

# prison health news

*-better health care while you are in and when you get out-*

Issue 9, Fall 2010

## Who We Are...

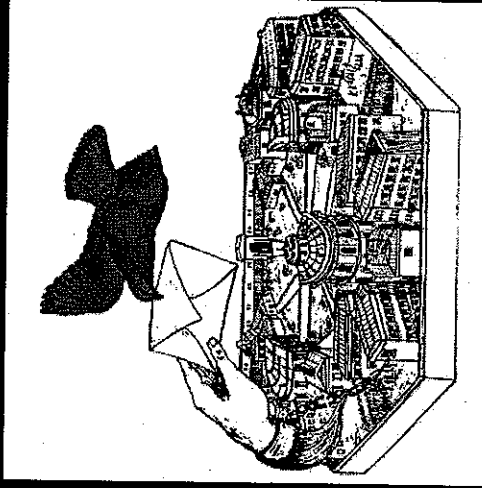
We are on the outside, but many of us were inside before... and survived it. We are formerly incarcerated people and allies talking about health issues and trying to bring about a positive change for all people who are in prison now or ever have been in the past. This newsletter is about all of us.

We will be talking about health issues. For example, what is good nutrition? Where can you get services and information on the outside? We want to take your health questions seriously and break down complicated health information so that it is understandable.

We're also here to help you learn how to get better health care within your facility and how to get answers to your health questions. Don't get frustrated. Be persistent. In prison, it's often hard to get what you want, but with health information, it doesn't have to be impossible. Join us in our fight for our right to health care and health information.

## Read on...

From,  
Ben G., Ben R., Che,  
Cliff, Dawna, Hannah,  
Laura, LuQman, Marcie,  
Suzy, Tammy, and Teresa



Words: Break Down Walls, by Molly Fair  
Justseeds Artists' Cooperative - justseeds.org

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## Write an Article!

We have gotten lots of requests for articles already, and we know that everyone who reads this newsletter will have questions or their own story to tell.

Every issue, we have five different feature sections:

- 1. Body, Mind & Soul** – on the concrete health information people in prison need access to in order to advocate for standard of care treatment
- 2. Words to Live By** – on the strategies for getting health care behind the walls
- 3. Breaking the Chains** – on the inspirational work of people who are currently/formerly in prison fighting for the lives they want to lead
- 4. Try This Out** – on incredible organizations and projects across the country who are doing the hard work of rebuilding our communities in a time of mass imprisonment
- 5. The Big Picture** – on the political issues that drive the prison (and prison health) crisis in our country

If you want to write an article on something you think is important for prison health, send it and we will consider publishing it in *Prison Health News*. You can also write us first to discuss ideas for articles.

If you want your name kept confidential, you can sign your article with your first name or "anonymous."

## Survival & Support:

by Derek Murray

Rape is a deeply hurtful and dehumanizing experience for anyone. For those who are sexually assaulted behind bars, it can be especially heinous because survivors of such abuse often do not have the resources to protect themselves from further attacks or retaliation and face many obstacles in reporting and getting the help they need.

Just Detention International (JDI) is a human rights organization dedicated to ending sexual violence in detention. The organization was formed by a group of survivors of prisoner rape over 30 years ago. They were able to organize and build a professional organization that today works to hold the government accountable for prisoner rape, changes public attitude on the topic, and promotes access to resources for survivors.

Countless men, women and children are sexually abused behind bars every year. It can happen to anyone and takes many forms, including sexual harassment, threats, rape, sex in exchange for protection, and other forms of unwanted sexual contact. It can occur anytime someone is in custody, whether they are in a prison or a jail, a juvenile facility, an immigration detention center or a police lock-up. Perpetrators can be staff or other inmates.

For many survivors, the feelings of disgrace and shame are deep and extremely painful. After an assault, survivors tend to question who they are and how to go on living their lives.

It is possible to heal from a sexual

## Legal Resources for Incarcerated Survivors of Sexual Violence

assault. If you are a survivor of sexual violence in detention, you are not alone in what happened to you, or in how you feel. There are people who care about what you are going through as you try to heal.

One difficult decision for survivors is whether or not to report the sexual assault. Reporting may not be possible for you right now. Or, it may be the only way to stay alive. Only you know.

If you do not know how to report a sexual assault, some of the relevant information may be in your inmate packet, or there may be a trusted staff member you can ask. Staff members are usually required to report any crime that happens on their grounds, so ask general questions without giving any information if you are still undecided about reporting.

