

COVID-19 HITS PRISONS AROUND THE WORLD

Shortly after COVID-19 appears in communities, it predictably makes its way into the prisons of those communities, where it often amplifies.

Health through Walls (HtW) staff and volunteers in several countries have been working tirelessly with prison officials since early 2020 to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and protect the incarcerated persons within them or advocate for their release. Many prisons did not have budgets, plans, or means to respond to a respiratory-born pandemic. HtW provided guidance, volunteers, personnel, equipment, supplies, and provided training and education. Below are reports from HtW staff and partners from various countries.

Haiti, Appeals in early 2020 for funding from USAID, Global Fund and AIDS Healthcare Foundation to purchase and acquire personal protective equipment and sanitation supplies provided a head start against the COVID-19 pandemic, along with an effort from the Ministry of Justice to decongest and release some prisoners although this effort was not robust.

Margaret Bury, MD, HtW project manager in Haiti shares the following:

The news out of the blue: at the Civil Prison in Port-au-Prince, the COVID-19 test results were positive! The prison administration, known as DAP, had implemented procedures to avert the COVID-19 contamination of prisoners.

Despite the DAP's contingency plan which consisted of efforts to isolate new prisoners, preventive measures, the establishment of hand washing points, recording of prisoner's temperatures, and individual protection measures, the pandemic had the upper hand.

Unusual symptoms started coming to the attention of the HtW' medical personnel who had been working in the field for several years to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted and other contagious diseases including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and co-morbidities. At the end of April, isolated cases of fevers started to be screened in the consultation areas. This initially was not a cause for concern because the dispensary admits such cases on a daily basis. But when a particular cell block of the prison continued to present similar cases, the health care staff began to focus and investigate these fever cases. From Thursday, May 7th onwards, the clinical picture changed quickly. On Friday, May 8th, the staff triaged and examined 18 patients. They all had symptoms related to aches, fevers, flu, diarrhea, and slightly red eyes.

The team also noted two deaths which caused troubling concerns. Until this point, there had not been evidence that COVID-19 had infiltrated the prison. HtW nursing staff immediately went into action, and collaborated with the Ministry of Health for testing which confirmed the virus. On Saturday, May 9th and Sunday, May 10th the team mobilized at the National Penitentiary to detect suspected cases of COVID-19. Within two days they examined 1,200 prisoners. Of these prisoners, 40 presented possible symptoms of COVID-19.

Several HtW medical staff developed COVID-19 over the months and staff shortages have been common, but the work continues to mitigate disease and save lives. Thanks also to Yale University School of Medicine for their kind donation of 300 N95 masks for our HtW medical team.

Sustainable prison healthcare in developing countries



Out of cell time in crowded prison during COVID-19

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HtW Newsletter
DECEMBER 2020

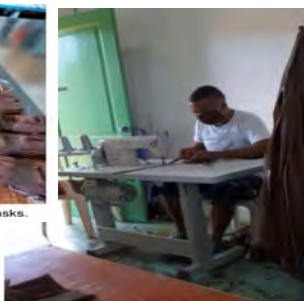


Dominica Republic - LaVictoria Penitentiary, the largest prison, was particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, as the country had robust tourism at the time, and the prison's pre-COVID-19 system allowed for two conjugal visits per week of approximately 5,000 visitors weekly "which meant an open door was left for the virus to reach the inmates and police officers," according to Dr. Martha Butler of the non-profit Fundación Génesis which partners with HtW in the Dominican Republic. This practice ended by end of March but COVID-19 had already entered this large and overcrowded prison of close to 9,000 prisoners at the time. Dr. Butler explained that limited personal protective equipment and testing kits "delayed a prompt response and that casualties occurred."

"As early as mid-March, Fundación Génesis and HtW began mobilizing a response. Through social media solicitation of funds and materials, civil society and private donors provided masks and other personal protection items for the health care providers who are permanently assigned there," explained Dr. Butler. Generous support from AIDS Healthcare Foundation made it possible to provide incarcerated persons with soap, bleach, disinfectant materials. Sewing machines, cutting tables and enough materials to make an additional 5,000 cloth masks for prisoners was procured. Fundación Génesis arranged for a volunteer psychologist to counsel prisoners via Zoom.



Packs of finished cloth masks.



Sewing machines.



PHOTO ABOVE: Dr. Donna Royer-Powe (L), Jamaica Dept of Correctional Services and HtW's Arnold Campbell (R) with donations.

Jamaica. Funding from AIDS Healthcare Foundation allowed HtW's Program Director Arnold Campbell and team to assist Jamaica Department of Correctional Services and Medical Director Dr. Donna Royer-Powe to expand sanitization and preparedness inside their prisons and provide training to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Donated materials included sewing machines, disinfectants, masks and more. Supplies were distributed to all prisons in the country followed by educational and sanitation campaigns

Malawi. Pastor Danileck Mitepa, Program Director of HtW in Malawi, visits several prisons, including the women's and the children's prisons to conduct HIV health education as well as to provide needed supplies including vitamin-enriched peanut butter. The prisons are overcrowded, lack basic materials and have limited medical care. AIDS Healthcare Foundation provided funding for HtW to purchase COVID-19 relief items necessary to prevent its spread including buckets to create handwashing stations, soap, bleach, masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, basins, blankets, food, and more. Additionally, HtW participated in national training for COVID-19 mitigation with prison wardens.

