

Center for the Victims of Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.justsecurity.org/64691/deprivation-and-despair-the-crisis-of-medical-care-at-guantanamo/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

by [Scott Roehm](#)

June 26, 2019

[detainee treatment](#), [Guantanamo](#), [Military Commissions](#), [NDAA](#)

by [Scott Roehm](#)

June 26, 2019

Earlier this year, in a rare and refreshing moment of candor, the admiral who was in charge of the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, [expressed concern](#) about the military's ability to provide medical care to the detainees still held captive there. Many of the 40 remaining prisoners are entering old age and there is seemingly no prospect of their release. Speaking to reporters in April, Rear Adm. John Ring said:

Unless America's policy changes, at some point we'll be doing some sort of end of life care here. A lot of my guys are prediabetic. Am I going to need dialysis down here? I don't know. Someone's got to tell me that. Are we going to do complex cancer care down here? I don't know. Someone's got to tell me that.

I'm sort of caught between a rock and a hard place. The Geneva Conventions Article III, that says that I have to give the detainees equivalent medical care that I would give to a trooper. But if a trooper got sick, I'd send him home to the United States. And so I'm stuck. Whatever I'm going to do, I have to do here.

But what Ring did not tell reporters was that, when it comes to concerns regarding the state of medical care at Guantanamo, complications associated aging are just the tip of the iceberg.

Today, my organization, the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), along with Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), released a joint report finding that Guantanamo's medical care system has long been broken in a number of respects. The legacy of U.S. torture and in particular medical complicity in that unlawful and immoral project is at the root of many of the medical care deficiencies we identified and continues to exacerbate all of them.

The report *Deprivation and Despair: The Crisis of Medical Care at Guantanamo* compiles and analyzes opinions from over the years of independent civilian physicians who have managed to access detainees, review medical records, and otherwise interface with Guantanamo's medical care system. Our analysis was further informed by consultation with several of the physicians and with counsel for detainees. (The full report is available [here](#); a stand-alone executive summary [here](#); and a selection of some of the civilian medical experts' findings and conclusions regarding the treatment of various detainees [here](#). The report also includes case studies for four detainees, three of whom remain at Guantanamo).

Our findings include, but are not limited to:

We assess these, and the balance of our findings broadly, against the standard of care that Guantanamo officials claim to provide, and which is required by the [military's own regulations implementing the Geneva Conventions](#) that detainees receive medical care equivalent to that afforded U.S. service members and more specifically against the [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners](#) (the Nelson Mandela Rules), which the United States has championed. We conclude that the United States is not meeting its obligations in a host of areas, and detainees are paying the price.

However, our findings and conclusions, distressing as they are, should not be taken as a sweeping indictment of front-line medical personnel at Guantanamo. Many of the deficiencies in medical care that we describe are structural, operational, and/or cultural, and cannot be fixed by even the best intentioned of the staff working there. Some of the deficiencies can be mitigated, but only to a degree, as long as Guantanamo remains open. Lack of torture rehabilitation services, for which there is widespread and urgent need, cannot be remedied at all at least not in a meaningful way in a facility antithetical to the core requirements for effective treatment (including instilling a felt sense of safety and allowing the victim control over elements of the rehabilitation context, content and process).

Stepping back, all of this is yet another reason why Guantanamo should be closed. Recognizing that day is a long way off, though, we recommend a series of steps that one or more of the executive branch, Congress and the courts can take at least to improve the status quo in the interim. They include:

In a welcome sign, both Democrats and Republicans in Congress have begun to acknowledge, to varying degrees, the medical care crisis at Guantanamo and are [working toward](#) pursuing some legislative improvements consistent with what we recommend. Of particular note, the annual defense authorization bill (NDAA) as reported out of the Republican-led Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) would create a chief medical officer for Guantanamo very much along the lines we suggest. The SASC bill would also, as it has in years past, create an exception to the statutory ban on U.S. transfers for detainees who require emergency medical care that Guantanamo cannot adequately provide.

The House Armed Services Committee's companion bill, while much more ambitious on Guantanamo in critical respects like prohibiting the administration from sending new detainees there, and dropping the U.S. transfer restrictions altogether, is surprisingly less robust on medical care specifically. The bill includes a sense of Congress on the provision of medical care at Guantanamo that does not sufficiently reflect the scope or gravity of the problems, and it calls for a report by the Government Accountability Office on the quality of medical care detainees receive. A positive development in a vacuum, but far less so if it serves to delay (or worse yet displace) other legislative changes that can and should be made now.

