

Criminal Justice and Public Health National Convening Vision, Mission, and Principles

Vision

We envision a society that promotes and secures health, safety, and racial equity and in which the justice and public health systems have been transformed to create the social, economic, and political conditions needed for all individuals, families, and communities to thrive.

Mission

Our mission is to transform the justice and public health systems so they create the social, economic, and political conditions necessary for all to thrive. We will do this by bringing health and justice advocates together to build our collective power, especially the power of those who have been most directly impacted by the justice system. In doing this, we recognize the historical and current harms the justice and health systems have been responsible for, especially among communities of color. Through these efforts we seek to promote more constructive and healing alternatives to the use of punitive measures, honor human dignity and rights, and advance racial, social, and economic justice.

Context

Our criminal justice and public health systems are idealized as being founded on a premise of promoting safety, health, and wellbeing. However, the history of criminal justice and public health practice in the United States has been driven by a worldview and narrative that emphasizes personal responsibility and self-reliance over collective responsibility for the good of all communities. This perspective purposefully ignores this country's origin story of racial and economic exploitation and manifests across our social institutions and structures.

In criminal justice, this approach has spawned policy-making that prioritizes punishment and retribution over rehabilitation and healing, the consequences of which have been deep and unjust racial and health inequities across all elements of the system. In public health, while the effects may not be as devastating and wide-ranging, this narrative has resulted in interventions at the individual level rather than a focus on the social, economic, and environmental factors that determine health – a lost opportunity to improve upon the deep inequities that persist in our society. And, at the same time, we have built up a criminal justice system at the expense of our public health system, and fallen farther behind in our ability to promote safety, health, and wellbeing.

We need a justice system and a public health system that truly achieve their intended purpose.

Principles

Together and through all their component parts, the justice and public health systems should authentically prioritize:

1. Policies, actions, and investments that improve the social determinants of health, rather than interventions that are individually focused and punitive.
 - These systems should emphasize violence prevention and harm reduction and minimize the use of the justice system as well as profit making by some at the expense of others. They should increase accountability of all actors involved.
2. The health, healing, and rehabilitation of all people, especially people of color and low-income people.
 - These systems should do no harm, treat the traumas experienced, foster responsibility and resiliency, and increase access to and the quality of physical and behavioral health care.
3. Fairness and equity with regard to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, and physical and mental ability.
 - These systems should treat people with dignity.

4. Empowering low-income and historically marginalized communities to be at the center of decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Who We Are

We are a strategic alliance of advocates committed to changing the criminal justice and public health systems who see criminalization and mass incarceration as a threat to health, safety, and equity. We believe that by joining together, we can magnify our power, influence, and impact toward achieving our collective vision.

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