

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/high-mortality-rate-among-the-formerly-incarcerated-demands-better-policies>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The surge of opiate-related overdoses in the United States is a pressing public health issue. An underrepresented aspect of this epidemic is the disproportionately high risk of death that people reentering the community from jail or prison experience upon their release. Public health and correctional agencies share a responsibility in preventing avoidable mortality and morbidity associated with these events.

Vera's Director of Research, Jim Parsons, recently spoke with Dr. Ingrid Binswanger, Associate Professor in the Division of General and Internal Medicine at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, whose widely-cited research reveals a range of factors that contribute to elevated mortality risk among people recently released from prison and signals the need for better collaboration and communication between health and justice systems to improve continuity in care. Their interview is featured in a new Vera Voices podcast video, *Health Care Issues After Incarceration: Risk Factors, Mortality, and the Need for Prevention*.

Dr. Binswanger's research primarily focuses on the United States, but reflects an internationally observed trend: people experience a high risk of death during the reentry phase, especially in the first few weeks after their release. Her research reveals a range of contributing factors that explain why this population is vulnerable to a higher risk of death upon release:

While identifying these systemic problems that arise in the transition between prison and home, Dr. Binswanger's research also pointed to solutions that may reduce mortality risk, many of which coincide with work in [Vera's Substance Use and Mental Health Unit](#) (SUMH) that seeks to break down the barriers between community health and criminal justice agencies.

Above all, Dr. Binswanger's research signifies the need for breaking down the silos between community health and corrections. Vera's [Justice and Health Connect website](#) advances this goal by helping criminal justice and community health stakeholders overcome the legal, cultural, and practical barriers to sharing information that can help maximize continuity of care and link people in transition to appropriate services. In 2013, Vera's researches completed a [study](#) in Los Angeles County that demonstrated the limited communication and coordination between the county sheriff's department, other government agencies, and the range of community-based service providers, which can exacerbate the risk of life-threatening events following release.

The important research being conducted by professionals like Dr. Binswanger helps to elevate the work of SUMH while echoing the clear need for better collaboration and communication between health and justice systems.

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