

Medical Care for the Incarcerated

The Texas Catholic Conference *supports efforts to improve access to medical care for the incarcerated in Texas.*

We are called to show compassion and mercy to all, including those who are incarcerated. Basic human rights, including access to health care, must not be denied to those in our prison and jails, who are first and foremost children of God.

A Texas Bishop Speaks:

"As the nation implements health care reform, we must continue to improve access for our brothers and sisters who are incarcerated and often do not have access to basic medical and dental care."



-Bishop Michael Mulvey, Diocese of Corpus Christi

Church Teaching

- ★ All are created in the image of God and possess a dignity, value, and worth that must be recognized, promoted, safeguarded, and defended. For this reason, any system of penal justice must provide those necessities that enable inmates to live in dignity: food, clothing, shelter, personal safety, timely medical care, education, and meaningful work adequate to the conditions of human dignity. (*USCCB, Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*)
- ★ Our Catholic moral tradition teaches that every human being, from the moment of conception to natural death, has an innate dignity that entitles him or her to certain rights and protections, including the fundamental right to life and the right to affordable healthcare, which flows from the right to life. (*Texas Catholic Conference, Statement on Health Care*)
- ★ Since the 1970s, a considerable debate has developed in the United States about whether treatment programs work and to what extent. Careful reviews of the literature on rehabilitation have concluded that treatment does reduce recidivism. No single type of treatment or rehabilitation program, however, works for every offender. The effectiveness of programs depends on many things, including type of offense, quality of the program, and family, church, and community support. (*USCCB, Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*)
- ★ Two thousand years have passed since the Son of God was made man and came to dwell among us. Today as then, the salvation brought by Christ is continually being offered to us, that it may bear abundant fruits of goodness in keeping with the plan of God who wishes to save all his children, especially those who have gone away from him and are looking for the way back. The Good Shepherd is always going in search of the lost sheep, and when he finds them he puts them on his shoulders and brings them back to the flock. Christ is in search of every human being, whatever the situation! (*Pope John Paul II, Jubilee in Prisons*)

Resources

- ★ **Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.shtml)
- ★ **Restore Justice** offers a place of compassion and assistance, resources and services and educational information for anyone who is affected by crime (www.RestoreJustice.com)

The Texas Catholic Conference (TCC) is the association of the 15 Roman Catholic dioceses of the State of Texas, and is the Official Public Policy Voice of the Catholic Bishops of Texas.

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Health Care is a basic human right that cannot be withheld from those who are incarcerated. The Texas Catholic Conference supports improving the quality of health care to those who are incarcerated and specific measures to care for and alleviate the suffering for those who are need substance abuse or mental health treatment, or are elderly or terminally ill.

Cost of careⁱ

The average daily medical bill for Texas inmates grows about 4 percent every year — which is low, compared to some states. The sickest inmates can each cost the state up to \$1 million a year in health care costs. If these same inmates were living in nursing homes or hospice facilities, the federal government — through Medicaid — would pay two-thirds of the cost and save Texas taxpayers up to \$50 million a year, according to state projections. If the offenders are eligible for Medicare, the federal government can pay for the full cost of medical care.

Deaths While in Prisonⁱ

In the last fiscal year alone, more than 440 Texas inmates died in prison. Thirty-one inmates who'd been recommended by medical staff for release died while awaiting the parole board to take up their case; another 26 died after the parole board rejected them for release. Twelve inmates were approved for medical parole but died before they could be sent home. Prison doctors routinely offer up the oldest and sickest of these inmates for medical parole, a way to get those who are too incapacitated to be a public threat and have just months to live. They've recommended parole for 4,000 such inmates within the last decade, but the state parole board, which makes the final decision on "medically recommended intensive supervision," has only agreed in a quarter of these cases, leaving the state to care for the others, who die in prison.

Geriatric Careⁱ

Texas' "geriatric" inmates, classified as those 55 and older, make up just 7.3 percent of Texas' 160,000-offender prison population. But they account for nearly a third of the system's hospital costs and make three times as many visits to prison medical departments as younger inmates. Elderly inmates have average annual hospitalization costs of \$4,700, compared to \$765 for inmates under 55. In total, providing inmate medical care costs the state correctional health care system — already facing hundreds of employee layoffs amid a budget shortfall — nearly half a billion dollars a year.

Mental Healthⁱⁱ

In Texas, there are nearly 8 mentally ill persons in jails and prisons for every one in a hospital. In prisons "the average prisoner costs the state about \$22,000 a year," but "prisoners with mental illness range from \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year." Texas ranks 48th in the Nation based on per capita expenditures by our state mental health authority.

Drug Treatmentⁱⁱⁱ

According to a National Institute of Justice report, at the time of their arrest two-thirds of adults and half of juveniles tested positive for at least one drug. Recent nationwide studies have concluded that drug treatment is reducing drug use, criminal activity, and physical and mental health problems, as well as increasing employment potential. These research studies also suggest that drug treatment is a very cost-effective method to reduce substance abuse and crime. The savings to tax payers from quality substance abuse treatment versus imprisonment is significant (three to one in a recent RAND Corporation study). Furthermore, community-based substance abuse programs and programs that address behaviors that lead people to crime are far less expensive than similar programs in prison and produce effective and encouraging results.

(Last updated August 12, 2010, 82nd Legislative Session)

ⁱ"Few Texas Inmates Get Released on Medical Parole — Texas Department of Criminal Justice." *The Texas Tribune*. Web. 11 Aug. 2010. <www.texastribune.org/texas-dept-criminal-justice/texas-department-of-criminal-justice/few-texas-inmates-get-released-on-medical-parole/>.

ⁱⁱ Torrey, M.D., E. Fuller, Aaron D. Kennard, M.P.A., Don Eslinger, Richard Lamb, M.D., and James Pavle. *More Mentally Ill Persons Are in Jails and Prisons Than Hospitals: A Survey of the States*. Rep. Treatment Advocacy Center and National Sheriff's Association, May 2010. Web. 12 Aug. 2010. <www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/tac/documents/final_jails_v_hospitals_study.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Web. 11 Aug. 2010. <www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.shtml>.