There is a long way to go before the NDAA becomes law, including consideration on the floor in both chambers and subsequent conference negotiations to reconcile the versions that the House and Senate pass, respectively, which presents both opportunities and risks. I hope lawmakers will look to protect, and where possible enhance, the types of medical care provisions that we are recommending at every turn. The problems our report identifies will only worsen over time. If left unaddressed, as our report warns, complex medical conditions that cannot be managed at Guantanamo should be expected to accelerate in frequency and escalate in severity. The costs of such inaction, first and foremost for the remaining detainees, but also for the United States, would be devastating.

[detainee treatment](#), [Guantanamo](#), [Military Commissions](#), [NDAA](#)

All-source, public repository of congressional hearing transcripts, government agency documents, digital forensics, social media analysis, public opinion surveys, empirical research, more.

by [Brianna Rosen](#)

Oct 25th, 2022

by [Ambassador Juan Manuel Gmez-Robledo Verduzco](#)

Oct 24th, 2022

by [Cathryn Grothe](#)

Oct 21st, 2022

by [Steven J. Barela](#)

Oct 20th, 2022

by [Douglas London](#)

Oct 18th, 2022

by [Luke Hartig](#)

Oct 17th, 2022

by [Jonathan Leader Maynard](#)

Oct 14th, 2022

by [Oona A. Hathaway](#)

Oct 11th, 2022

by [Amanda L. White Eagle](#)

Oct 10th, 2022

by [Muhammad Kamal](#)

Oct 7th, 2022

by [Richard Dicker](#) and [Paloma van Groll](#)

Oct 6th, 2022

by [Naomi Kikoler](#) and [Sarah McIntosh](#)

Oct 6th, 2022

by [Jens Iverson](#)

Oct 5th, 2022

by [Jens Iverson](#)

Oct 5th, 2022

by [John K. Glenn](#)

Oct 4th, 2022

by [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Clara Apt](#)

Sep 29th, 2022

by [Jennifer Trahan](#)

Sep 26th, 2022

by [Jennifer Trahan](#)

Sep 26th, 2022

by [Norman L. Eisen](#) and [Fred Wertheimer](#)

Sep 26th, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Sep 24th, 2022

by [Astrid Reisinger Coracini](#)

Sep 23rd, 2022

by [Astrid Reisinger Coracini](#)

Sep 23rd, 2022

by [Ambassador H.E. Juan Ramn de la Fuente](#) and [Pablo Arrocha Olabuenaga](#)

Sep 23rd, 2022

by [Katherine Fang](#) and [Clara Apt](#)

Sep 22nd, 2022

by [E. Danya Perry](#), [Joshua Stanton](#) and [Norman L. Eisen](#)

Sep 21st, 2022

by [Ambassador John E. Herbst](#)

Sep 21st, 2022

by [Richard Gowan](#)

Sep 20th, 2022

by [Richard Gowan](#)

Sep 20th, 2022

by [Oona A. Hathaway](#)

Sep 20th, 2022

by [Oona A. Hathaway](#)

Sep 20th, 2022

by [Marc Sommers](#)

Sep 19th, 2022

by [Ambassador Thomas Graham Jr.](#)

Sep 16th, 2022

by [Aryeh Neier](#)

Sep 14th, 2022

by [Eian Katz](#)

Sep 13th, 2022

by [Sam Cohen](#)

Sep 12th, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Sep 10th, 2022

by [Michael Stern](#)

Sep 9th, 2022

by [Tess Bridgeman](#) and [Brian Finucane](#)

Sep 8th, 2022

by [Sophie Richardson](#)

Sep 8th, 2022

by [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Justin Hendrix](#)

Sep 7th, 2022

by [Laurence H. Tribe](#), [Philip Lacovara](#) and [Dennis Aftergut](#)

Sep 6th, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Sep 3rd, 2022

by [Jumaina Siddiqui](#)

Sep 2nd, 2022

by [Peter Devine](#)

Sep 1st, 2022

by [Shaharзад Akbar](#)

Aug 31st, 2022

by [Ambassador M. Ashraf Haidari](#)

