

Harm Reduction After the War on Drugs: Reimagining New York's Treatment System

MONDAY | MAY 4 | 9AM-3PM

JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

EVENT WEBPAGE



HOSTED BY:



DATA COLLABORATIVE FOR JUSTICE
AT JOHN JAY COLLEGE

P2PH
FROM PUNISHMENT
TO PUBLIC HEALTH

**Center
for
Justice
Innovation**

WELCOME!

This hybrid in-person and live-streamed convening will reimagine New York's substance use treatment system by moving beyond the carceral legacy of the War on Drugs toward community-based models that center harm reduction as the default approach.

Goals for the Day:

- Provide a clear understanding of how New York's current substance use treatment system has been shaped by the War on Drugs and continues to reproduce racialized harms, particularly for people impacted by the criminal legal system.
- Elevate harm reduction as the default, health-first framework for substance use care by showcasing community-based, culturally responsive models from across New York State.
- Highlight concrete opportunities to redirect opioid settlement funds and other public investments away from carceral responses and toward community-based harm reduction and treatment services.
- Name specific policy and practice changes that would better align health, racial justice, and public safety goals.



NATIONAL BLACK HARM
REDUCTION NETWORK

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AGENDA

8:30-9:00am: Registration & Breakfast

9:00-9:30am

Welcome & Opening Plenary

This opening plenary will frame harm reduction as an effective, health-first model for substance use treatment, spotlight opportunities to direct opioid settlement funds toward these approaches, and lift up New York organizations already leading this work.

Speakers:

- Erica Bond, Vice President of Justice Initiatives, John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- Tracie M. Gardner, Executive Director, National Black Harm Reduction Network
- Saeeda Lesley Dunston, CEO, Elmcour Youth & Adult Activities, Inc.

9:30-10:45am

Panel 1: Historical Context **From Rockefeller to Now: How Carceral Drug Policy Shaped New York's Treatment System**

This panel will trace the rise of punitive drug policies from the Rockefeller Drug Laws through the War on Drugs, examine how these approaches restricted treatment access and criminalized marginalized communities, and unpack the legislative shifts marked by the 2009 reforms.

Speakers:

- Jeffrey Coats (moderator), Director, From Punishment to Public Health (P2PH) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- gabriel sayegh, Executive Director, Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice
- Samuel Roberts, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History, Sociomedical Sciences, and African American and African Diaspora Studies, Columbia Mailman School of Public Health
- Megan French-Marcelin, Senior Director for New York State Policy, Legal Action Center

10:45-11:00pm

Break

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| 11:00-12:15pm | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Panel 2: Health-Justice Intersection</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">When Health and Justice Don't Meet: Closing the Gap Between Care Systems and Legal Systems</p> |
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This session will examine how gaps between health and legal systems limit access to voluntary, evidence-based harm reduction and treatment, offer concrete policy and practice recommendations to better align health and public safety goals, and highlight a real-world model of improved health-justice coordination in action.

Speakers:

- Bridget Rivera Degnan (moderator), Senior Policy Manager, Data Collaborative for Justice at John Jay College
- Aaron Fox, M.D., M.S., Professor of Medicine, Division of General Internal Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine/Montefiore Medical Center
- David Lucas, Senior Technical Advisor – States, Overdose Prevention Program, Vital Strategies
- Allison McCullough, DSW, LCSW, Clinical Director, Midtown Community Justice Center
- Hon. John Zhuo Wang, Presiding Judge, Midtown Community Justice Center

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| 12:15-1:15pm | Lunch Break |
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| 1:15-1:45pm | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Afternoon Plenary</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Trial by Treatment: Bridging the Morning's Conversations</p> |
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This plenary will build on the morning's discussions to examine the limitations of diversion-based approaches. It will then consider what it would mean for harm reduction to become the default approach to substance use care, pointing to opportunities for policymakers, practitioners, and advocates to advance voluntary, health-centered models.

Speaker:

- Mary Ellen Stitt, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University at Albany School of Criminal Justice, Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy

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| <p>1:45-3:00pm</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Panel 3: Promising Practices</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">On the Ground and in the Community: Harm Reduction Innovations Redefining Treatment in New York</p> |
| <p>This session will showcase innovative community- and outpatient-based harm reduction models, elevate street outreach as a key strategy for engaging people in care and expanding access, and surface ways opioid settlement funds can be leveraged to scale and sustain these approaches across New York.</p> <p><u>Speakers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darryl Phillips (moderator), Executive Director, Always Strive and Prosper (ASAP) Foundation • Brittney Vargas-Estrella, Director of Operations, On Point NYC • Valerie St. Vil, LMSW, Associate Director of Mental Health/Director of Street Health Outreach and Wellness (SHOW) Program, NYC Health and Hospitals • Eric Trujillo, LMSW, Social Worker, Street Health Outreach & Wellness (SHOW) Program, NYC Health and Hospitals • Allan Clear, Director, New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute’s Office of Drug User Health | |
| <p>3:00-3:15pm</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Closing Remarks</p> |
| <p>In the closing session, we will distill the day’s key themes and leave with a call to action for policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and funders.</p> <p><u>Speakers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imogen Carr, Senior Program Officer, Redlich Horwitz Foundation • Tracie M. Gardner, Executive Director, National Black Harm Reduction Network | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">End of Program</p> | |

SPEAKERS & ORGANIZATIONS

Scan to access full speaker bios over on the event webpage:



- **Erica Bond**, Vice President of Justice Initiatives, John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- **Imogen Carr**, Senior Program Officer, Redlich Horwitz Foundation
- **Allan Clear**, Director, New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute's Office of Drug User Health
- **Jeffrey Coots**, Director, From Punishment to Public Health (P2PH) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- **Saeeda Lesley Dunston**, CEO, Elmcot Youth & Adult Activities, Inc.
- **Aaron Fox**, M.D., M.S., Professor of Medicine, Division of General Internal Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine/Montefiore Medical Center
- **Megan French-Marcelin**, State Policy Director, Legal Action Center
- **Tracie M. Gardner**, Executive Director, National Black Harm Reduction Network
- **David Lucas**, Senior Technical Advisor – States, Overdose Prevention Program, Vital Strategies
- **Allison McCullough**, DSW, LCSW, Clinical Director, Midtown Community Justice Center
- **Darryl Phillips**, Executive Director, Always Strive and Prosper (ASAP) Foundation
- **Samuel Roberts, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of History, Sociomedical Sciences, and African American and African Diaspora Studies, Columbia Mailman School of Public Health
- **Bridget Rivera Degnan**, Senior Policy Manager, Data Collaborative for Justice at John Jay College
- **gabriel sayegh**, Executive Director, Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice
- **Mary Ellen Stitt, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor, University at Albany School of Criminal Justice, Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy
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ABOUT THE HOST ORGANIZATIONS

The National Black Harm Reduction Network (NBHRN) is a national coalition dedicated to advancing harm reduction principles that optimize health and wellness for Black communities disproportionately impacted by public health systems, the criminal legal system, and drug policies. Rooted in the legacy of Black-led movements, the Network works to elevate and shape the national conversation on harm reduction through advocacy, policy engagement, and network building. Its efforts focus on providing technical assistance, supporting Black-led initiatives, and strengthening community-based responses to substance use and related harms. NBHRN collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders to promote equitable, culturally grounded approaches that move beyond reducing harm toward eliminating it. More information about the National Black Harm Reduction Network's work is available at: www.nbhrn.org.

The Data Collaborative for Justice (DCJ) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice conducts research on important questions about the criminal legal system and its role in creating safe, just, and equitable communities. Our projects encompass law enforcement, pretrial justice, case processing, sentencing, mass incarceration, and racial and ethnic disparities across the justice continuum. DCJ seeks to collaborate with a wide range of organizations and to facilitate an evidence-informed dialogue that can put us on a path towards a criminal legal system we all deserve. More information about the Data Collaborative for Justice's work is available at: www.datacollaborativeforjustice.org.

From Punishment to Public Health (P2PH) is an initiative based at John Jay College of Criminal Justice that works to transform the infrastructure of public health and public safety. P2PH brings together organizations across government, healthcare, and community-based sectors to coordinate resources, develop shared priorities, and advance cross-sector collaboration. Its work focuses on convening stakeholders, supporting innovative solutions, and advocating for reforms that address the root causes of public safety challenges while reducing reliance on the criminal legal system. Through partnership and systems-level change, P2PH seeks to promote more equitable, health-centered approaches that lead to safer, stronger communities. More information about P2PH's work is available at: www.p2ph.org.

The Center for Justice Innovation (the Center) is a community justice organization that works to advance safety, racial justice, and community well-being in partnership with communities, courts, and those most impacted by the justice system. Its work focuses on designing and implementing community-based programs, supporting victims, and strengthening local responses to harm—while also providing research, evaluation, and technical assistance to jurisdictions nationwide. Through collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, the Center develops and scales practical, evidence-informed solutions that reduce reliance on the traditional justice system and promote more effective, community-centered approaches to safety. More information about the Center for Justice Innovation's work is available at: www.innovatingjustice.org.



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EXPLORE THE RESEARCH

The conversations stemming from this event are anchored by the upcoming release of a new analytic research report from NBHRN, and the recently released report from DCJ and the Center:

Drug Enforcement & Court-Ordered Treatment Across New York State: Before and After Rockefeller Reform

Scan the QR code to access the full report:



This report examines how New York's drug policy has evolved over the past two decades, shaped by two key developments: the 2009 Rockefeller Drug Law Reform and the expansion of problemsolving courts.

The original Rockefeller Drug Laws drove sharp increases in incarceration and racial disparities. The 2009 reforms reversed course—eliminating most mandatory minimums and expanding diversion to treatment. Problem-solving courts have since become central to this shift toward a more health-focused approach.

Key Findings

- **Drug enforcement has declined sharply:** Drug arrests fell 80% statewide since 2000, with the steepest drops in NYC.
- **Convictions and incarceration are down—but unevenly:** Significant declines in NYC and the suburbs; little change upstate.
- **Treatment-based responses expanded, then stabilized:** Problem-solving court use grew rapidly and now reflects lower arrest volumes; most participants face felony charges.
- **Violent charges remain largely excluded:** Diversion programs rarely include violent felonies, despite evidence supporting treatment.
- **Treatment approaches have not meaningfully shifted:** Limited movement away from inpatient care toward less restrictive options.
- **Racial disparities are widening:** Black New Yorkers face higher felony drug arrest rates and are less likely to access diversion in some regions.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Be sure to save the event webpage, where you can access all materials and the full event recording:



<https://datacollaborativeforjustice.org/event/harm-reduction-afterthe-war-on-drugs-reimagining-new-yorks-treatment-system/>



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