One thing to consider is that the institution will not know that the rapist is dangerous or be able to offer any protection if a report is not made.

However, you are entitled to decide

what is best for you, and only you know if making a report could put you in more danger.

If you have been a victim of sexual assault, you



by Tammy Nichols

have a right to: be treated with respect by others; decide who to tell; decide how best to take care of yourself; ask questions about what will happen if you report and how to get medical care; be listened to and supported; to have fears of retaliation taken seriously; take your time to heal; request a housing or cell change for your safety; request to speak with mental health staff; contact a support agency like Just Detention International or a rape crisis center; and seek advice from a lawyer.

JDI is working hard to ensure that your right to be free from sexual abuse behind bars is guaranteed. Right now we are putting pressure on the Attorney General to enact national standards addressing prisoner rape. These measures have the potential to be the most powerful tool yet in the effort to end this abuse. If these rules become law, sexual abuse behind bars may become a dark legacy of the past. Please join us by spreading the word about JDI, our work, and educating others about their inalienable right to be free from sexual abuse.

If you are an advocate or a survivor of sexual abuse behind bars and would like additional information or support, you can write to JDI via confidential legal mail at the following address to request a packet of materials:

Cynthia Totten, Esq.  
CA Attorney Reg. #199266  
3325 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 340  
Los Angeles, CA 90010

# HPV Bağs

by Loreta Miles-Melendez

The human papillomavirus (also known as HPV) is spread by skin-to-skin contact. It is not like other sexually transmitted infections that are passed through bodily fluids. Condoms are very effective in preventing HIV, gonorrhea, and most other STDs. But you can catch HPV while using a condom, although the condom will help somewhat. And penetration isn't needed to share HPV between sexual partners.

Nearly three out of four Americans between the ages of 15 and 49 have had genital HPV in their lifetime, according to the American Social Health Association. Usually, people don't have symptoms, so they don't know they have it. But some types of HPV cause genital warts. Other types can cause abnormal cells that may lead to cervical or anal cancer. There is no cure for the HPV virus itself, but



Some types of HPV can cause warts like these in genital and anal areas. Those types are different from the types of HPV that can cause abnormal cells that may lead to cervical or anal cancer.

the body's immune system usually will clear it. HIV makes this harder for the body to do. Women and men up to 26 years old can get a vaccine to prevent HPV.

The only way to find the abnormal cells that some types of HPV can cause is by having a Pap smear. For people who have a vagina, a vaginal Pap smear should be done every year. Pap smears may be needed every six months if you are living with HIV, and have a CD4 (T cell) count lower than 400.

But also, those of us with an anus (butthole) – that's everyone – should get anal screenings, especially those of us who are HIV positive. Young men and older, do not be ashamed to check parts of you that are private. HPV can be spread from other areas of a person's genitalia to the anus. So anal sex is not the only way to get anal HPV. People of all sexual preferences can get anal cancer. In fact, actress Farrah Fawcett died of anal cancer last year. But if you are gay or transgender and/or enjoy anal sex, you may want to take extra good care of your rear.

The reason it's important to get vaginal and anal tests for abnormal cells is that treatment is almost always successful in preventing cervical and anal cancer if the abnormal cells are found in time. When you go for your yearly check-up, check every part of your body. This includes vaginal and/or anal Pap smears.

# Body, Mind & Soul

# Physician Heal Thyself

by Nasir Allah

*It is Your Duty to Live!*

Having spent 45 of my 67 years behind bars I can speak firsthand about the lethargic medical treatment given to those unfortunate enough to be bound in the bowels of America's prison system.

