

Exploring Experiences of Disclosing HIV-Positive Status While in Prison

Investigator: Megan Comfort

Project Staff and Partners: Alex Kral, Lynn Wenger, Alexandra Lutnick, Joseph Bick (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation), AIDS Project East Bay, The Gamble Institute, Casa Segura

This study began in January 2013 and aims to develop an understanding of HIV-positive people's experiences disclosing or not disclosing their status while incarcerated. During the course of this 3-year study, we will conduct in-depth qualitative interviews with 100 HIV-positive people who have recently exited incarceration. Potential participants will be referred by community-based organizations in Oakland that work with HIV-positive people, formerly incarcerated people, and people who use drugs. Data analysis will be guided by the Behavioral Model for Vulnerable Populations. This study is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (R01 DA 033847).

In order to receive HIV treatment while incarcerated, individuals who know they are HIV-positive must disclose their status either by consenting to HIV testing or by identifying themselves to correctional medical providers. Seroprevalence data suggest that a potentially large proportion of HIV-positive prisoners decide not to disclose their status and therefore do not receive HIV care while incarcerated. Study findings will provide critical knowledge to inform recommendations for facilitating HIV-positive people's disclosure of their status while incarcerated, potentially increasing the numbers of individuals linked to correctional HIV care. Improving access to treatment in prison will have an impact on a disproportionately African American and Latino population. This study's aims closely align with the National AIDS Strategy goals of improving access to care for people living with HIV and reducing health disparities.