

Drug Policy Alliance

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://drugpolicy.org/covid19>

Campaign and Advocacy

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COVID-19 is a public health crisis that is exacerbating the harms of the drug war and we at the Drug Policy Alliance are doing all we can to respond to this pandemic, fight alongside our community members, and carry out our shared mission.

DPA offers the following COVID-19 drug policy priorities to protect public health, individual rights, and the dignity and well-being of those in our communities who are most harmed by structural inequities.

In order to be most effective, equitable, and sustainable, all policy responses must:

[Read the full set of recommendations \(PDF\).](#)

Many federal and state policies are designed to make it difficult for people who use drugs to access life-saving harm reduction services and substance use disorder treatment, particularly the addiction medications buprenorphine and methadone for treating opioid use disorders. Some governments have relaxed long-standing barriers to care during the pandemic. We are fighting to ensure people have continued access to effective harm reduction and treatment interventions during this crisis and to preserve those reforms after.

For too long, drug war policies have targeted and imprisoned people who use drugs, people of color, and immigrants. This pandemic has made their incarceration an even greater injustice. People in prisons and jails are stuck in crowded, unsanitary spaces. They are prevented from taking basic safety measures, like practicing social distancing, to help protect themselves from COVID-19.

DPA stands with our allies in the criminal justice field who are calling for the broad-scale release of people currently incarcerated in institutions and settings that cannot possibly follow CDC directives on safe practices for reducing risk of COVID-19 transmission and so are putting people at unnecessary risk of harm. Our priorities simply reflect the calls we have fought for historically and those we organizationally find even more urgent today. If we're going to save lives during this crisis, we need to overhaul systems of mass criminalization.

Our work doesn't stop once people are released from prisons and jails. Federal and state policies bar newly released people from accessing the resources that are vital for them to successfully reenter society, especially those struggling with substance use. We are fighting to make sure people have access to housing, food assistance, employment, healthcare, harm reduction services and medications, and overdose prevention resources.

There are several million state-licensed medical cannabis patients in the U.S., in addition to people who use cannabis for other reasons. This pandemic is making it difficult for them to safely access marijuana. There are also 200,000 workers in the state-licensed cannabis industry who are struggling during this financial crisis. We are fighting to protect patient and consumer health, as well as cannabis businesses and employees.

[Read the full set of recommendations \(PDF\).](#)

[Watch our COVID-19 and drug policy discussion series](#)

In this 7-part series, we explored issues like decarceration, reentry, treatment, and policing. Advocates and allies discussed how we can sustain progress and which obstacles still remain.

[Listen to the DPA podcast](#)

We've been discussing our issues through the lens of COVID-19, including episodes with activist Alejandra Pablos who talks about her experience in an immigrant detention center and DPA's Mary Sylla who talks about the current reality of health injustice in prisons and jails.

[See COVID-19 resources from our allies](#)

Learn how to protect yourself and others during this pandemic with resources from Harm Reduction Coalition, Vital Strategies, The Justice Collaborative, Vera Institute of Justice, and more.

[Sign DPA action alerts](#)

Join us as we call for Congress, the CDC, and governors to take action now to save lives during COVID-19.

[Read the coalition letters we've signed](#)

We're joining our allies to call for lifesaving measures during this public health crisis like releasing all people detained in ICE custody and providing access to medication-assisted treatment.

[Join us to discuss COVID-19 rapid response research](#)

Our Department of Research and Academic Engagement is facilitating conversations about how rapid response research on the impacts

of COVID-19 can guide drug policy reform. Watch previously recorded discussions, or join our Google group and listserv to participate.

[Share our graphics on your social channels](#)

Educate your followers about how criminal justice reform and harm reduction services will save lives during this pandemic.

[Join DPA - become a member](#)

DPA will continue to work in coalition with our partners to fight for effective, permanent drug policy reform. But we also need your help. DPA members help us ensure that people who are systematically targeted by this drug war do not have their needs denied, and are not stigmatized or pushed aside.

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Sign up to receive action alerts and news about drug policy reform.

Get tips for covering the war on drugs and download DPA staff photos, logos, marijuana stock photos and b-roll video.

Our new strategic plan takes bold steps to dismantle this war on drugs and our communities. Join us in seeing this vision through.

Sign up to receive our monthly newsletter to get an inside look at DPA and the world of drug policy reform.



Sign up to receive action alerts and the latest news on drug policy reform today.