

Prison inmates and staff need more health education, training

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Overcrowding, poor hygiene and lousy food predispose inmates to many preventable diseases. And due to lapses in food safety by prison staff, U.S. prisoners are six times more likely to contract a foodborne illness than the general population, according to a resolution introduced by the Pennsylvania delegation at the 2019 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago.

To address this and other health problems in jails and prisons, delegates yesterday directed the AMA to “collaborate with state medical societies and federal regulators to emphasize the importance of hygiene and health literacy information sessions for both inmates and staff in correctional facilities.”

Reproductive health in jails, prisons

In a separate action, the HOD adopted policy to “support an incarcerated person’s right to accessible, comprehensive, evidence-based contraception education, access to reversible contraceptive methods and autonomy over the decision-making process without coercion.”

Of the more than 200,000 American women incarcerated, the majority are between the reproductive ages of 18 and 44, says an AMA Resident and Fellow Section resolution the HOD adopted. Up to 84% of incarcerated women have had a prior unintended pregnancy, as many as 84% plan to be sexually active within six months of release, and 72% had not been using regular forms of contraception before incarceration.

“The majority of incarcerated women face multiple barriers in accessing health care, including reproductive care,” said AMA Board Member E. Scott Ferguson, MD. “It is important that we help ensure incarcerated women have access to contraceptive care, and the information they need to make their own health decisions concerning contraception prior to transitioning back into the community.”