

Positive Pathways Project



The Positive Pathways Project is a partnership between:

- NYS Department of Corrections & Community Supervision (DOCCS)
- NYS Department of Health (DOH)
- HIV Center at Columbia University & Hunter College School of Public Health
- Five Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

Questions:

Heidi Reukauf, MPH, RN
Positive Pathways Coordinator
NYS Department of Health

Phone:
518.402.5701

E-mail:
Heidi.reukauf@health.ny.gov

What is the Positive Pathways Project?

The Positive Pathways Project is an innovative public health initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Activities have been launched in 17 correctional facilities across NYS. This initiative has the potential to identify new and existing HIV+ individuals in the correctional setting, link these individuals to medical care for HIV during incarceration and ensure continued linkage to medical care for HIV upon and after release to the community.

Why is this project important?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics NYS has the highest number of inmates diagnosed with HIV in the nation; estimated at 3,000. The NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) is aware of less than 40% of these cases. It is believed that most HIV positive inmates unknown to DOCCS Health Services are personally aware of their HIV status but choose not to disclose. As a result, the majority of inmates living with HIV are not connected to essential medical care and services for HIV. To address this public health challenge the NYS DOCCS is partnering with NYS Department of Health (DOH) to implement Positive Pathways.

What are the goals of the Positive Pathways Project?

- Reduce the stigma associated with being HIV positive in the correctional setting.
- Identify new and existing HIV+ persons in the inmate population.
- Encourage HIV positive inmates to link to medical care/treatment for HIV during incarceration.
- Link HIV positive releasees to medical care for HIV and supportive services in the community upon and after release.
- Sustain releasees in medical care for HIV for six months post-release.

How does the project work?

Six distinct strategies are employed to reduce HIV-related stigma, increase inmate confidence in DOCCS medical care, identify and treat the HIV positive correctional facility population, and link and sustain in care HIV positive individuals upon and after release:

1. Education and training of DOCCS Correction Officers;
2. Education and training of DOCCS Health Services staff;
3. Education of the general inmate population;
4. Delivery of an evidence-based intervention to connect inmates diagnosed with HIV to medical care;
5. Systematic offer of HIV test to inmates with no testing history known to DOCCS within 90 days of release date; and,
6. Supportive services in the community to ensure linkage to and continuation of medical care and treatment for HIV upon and after release for a period of 6 months.