Aug 30th, 2022

by [George Croner](#)

Aug 29th, 2022

by [Douglas London](#)

Aug 29th, 2022

by [Michael Stern](#)

Aug 28th, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Aug 27th, 2022

by [Virginia Canter](#) and [Gabe Lezra](#)

Aug 26th, 2022

by [Fionnuala N Aolin](#)

Aug 25th, 2022

by [Gaiane Nuridzhanian](#)

Aug 24th, 2022

by [Ezequiel Heffes](#)

Aug 24th, 2022

by [Gaiane Nuridzhanian](#)

Aug 24th, 2022

by [James A. Goldston](#)

Aug 23rd, 2022

by [Ambassador \(ret.\) Lee Wolosky](#)

Aug 22nd, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Aug 20th, 2022

by [Ximena Casas Isaza](#) and [Catalina Martinez](#)

Aug 19th, 2022

by [Ryan Goodman](#)

Aug 18th, 2022

by [William S. Dodge](#)

Aug 18th, 2022

by [Faiza Patel](#) and [Spencer Reynolds](#)

Aug 17th, 2022

by [J. William Leonard](#)

Aug 16th, 2022

by [Genevieve Nadeau](#) and [Helen White](#)

Aug 16th, 2022

by [Albert W. Alschuler](#)

Aug 16th, 2022

by [Shabana Basij-Rasikh](#)

Aug 16th, 2022

by [Nasir A. Andisha](#) and [Marzia Marastoni](#)

Aug 15th, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Aug 13th, 2022

by [Karima Bennouna](#)

Aug 12th, 2022

by [Nicholas Rasmussen](#) and [Sarah Kenny](#)

Aug 12th, 2022

by [Liz Hempowicz](#)

Aug 11th, 2022

by [Asha Rangappa](#), [Norman L. Eisen](#) and [Bradley P. Moss](#)

Aug 9th, 2022

by [Julie Owono](#)

Aug 9th, 2022

by [Khalid Aljabri](#)

Aug 8th, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Aug 4th, 2022

by [Clara Apt](#)

Aug 1st, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Jul 30th, 2022

by [Sang-Min Kim](#)

Jul 29th, 2022

by [Joseph Nunn](#) and [Elizabeth Goitein](#)

Jul 28th, 2022

by [Lawrence Woocher](#)

Jul 25th, 2022

by [Viola Gienger](#)

Jul 23rd, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Jul 23rd, 2022

by [Noah Bookbinder](#), [Norman L. Eisen](#), [Fred Wertheimer](#), [Donald Simon](#), [Jason Powell](#), [Debra Perlin](#), [Colby Galliher](#) and [Madison Gee](#)

Jul 21st, 2022

by [Albert W. Alschuler](#)

Jul 21st, 2022

by [Salah Ben Hammou](#) and [Avery Reyna](#)

Jul 20th, 2022

by [Dario Cristiani](#)

Jul 19th, 2022

by [Ryan Goodman](#)

Jul 19th, 2022

by [Norman L. Eisen](#), [Noah Bookbinder](#), [Fred Wertheimer](#), [Donald Simon](#), [Jason Powell](#), [Debra Perlin](#), [Colby Galliher](#), [Madison Gee](#) and [Taylor Redd](#)

Jul 18th, 2022

by [Ryan Goodman](#)

Jul 18th, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Jul 16th, 2022

by [Douglas London](#)

Jul 15th, 2022

by [Nasir A. Andisha](#) and [Hamid A. Formuli](#)

Jul 14th, 2022

by [Tess Bridgeman](#)

Jul 13th, 2022

by [Kristine Beckerle](#) and [Ali Jameel](#)

Jul 13th, 2022

by [Ambassador P. Michael McKinley \(ret.\)](#)

Jul 12th, 2022

by [Ryan Goodman](#), [Justin Hendrix](#) and [Clara Apt](#)

Jul 11th, 2022

by [Bradley Honigberg](#)

Jul 8th, 2022

by [Alexandra Stark](#)

Jul 7th, 2022

by [W. Neil Eggleston](#)

Jul 5th, 2022

by [Just Security](#)

Jul 2nd, 2022

by [Karl Mihn](#), [Justin Cole](#), [Iva Petkova](#), [Margaret Shields](#), [Mari Dugas](#), [Nicholas Tonckens](#) and [Tess Bridgeman](#)

