

Using linked health and justice data to study health outcomes among people released from custody

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Background

The prison population in Australia is increasing at a rate in excess of the general population. Studies establishing the poor health of justice-involved youth and adults in custody have increased rapidly over the past decade. However, despite the substantial amount of people released from prison annually (>64,000 in Australia), our understanding of the health and health service experience of justice-involved people remains limited. Longitudinal studies combining survey data with prospectively linked health and justice data provide unique opportunities to examine, understand, and improve the health outcomes for justice-involved youth and adults.

Objectives

This presentation will describe the process, challenges, and findings from several of the largest cohort studies to linking routine administrative health and justice data ever conducted, globally.

Method

An overview will be provided of the data collected through surveys and prospectively linked with State-based health and correctional records, Medicare and PBS records, and the National Death Index will be described in detail. Examples of how these cross-sectoral data linkage studies have been used to answer novel public health questions and recommendations for future study design to further improve our understanding of the health of people released from custody, will be discussed.

Results

By generating evidence using unique combinations of survey data, and prospective linkage with National and/or State-based health and justice records, our findings show that, compared to the general population, people released from custody are at increased risk of mortality and morbidity, particularly from potentially preventable causes such as overdose, self-harm/suicide, and injury