

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/prea-information-and-victim-services-should-be-accessible-to-incarcerated-people-with-disabilities>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Too often, educating incarcerated people with disabilities about their rights, access to services, and agency policies is limited to reading aloud to people who are blind or low-vision and giving print materials to Deaf people. These makeshift accommodations, while understandable in a busy correctional facility that places high demands on staff, provide only the most basic access to information for only a portion of those who have diverse and easily identifiable needs.

With greater understanding of disability and a practical list of strategies for creating broader accessibility, we believe corrections can do more. That's why Vera's Center on Sentencing and Corrections (CSC) and Center on Victimization and Safety (CVS), in conjunction with the [National PREA Resource Center](#), teamed up to create a new resource for corrections administrators and staff. [This guide](#) offers practical recommendations that will help agencies broaden the accessibility of their PREA education and victim support services and comply with the national [PREA standards](#).

Research tells us that people with disabilities living in the community are subject to violent victimization at higher rates than their counterparts without disabilities. Incarcerated people with disabilities also experience higher rates of victimization and significant barriers to services—barriers that are often magnified and compounded by challenges unique to correctional settings. For example, incarcerated people with disabilities may go unidentified if their disability is not obvious, which may leave them uninformed about PREA and potentially vulnerable.

In addition, although the PREA standards do not allow corrections agencies to use incarcerated peers as interpreters, we learned that facilities still sometimes use inmate helpers. This can create an unintended power balance or opportunities for exploitation, where the person with the disability is dependent on the helper for some of the activities of daily living. This often occurs because corrections professionals do not have the training or tools necessary to create more accessible environments for learning and seeking help.

With our collective expertise in the areas of disability and PREA, Vera crafted a practical correctional guide grounded in community best practices. CVS has worked with more than 60 communities to help them improve their responses to victims with disabilities, and CSC has a long history of doing PREA work, including specific projects that seek to improve responses to victims of sexual abuse in confinement.

We hope the PREA guide strengthens corrections professionals' understanding of disability and sparks interest in creating meaningful change to how PREA information and services are delivered to incarcerated people. Further, we believe that the facilities that adopt these strategies will be signaling a commitment to an institutional culture of safety and respect for all incarcerated people. After all, people are much more likely to report sexual abuse and seek help when they understand their rights to be free from abuse, how to report, and how to get help.

Join our webinar next Thursday, October 29, 2015, at 3pm ET to discuss PREA standards, disability, and the guide's recommendations. [Register now.](#)

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