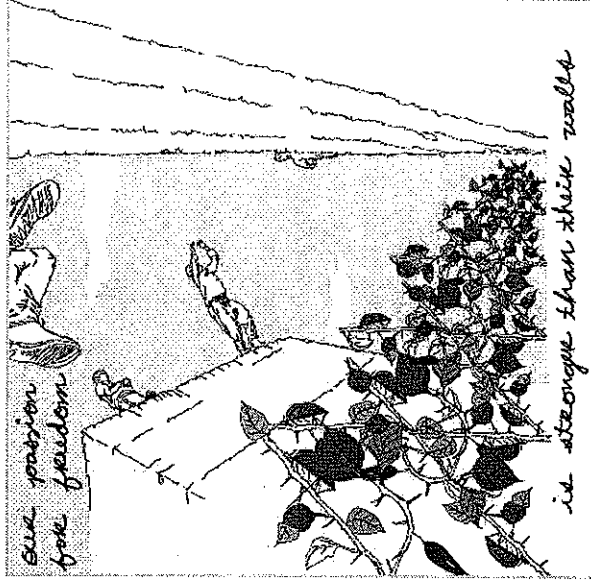
So what can one do to maintain a semblance of good health and well-being while incarcerated? Around the country there are various numbers of organizations reaching out to help prisoners and sharing vital information on how to take care of themselves and they have given inmates excellent legal advice about their rights concerning health care issues while behind bars. As one blessed with sound body and mind, I realized long ago that my best health care provider was me.

I am definitely about how to "Eat to Live," avoiding at risk behavior, exercising daily, getting (HIV/AIDS) tested, staying "sucker free," and keeping on top of my hygiene. I have been fortunate enough to have been able to crush and swallow one clove of garlic, a teaspoon of apple cider vinegar, a spoon of honey every morning, and a few vitamins. This regimen has helped me endure.

Those unfortunate enough to be diagnosed with any of the life-threatening diseases are often treated callously by other inmates, guards, and medical personnel. This is not an indictment against all of the aforementioned individuals however, ignorance and indifference has caused much pain for those inflicted with life-threatening disease. I really appreciate the good work of those involved with Prison Health News /Philadelphia FIGHT programs. The "Prison Health Newsletter" please keep the positive energies flowing. For all in the "belly of the beast," keep your heads up because this too shall pass.

Respectfully,  
James Washington  
aka Nasir Allah

# Words to Live By



*Our passion  
is freedom*

*is stronger than their walls*

# SSI & SSDI Update: Most Bench Warrants Are No Longer a Problem!

by Rebecca Vallas

*Bench Warrants Due to Probation and Parole Violations Still a Bar to Eligibility. Most Other Types of Bench Warrants No Longer Need to Be Resolved to Get SSI and SSDI!*

## Did you know?

Most types of bench warrants will no longer keep you from getting SSI and SSDI benefits! Thanks to a recent lawsuit settlement, the Social Security Administration has changed its policies.

## The Old Policy

Until April 2009, if you had an open bench warrant you couldn't get SSI or SSDI. Social Security used a computer system to match the names of its beneficiaries with the names in warrant databases to keep from paying benefits to people who might be fleeing prosecution. This practice caused Social Security to make lots of mistakes in denying or suspending benefits, because many of the "matches" were based on false or unproven accusations, minor offenses, mistaken identity, or years-old arrest warrants. Even though Social Security is supposed to allow beneficiaries and applicants to appeal, many people who were hurt by this system were told by Social Security staff that they were not allowed to appeal. As a result, hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries around the country lost or were denied benefits.

## *Martinez v. Astrue* - Lawsuit Settlement

A lawsuit was brought to challenge this policy of denying

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and stopping benefits when there was a "match" with a warrant database. The policy was found to be illegal, and Social Security had to change its system. Starting April 1, 2009, Social Security may no longer suspend or deny benefits just because a person has an open bench warrant - unless the warrant is for a probation or parole violation, or for charges such as flight or escape. This new policy applies to SSI, Social Security Disability, and Social Security retirement benefits.

The named plaintiff in the lawsuit, Rosa Martinez of Redwood City, California, lost her SSI benefits due to a case of mistaken identity. Social Security cut off her benefits in January 2008, when they matched her name to a 20-year-old Miami warrant for a drug charge. Ms. Martinez had never been arrested, had never used illegal drugs, and had never even been to Miami. The arrest warrant described the suspect as a 5'4" tall woman, and Ms. Martinez is only 4'8". Even so, Social Security suspended her benefits and told her she could not appeal.

## What does this mean for me?

Even if you have an unresolved warrant, you may now be eligible for SSI or SSDI.

Remember: warrants for probation and parole violations, or for flight/escape, are not part of this change in policy, and will in most cases still keep you from getting benefits. And also, remember that bench warrants don't go away unless you deal with them!

Rose by Wayne E. Cole, Books Through Bars Contexts Collection

If you were getting SSI and SSDI benefits but lost them due to a warrant, you may be able to have your benefits reinstated. You may also get back payments for the time when you weren't getting benefits.

