately impact the Black community compared to other communities, which is unacceptable.

Background

- Incarcerated individuals have high rates of chronic health conditions, including communicable diseases.
- In 2018, black Americans represented 33% of the sentenced prison population, nearly triple their 12% share of the U.S. adult population.
- One-in-twenty black men were in state or federal prison in 2018 (5,008 inmates for every 100,000 black men in this age group).
- Incarcerated individuals of both sexes are more likely to have high blood pressure, asthma, cancer, and arthritis.
- Risks for poor health outcomes are increased by engagement with the criminal justice system.
- Close to 40% of jailed inmates self-report a history of mental illness, with higher rates among black inmates.
- Recidivism is associated with increased rates of mental health conditions.
- People who were formerly incarcerated were 40 times more likely to die of an opioid overdose than someone in the general population.

Recommendations to Legislators

NBNA calls upon the 118th Congress to:

- Support legislation that removes barriers of care for incarcerated individuals.
 - Providing adequate funding, enhancing the role of community health systems, and addressing stigma and discrimination are imperative to improve the health and well-being of incarcerated populations.
- Support legislation that addresses incarcerated individuals' mental health and substance abuse needs.
- Support legislation that will help develop and maintain programs for screening and treatment of substance abuse and mental health.
- Support legislation that would provide comprehensive health care services during and after incarceration.
 - Linking people to health care services post-release will improve the health and well-being of those newly released, and those with a history of incarceration.

- Support legislation that supports cultural change in policing such as community policing models
- Repeal the 18:1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine.

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