Nov 19th, 2021

by [Karl Mihn](#), [Jacob Apkon](#) and [Sruthi Venkatachalam](#)

Sep 29th, 2022

by [Tess Bridgeman](#) and [Brianna Rosen](#)

Mar 24th, 2022

by [Megan Corrarino](#)

Feb 18th, 2022

by [Mary B. McCord](#)

Jan 24th, 2022

by [Emily Berman](#), [Tess Bridgeman](#), [Megan Corrarino](#), [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Dakota S. Rudesill](#)

Jan 20th, 2022

by [Laura Brawley](#), [Antara Joardar](#) and [Madhu Narasimhan](#)

Oct 29th, 2021

by [Leila Nadya Sadat](#)

Sep 13th, 2021

by [Tess Bridgeman](#), [Rachel Goldbrenner](#) and [Ryan Goodman](#)

Sep 7th, 2021

by [Just Security](#)

Jul 19th, 2021

by [Kate Brannen](#)

Jun 30th, 2021

by [Fionnuala N Aolin](#) and [Kate Brannen](#)

Jun 14th, 2021

by [Steven J. Barela](#) and [Mark Fallon](#)

Jun 1st, 2021

by [Christine Berger](#)

May 29th, 2021

by [Beth Van Schaack](#)

Feb 1st, 2021

by [Beth Van Schaack](#) and [Chris Moxley](#)

Nov 16th, 2020

by [Oona A. Hathaway](#), [Preston Lim](#), [Mark Stevens](#) and [Alasdair Phillips-Robins](#)

Nov 10th, 2020

by [Emily Berman](#), [Tess Bridgeman](#), [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Dakota S. Rudesill](#)

Oct 14th, 2020

by [Cristina Rodriguez](#) and [Adam Cox](#)

Oct 12th, 2020

by [Scott Roehm](#), [Rita Siemion](#) and [Hina Shamsi](#)

Sep 11th, 2020

by [Matiangai Sirleaf](#)

Jul 13th, 2020

by [Catherine O'Rourke](#)

Oct 21st, 2020

by [Sarah Knuckey](#) and [Jayne Huckerby](#)

May 27th, 2020

by [Tess Bridgeman](#) and [Ryan Goodman](#)

Sep 12th, 2019

by [Just Security](#)

Jan 28th, 2019

by [Marty Lederman](#)

Oct 25th, 2018

by [Erik Dahl](#)

Jun 7th, 2022

by [Justin Hendrix](#), [Nicholas Tonckens](#) and [Sruthi Venkatachalam](#)

Aug 29th, 2021

by [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Juilee Shivalkar](#)

Aug 8th, 2021

by [Kate Brannen](#) and [Ryan Goodman](#)

May 11th, 2021

by [Atlantic Council's DFRLab](#)

Feb 10th, 2021

by [Ryan Goodman](#), [Mari Dugas](#) and [Nicholas Tonckens](#)

Jan 11th, 2021

by [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Danielle Schulkin](#)

Nov 3rd, 2020

by [Chris Shenton](#)

Aug 24th, 2020

by [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Danielle Schulkin](#)

Jul 27th, 2020

by [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Julia Brooks](#)

Mar 11th, 2020

Washington Director of the Center for Victims of Torture. Chair of the Board of Directors for Refugee Council USA.

[Send A Letter To The Editor](#)

by [Joseph Margulies](#)

Oct 13th, 2022

by [Eian Katz](#)

Sep 13th, 2022

by [Heather Brandon-Smith](#)

Aug 26th, 2022

by [Joseph Nunn](#) and [Elizabeth Goitein](#)

Jul 28th, 2022

by [Tess Bridgeman](#)

Jul 13th, 2022

by [Terry Rockefeller](#)

Jul 1st, 2022

by [Joseph Margulies](#)

Mar 11th, 2022

by [Scott Roehm](#)

Feb 2nd, 2022

by [Tess Bridgeman](#)

Feb 1st, 2022

by [Tess Bridgeman](#)

Jan 20th, 2022

by [Shayana Kadidal](#)

Jan 11th, 2022

by [Ian Moss](#)

Jan 11th, 2022

Just Security is based at the Reiss Center on Law and Security at New York University School of Law.