



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

Oxiris Barbot, MD
Commissioner

Dear Health Care Professional:

Involvement in the criminal justice system can include incarceration, parole and probation. Incarceration rates in the United States have increased over 700% since 1970.¹ In 2018, over 48,000 people were held in New York State prisons² and over 8,400 in New York City (NYC) jails.³ About 90% of these individuals in NYC are Black and Latino men and women.⁴

Justice-involved individuals have higher risk for chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular disease,^{5,6} hypertension and diabetes,⁷ in addition to substance use⁸ and mental health conditions.^{9,10,11} Despite this increased risk, justice-involved individuals report financial and administrative barriers to obtaining health care, as well as stigma related to incarceration.^{12,13}

You can help justice-involved patients get the care they need. It is important to recognize this is a highly sensitive topic and patients may not want to immediately disclose their history. Patients with criminal justice involvement may also have a history of trauma, so it is important to adopt a trauma-informed approach when providing care. If your patient discloses a history of criminal justice involvement, the New York City Health Department recommends you:

1. Use nonjudgmental language that validates their lived experiences and reassures them of your intention to provide care that reduces the potential health impacts of justice involvement.
2. Screen comprehensively for chronic diseases and associated risk factors, infectious diseases and behavioral health conditions, including substance use.
3. Adopt a trauma-informed approach in your clinical and organizational practice.
4. Connect patients with local behavioral health services and community-based organizations familiar with the social needs of justice-involved individuals.

This action kit provides clinical tools, provider resources and patient education materials to help you communicate with and treat justice-involved patients. Your Health Department representative will discuss ways to integrate these tools and materials into your work.

By working together to address the needs of marginalized and often overlooked communities, we can improve the health of all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Oxiris Barbot MD".

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To view the references listed above, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **criminal justice toolkit**.