If you applied for benefits but were denied due to a warrant, you may now be able to get benefits and may be eligible for back payments back to the date you applied.

If you have an overpayment due to a warrant, Social Security must stop collecting it and may have to return money it has already taken from you to repay the overpayment.

NOTE: Social Security cannot pay back benefits to people while they are incarcerated. People who are eligible for back payments under *Martinez* can get their back benefits when they are released.

## What should I do if I think I qualify for *Martinez*?

SSA has begun sending notices to beneficiaries who can benefit from the settlement. To get your benefits restarted and to claim back benefits, you should respond to this notice right away if you get one. There may be a 60-day time limit on how long you have to respond in order to benefit.

Just because you don't get a notice doesn't mean you can't be helped by the settlement. Many people may not receive these notices, especially if they have changed address.

People who think they may be affected by the settlement should call or visit their local Social Security office and ask to be added to the

*Martinez* list. They should also make sure SSA has their current address on file.

Community Legal Services may be able to help Philadelphia residents in appealing suspensions, denials, and overpayments due to warrant issues. To find out if you or a loved one qualify for benefits under the *Martinez* settlement, contact us at:

Community Legal Services  
ATTN: *Martinez* Settlement  
3638 N. Broad St.  
Philadelphia, PA 19140  
Phone: 215-227-2400 ext. 2100  
Web: www.clsphila.org

\*CLS is able to serve Philadelphia residents only.

For people outside of Philadelphia, please contact:

Prison Health News  
c/o Philadelphia FIGHT  
1233 Locust Street, 5th Floor  
Philadelphia PA 19107

For more information about the *Martinez* settlement, please contact National Senior Citizens Law Center  
Web: www.nslc.org

Community Legal Services, Inc.,

was established by the Philadelphia Bar Association in 1966. Since then, CLS has served more than one million low-income Philadelphia residents through individual cases, class actions, and advocating for improved regulations and laws that affect low-income Philadelphians.

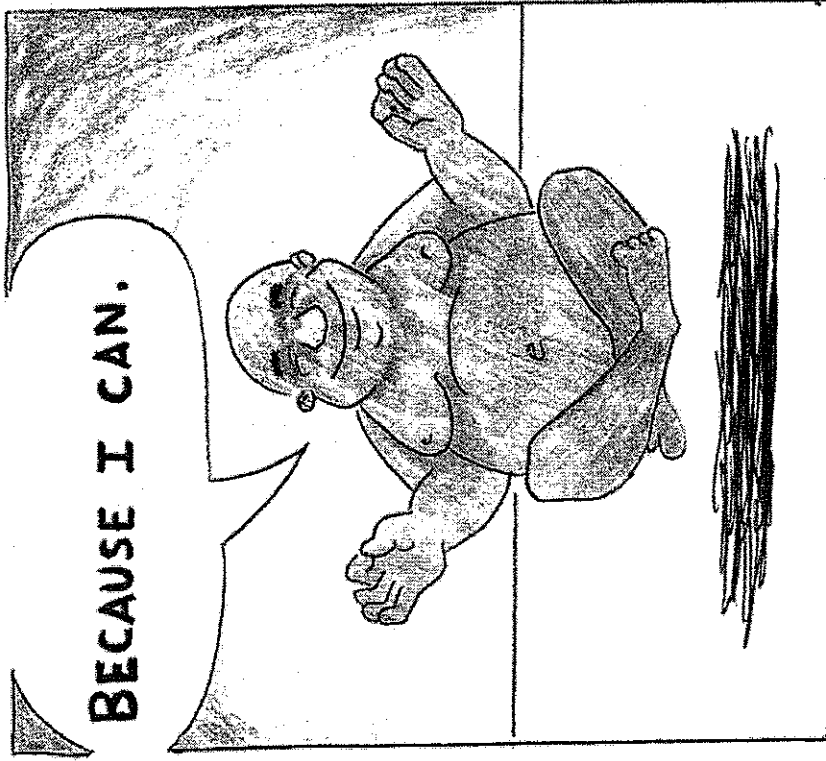
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# Spiritual Well-Being and Holistic Health

by cliffwms44

Holistic medicine is a belief that the physical and mental aspects of overall health are closely related. Holistic health has been around for ages and is usually associated with the topic of alternative medicine (another means of treating an illness or disease). I have talked with some medical persons in practice who believe that maintaining good health while being HIV+ (HIV positive) is more than just taking medication as directed. It incorporates taking care of different parts of our physical body, and it includes the mental and spiritual as well.

