

Positive Justice Project

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Positive Justice Project (PJP) is CHLP's national campaign to end the criminalization of HIV and other stigmatized health conditions.

PJP is guided by a framework that seeks to go beyond repealing and reforming laws and policies that criminalize people for living with stigmatized health conditions and expand possibilities for a reality in which people thrive. This framework is rooted in a Black feminist, harm reductionist, abolitionist politic.

We believe that a public health approach, grounded in liberation to achieve health equity, should be used to address public health concerns. When laws or policies are used to criminalize people, we aim to abolish them. When that is not feasible, we work to reform the law or policy in an effort to reduce the harm caused to communities that bear the brunt of enforcement.

Historically, laws that target individuals based on their health status have been used to criminalize those who are already affected by systems of oppression, including people who are Black, Indigenous, brown, trans, queer, women,

immigrants, disabled, unhoused, drug users, sex workers, currently or formerly incarcerated, and/or are living with stigmatized conditions. PJP was envisioned in response to the needs and knowledge of people most affected by criminalization, patriarchal violence, white supremacy, and economic divestment.

We intend for these principles to guide internal decision-making, assist in training and support, inform coalition work, promote accountability, and publicly communicate the motivations behind CHLP's approach.

PRINCIPLE #1

The Positive Justice Project is dedicated to eliminating laws that criminalize people's health conditions as well as rob people of their bodily autonomy.

- + We oppose laws that consider simply living with stigmatized conditions as evidence of intent to expose or transmit and those that equate exposure to or transmission of the condition as a form of violence.
- + While the elimination of these laws is the goal, we acknowledge the importance of reducing the harms caused by laws

through reform. We stand firm that efforts to update laws should not create more serious crimes for exposing or transmitting a specific condition or increase the punishment a person living with a stigmatized health condition may face based solely on their diagnosis.

PRINCIPLE #2

PJP honors the experience and knowledge of people living with HIV or other stigmatized health conditions and seeks to build trust-based relationships with advocates who are fighting criminalization in their communities.

- + When entering coalitions and collaborations, our intention is to remain grounded in humility and to prioritize listening. We follow the guidance of leaders working to create community-driven strategies in response to the needs and insights of people living with HIV or other stigmatized health conditions who are affected by criminalization or are at risk of being criminalized.
- + In the event that the goals or actions of an organization or person intentionally or unintentionally exclude or silence those most affected by criminalization, we will remain steadfast in advocating for their inclusion and will not be complicit in allowing their erasure.

PRINCIPLE #3

PJP's work is oriented around an evidence-based understanding that criminalization has no place in public health. If our goal is to do no harm, we must meet public health issues with public health solutions grounded in liberation.

- + HIV criminalization endangers the health and well-being of our communities. It discourages HIV testing, increases stigma related to HIV and the people deeply affected by it, prevents open and honest conversations about HIV status, and inflames medical and other institutional mistrust. It worsens health disparities through further marginalization of underserved communities from HIV services and does not address the root causes of HIV transmission.
- + We must advocate for compassionate, evidence-based strategies that center autonomy, dignity, and justice and humanize rather than stigmatize.
- Reform should reflect current scientific understanding of transmission, testing, and treatment of HIV and the lived experiences of people living with HIV.
- + PJP prioritizes education, prevention, and access to care over punishment. Public health responses allow people to feel more empowered and confident to take charge of their health, engage with and stay connected to care, and discuss sexual health with providers, partners, and loved ones. We advocate for systems that provide resources and support for people to achieve their vision of health and happiness.