CHALLENGE STATEMENT

COVID-19

The UCLA Covid-19 Behind Bars Data Project

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ABOUT THE SPONSOR

The UCLA Covid-19 Behind Bars Data Project tracks the spread and impact of Covid-19 in American carceral facilities and compiles key resources relating to this fast-unfolding situation. The project collects Covid-19-related data on infection rates and deaths inside every prison system and some jails; testing; releases; and conditions in youth facilities and immigration detention. We also maintain a database of Covid-19-related legal filings and court orders in carceral facilities; grassroots organizing efforts; and additional resources developed by others. The primary goal of the project is to provide this data to the advocates, journalists, and community members who are pushing for the release of incarcerated people, because the best way to protect people inside is to facilitate releases and reduce overcrowding. Over the long term, the project aims to catalogue and preserve as much data about the pandemic as possible for future study and analysis, since understanding what happened during this crisis will be vital to the urgent project of shrinking our country's massive carceral footprint.

BACKGROUND

Advocating for the wellbeing of those incarcerated and working in prisons -- and holding the criminal-legal system accountable -- requires understanding the severity and risks of the Covid-19 pandemic inside facilities. However, data about what goes on within carceral facilities is notoriously challenging to access, and even when data are made public, the lack of reporting and quality standards often make it difficult to compare and interpret; the variables that are reported, the frequency with which they are reported, and the formats in which they are reported differ dramatically between jurisdictions. The UCLA Covid-19 Behind Bars Data Project seeks a method of evaluating and comparing approaches to Covid-19 response and data accountability among state departments of correction (DOCs).

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

Use the provided Covid-19 testing, case, death, and population data for Pennsylvania, Arkansas, New Mexico, and Washington, along with provided information about state testing policies, to evaluate each DOC's pandemic response, data transparency, and data quality. Propose a weighted scoring methodology using the example scorecard on the following page as a starting point. The end result need not be limited to the considerations included in that example, but should be a public-facing scorecard that is both thoughtfully-designed on the back end and legible to a general audience on the front end. As part of your process, please consider existing approaches to evaluating Covid-19 responses (examples included at the end of this document), and justify your chosen approach.

Data availability varies widely, and assessing pandemic response will be particularly challenging for states DOCs with incomplete or low-quality data. We are particularly interested in innovative approaches evaluating these DOCs.

Feel free to seek out and incorporate additional data (from press releases, reports, etc.) beyond what we've provided. We do not currently collect data on sanitation practices, but we've included that as a potential scoring factor in the event that that data is available. We also do not have up-to-date population data for every state, which makes calculating infection and death rates a challenge.

If time allows, propose additional criteria to consider and how they would be weighted. Examples may include: other state-specific data from our datasets, comparison between infection rate within facilities and in the broader community, etc.

Sample scorecard
[NOTE: The below example is meant to illustrate possible factors you might consider in evaluating a State DOC. Please create your own scorecard.]

State DOC:			
		Best Practice	Weighted Score
Data Transparency and Quality			x/x
Reporting quality		x/x	
	Do they report infection data? For inmates, staff, or both?	Yes; Both	x/x
	Do they report death data? For inmates, staff, or both?	Yes; Both	x/x
	Do they report testing data? For inmates, staff, or both?	Yes; Both	x/x
	Do they report prison population data (to enable rate calculations)?	Yes	
	Does state report frequency of testing?	Yes	x/x
	Do they report what type of test is used?	Yes	x/x
Infection data quality			x/x
	Does state report cumulative cases, active cases, or both?	Both	x/x
	Does state report whether cases are symptomatic or asymptomatic?	Yes	x/x
	Does state report recovered cases, relapsed cases, or both?	Both	x/x
Death data quality			x/x
	Does state report confirmed Covid-19 deaths, presumed deaths, or both?	Both	x/x
Testing data quality			x/x
	Does state report number of tests administered, number of people tested, or both?	Both	x/x
	Do they report sanitation practices and policies? How accessible is the information?	Yes; On website	x/x
	Do they report testing practices and policies? How accessible is the information?	Yes; On website	x/x
	Do they provide information by facility, or only statewide?	By facility	x/x
Pandemic Response			x/x
Infection rate		?	x/x

Death rate		?	x/x
Overcrowding (% of rated capacity occupied)		?	x/x
Sanitation practices			x/x
	Do they provide masks?	Yes	x/x
	Do they provide hand sanitizer?	Yes	x/x
	Do they provide hand washing stations?	Yes	x/x
Testing practices			x/x
	Are policies standard across facilities?	Yes	x/x
	Do they provide masks and sanitation supplies?	Yes	x/x
	Do they test inmates, staff, or both?	Both	x/x
	Is testing for staff mandatory or voluntary?	Mandatory	x/x
	Are tests administered universally or only to those with symptoms?	Universally	x/x
	When/under what conditions do they administer tests? (Transfers, hospital visits, pre-release, etc.)	All of the above	x/x

* The UCLA Covid-19 Behind Bars Data Project collects data on infections and deaths related to Covid as well as incarcerated population numbers to calculate infection and death rates. This data, however, should not be seen as comparative across states, as how states calculate infections and deaths due to Covid is strongly tied to continuous accurate testing. Even when states claim to test 100% of their population, highly unlikely results are sometimes reported.

DATA

- Arkansas Dataset (csv)
- New Mexico Dataset (csv)
- Pennsylvania Dataset (csv)
- Washington Dataset (csv)
- Data Descriptions (pdf)
- Testing Policies and Practices (pdf)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Factors to keep in mind related to testing data:

- The test count may refer to tests administered or people tested.
- States vary in approaches to testing frequency.
- States vary in who they are testing, when, and for what reasons (e.g., entire prison population, symptomatic population, those who are new to the facility, those who are about to be released, etcetera).
- Tests vary in type, and therefore reliability.
- Some testing policies may vary across facilities within a single jurisdiction.

Factors to keep in mind related to cases and death data:

- Some states report only confirmed Covid-19 deaths, while others include presumed deaths.
- Some states report cumulative case counts, while others report only active cases.
- Not all states distinguish between asymptomatic and symptomatic cases.
- Some states do not report recovered and relapsed cases.

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Other Covid-19 scorecard initiatives:

- ACLU and Prison Policy Initiative's Failing Grades Report
- Eviction Lab's Covid-19 Housing Policy Scorecard
- We Rate Covid Dashboards (universities and colleges)
- Covid Act Now
- Covid Tracking Project

Additional data beyond what's included in our datasets:

- Most recent Arkansas population numbers
- Marshall Project/AP COVID-19 cases in prison, prison populations (by state)