Holistic medicine is full well-being, not merely the absence of disease or physical pain. It is the primary coping resource in all aspects of recovery from life threatening illness. In my time on this earth, the task has proved to be keeping disciplined through a lot of life's shortcomings, the stress and depression. I incorporated many indulgences as coping mechanisms that progressed and compounded, until it all got rolling like a train with no breaks. At that point I was so indulgent and disconnected that I thought I could regain control.



Because I Can, by Jacob Barrett  
Comix from Inside, the Real Cost of Prisons Project

Within our mental sphere, just like a drawer, we must clean out all the junk. A good example of mental baggage is an onion. The outer skin is not usable, so we begin to peel away the outer skin (layer after layer) until we come to what is usable.

Often as we begin to cut into that onion, the juices trigger our tears, like with our emotions. The body sets out to cleanse the eyes, to remove the irritation.

I have come to believe in the importance of understanding the relationship with our self. It's very hard to keep my dimensions of well-being in alignment, strong and changed, as if they are powered with current. I have come to focus on my mental, spiritual, and physical well-being, now that I am older.

In April 2003, I was diagnosed with HIV on my birthday. The news hurt in so many ways: mental, then spiritual, and more, in stages. Sort of numbing to whatever anyone else was going through or could go through. I thought my situation was the worst. We all know about the stigma, the feelings of rejection, the fears that come with a change in life. What began to go on in my mental and spiritual areas was as if they began to fall out of alignment. I now think of my life being HIV+ as a journey, to discover things of importance to me, and my place among them.

Spirituality is practiced in many ways, its purpose to add meaning to our lives. Spirituality provides an opportunity to disconnect from

circumstances. Spirituality allowed me to observe my life with clarity and integrity. Spirituality and well-being show our positive aspects in a state of working order, filing in alignment with one another, each charging the next:

>Mental>Spiritual>Physical>

>Relationship>Environment>

How can the effects of well-being possibly heal our ailments? The impact is greatly determined by each individual's spiritual power. In a therapeutic group setting, it can be transferred. So one may realize that even though they have issues, stresses, and challenges, they do not define us as individuals. Each individual person's spirituality is greatly impacted by the community they are a part of. Spiritual well-being is not a practice of isolation, but rather of involving the people around you, as a new perspective is formed. I have found that spiritual well-being groups provided a safe environment to explore, learn, practice, support, and heal. This safe haven provided me a pathway to greater Peace, freedom of self-expression, and higher self-esteem. My spiritual journey has made a big impact on my issues of depression, social relationships, and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). So inside my physical body, I now know how the dimensions of well-being are all connected.

>Mental>Spiritual>Physical>

>Relationship>Environment>

# Breaking The Chains

# TransJustice and AIDS Activism Zine!

## Call for Submissions:

As a gender-non-conforming person of color, I've found that there are very few published works by and for members of my community about AIDS activism and trans justice. Whether we're struggling for trans justice and against the stigmatization and criminalization of HIV/AIDS in non-profits, prisons, community centers, shelters, unfunded collectives, immigrant detention centers, on the street or in the clinic, we all have stories that we can share and experiences we learn from and organize around. Through this zine, I'd like to share our resources, experiences, activism, political analysis, ways of surviving and expressing ourselves, ways we care for one another, in hopes of making our stories more visible and supporting one another.

## I'd greatly appreciate contributions!

What is a "zine"? A zine is a collaborative "do it yourself" magazine project that uses original work. Here is an example of a individual artists pages from a transformative justice zine ([www.transformativejusticezine.org](http://www.transformativejusticezine.org)):



Submissions can be any type of print media! Feel free to decorate your writing (poetry, articles and stories) with fabulous expressions of your art (collage, painting, photography and drawing)! Your submission is all about your fabulously creative artistic vision!

Submission Guideline:  
2,000 word limit  
Deadline: November 15, 2010

Topics can be any of the following, or any another topic that you feel is related:

- Trans Justice
- AIDS Activism
- The Prison Industrial Complex
- Criminalization of HIV/AIDS
- Survival and Resiliency
- Resisting Invisibility

### Please send submissions to:

Che Gossett  
Hearts on a Wire  
PO Box 36831  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
[chegossett@gmail.com](mailto:chegossett@gmail.com)

Also, please let me know what feels safe for you in terms of how you would like to be credited (by name, anonymous, initials, alternate name, etc). The zine will be published and copies will be sent out December 2010!