Donations of personal protective equipment were also sent by HtW to meet needs in the prisons of **Guyana** and **Belize**.

MANY THANKS TO OUR 2020 VOLUNTEERS, SUCH AS

- Dr. Irving Waldman of Miami who reads thousands of digital x-rays of prisoners from Haiti;
- Linda Waldman of Miami who prepares radiology reports;



PHOTO: Dr. Irving Waldman reading x-rays for tuberculosis screening

- Since 2012, Dr. Irving and Linda Waldman have read x-rays prepared reports for **46,631** persons in Haiti's prisons!
- Cathy Lynn May, Florida, who provides accounting and support services;
- Dr Anne Spaulding, Emory University Rollins School of Public Health, for program evaluation and support; in addition to staff and students Shanaika Grandoit MPH, Laura Dirks, Haley Kehus, MPH.
- Our volunteer Board of Directors and Officers.

INTERNATIONAL TEAM OF ARCHITECTS DONATE EXPERTISE TO DESIGN EMERGENCY COVID –19 UNIT FOR HAITI’S NATIONAL PENITENTIARY



Site Organization - Premised Scheme - Conceptual Render
Capacity (Low: 85 SINGLE BEDS) / (High: 166 DOUBLE BUNK)

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Proposed section of the emergency COVID-19 treatment prison unit designed by volunteer architects.

As infections with COVID-19 increased in Haiti’s National Penitentiary, the overcrowded housing units made impossible the separation of those with infection from those without. HtW reached out to the Design Committees of the American Correctional Association and International Corrections and Prisons Association and a team of volunteer architects and engineers worked extensively to design an innovative structure from shipping containers, local materials, ventilation and renewable energy sources that could be built in a few weeks at minimal expense. Construction could teach trade skills for incarcerated persons. The team also secured pledges of donations of equipment and materials from other vendors. Unfortunately, the funding source for this initiative withdrew, but the plan remains ready. The unit would provide medical treatment rooms for sicker patients, isolation areas and open bays for stable patients. The model has been shared with other countries for consideration. HtW is grateful for the many hours of dedication, countless video conferences, and creative options from the team of Steve Carter, Andrew Cupples, Robert Boraks, Jim Beight and Mohamed Hasan.

UNITED NATIONS PARTNERS WITH HTW FOR SUPPORT ON COVID-19 MITIGATION IN PRISONS

The United Nations Department of Peace Operations and UN Development Program awarded a contract to HtW through July 2021 to assist with building preparedness, contingency planning and training for COVID-19 and other health related issues in prisons. HtW presently provides remote desk support to develop guidance and offer non-binding advice on health and medical-related questions in prison environments. Dialogues so far have engaged UN prison support units from Mali, Central African Republic, Libya, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Darfur, and Somalia.

HtW has assembled a volunteer Advisory Board to serve as medical resources which includes Dr. Anne Spaulding of Emory University, Dr. Newton Kendig of George Washington University, Dr. Marc Stern of University of Washington, Drs. Johnny Wu and John May of Centurion, and coordinated by HtW Board Member, Ned Heltzer. We are grateful for their contributions of time and expertise.



*"Adequate prisoner health not only controls infectious disease, but also contributes to safe, secure, and humane institutions - part of establishing a society of justice, prosperity and peace."
Dr. John May, President, Health through Walls*

HEROES WORK HERE ! (HtW Haiti team below)



Leading the Conversation on Prison Health

HtW hosted programming on prison health issues at the Global Village of the International AIDS Virtual Conference of the International AIDS Society in July 2020. Participants heard discussions of challenges and successes in the delivery of healthcare to incarcerated persons in some of the harshest settings in the world. The conference theme was resiliency, a topic well known to HtW staff and volunteers. Appreciation to HtW Vice-President, Michelle Karshan for putting together the acclaimed program.

A short video celebrating HtW's work in Haiti's prisons and in the community featured at the conference is available online: <https://www.healththroughwalls.org/slideshow-resiliency.htm>

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PRISONER ART, HAITI

Creating holiday cards to express appreciation.

Leading up to the December holidays, HtW provides art materials and compensation to incarcerated persons in Haiti who create greeting cards for HtW to send to its donors and friends. These men and women enjoy expressing themselves artistically as well as the opportunity to show their appreciation to those who make HtW services possible.

Thank you for your support! And in appreciation of 2020 generous support from USAID, Global Fund, TB REACH, and AIDS Healthcare Foundation, and partners such as SureAdhere and clinical advisors.

www.healththroughwalls.org

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HTW NEEDS YOUR HELP TO IMPROVE HEALTH FOR THOSE IN PRISON OF LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES

- Financial donations toward prisoner health services. So many needs! Medications, supplies, technology, medical services, and more.
- Medical equipment collected by HtW for the American Correctional Association's Container Donation Program shipping supplies to prisons of low income countries
- Volunteer at home or abroad
- Donate online at www.healththroughwalls.org or send check to:

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(Please include your name, address and email.)

Contributions are tax deductible under the IRS codes for 501(c)(3)