# Information resources for people in prison

If you need information while you are locked up, contact:

## Fortune News

The Fortune Society  
ATTN: Fortune News Subscriptions  
29-76 Northern Boulevard  
Long Island City, NY 11101  
newsletter on criminal justice issues;  
to subscribe, send your first name, last name, ID number, correctional facility, address, city, state, zip code  
\*free to people in prison.

## Project Inform

1375 Mission Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103-2621  
Hotline: 800-822-7422  
information & newsletters on HIV (materials also available in Spanish); responses to treatment questions from people in prison  
\*free to people in prison

## Protecting Your Health & Safety:

### Prisoners' Rights

325-pg bound manual explains the legal rights to health and safety in prison, and how to enforce those rights when they are violated.

publication of the Southern Poverty Law

Center, distributed by:

Prison Legal News  
P.O. Box 2420

West Brattleboro, VT 05303

\*\$16 for people in prison

## HCV Advocate

PO Box 427037  
San Francisco, CA 94142  
monthly newsletter on hepatitis C events, clinical research, and education (materials also available in Spanish).  
\*sample issue free to people in prison;  
\$10 for a year's subscription

## Just Detention International

3325 Wilshire Blvd, Ste 340  
Los Angeles, CA 90010  
support, resources and advocacy to address sexual violence behind bars; survivors should address Legal Mail to Cynthia Totten, Esq.  
\*free to people in prison

## Partnership for Safety & Justice

825 NE 20th Avenue, #250  
Portland, OR 97232  
support directory with health and legal organizations, prison book programs, resources for LGBT people, and more!  
\*free to people in prison

## Prison Legal News

P.O. Box 2420  
West Brattleboro, VT 05303  
newsletter on the legal rights of people in prison & recent court rulings  
\*sample issue \$3.50, unused stamps OK; \$24 for 1-year subscription

**END THE ATTACK ON OUR COMMUNITIES!**  
**BUILD FAMILIES NOT PRISONS!**

20% of prisoners are fathers who will care for their children.



by Melanie Cervantes

Justseeds 'Voices from Outside' portfolio, [justseeds.org](http://justseeds.org)

# advocacy and support resources for people in prison

If you need help while you are locked up, or when you get out, contact:

## **In Austin, TX:**

AIDS Services of Austin  
P.O. Box 4874  
Austin, TX 78765  
Phone: (512) 458-2437  
Web: [www.asaustin.org](http://www.asaustin.org)

## **In Boston, MA:**

SPAN Inc.  
105 Chauncy Street, 6th Floor  
Boston, MA 02111  
Phone: (617) 423-0750  
Web: [www.spaninc.org](http://www.spaninc.org)

## **In Chicago, IL:**

Men and Women in Prison Ministries  
10 W. 35th Street # 9C5-2  
Chicago, IL 60616  
Phone: (312) 328-9610  
Web: [www.mwipm.com](http://www.mwipm.com)

## **In Los Angeles, CA:**

Center for Health Justice  
900 Avila Street #301  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Phone: (213) 229-0985  
Prison Hotline: (213) 229-0979  
Web: [www.healthjustice.net](http://www.healthjustice.net)

## **In New Orleans, LA:**

Women With A Vision  
1515 South Salcedo Street, Suite 212  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70125  
Phone: (504) 301-0428  
Web: [www.wway-no.org](http://www.wway-no.org)

## **In New York, NY:**

New York Harm Reduction Educators  
953 Southern Boulevard, Suite 302  
Bronx, NY 10459  
Phone: (718) 842-6050  
Web: [www.nyhre.org](http://www.nyhre.org)

## **In Philadelphia, PA:**

Philadelphia FIGHT  
1233 Locust Street, 5th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
Phone: (215) 985-4448  
Web: [www.fight.org](http://www.fight.org)

If you need resources in a city not listed here, **write to us!** We will help you track down answers to your specific questions.

**Write to us** if you know about a great organization that is not yet listed here as a PHN partner.

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# prison health news

PHN is a project of *Reaching Out: A Support Group with Action* and the *Institute for Community Justice* at Philadelphia FIGHT.

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All subscriptions are free, and are mailed First Class.