



## **SOPHIA** | *HIA & Equity Case Study*

# **Rehabilitating Corrections in California: The Health Impacts of Proposition 47**

Human Impact Partners conducted an HIA of Prop 47, a 2014 California state ballot initiative that would reclassify six low-level crimes of drug possession and petty theft from felonies to misdemeanors and shift savings to improve services and programs for mental health and substance use, truancy prevention, and for victims of crime.

The HIA found that passage of Prop 47 could reduce crime, recidivism, and racial inequities in sentencing, keep families together, and save the state and its counties \$600 to \$900 million a year – but only if treatment and rehabilitation programs were fully funded and implemented properly. Its reforms could also reduce convictions in California by up to 40,000 per year, allow more than 9,000 people in prison for low-level crimes to apply for reduced sentences or release, and lessen or avoid the stigma of being a convicted felon and its lasting effects on individual and community well-being.

Criminal justice in general, and sentencing policy in particular, are issues that have tremendous equity impacts. Many have documented the disproportionate impact the criminal justice system has on people of color.

### **A focus on equity was integrated throughout the HIA process**

With the intent of doing an HIA to support the advancement of equitable criminal justice policies, HIP reached out to Californians for Safety and Justice, other advocacy groups, and community organizations that organized formerly incarcerated people and their families – those that would be most impacted by policy change – to understand their current projects. Through discussions, they learned about what would become Prop 47, and then built a 15-member advisory committee with representatives of those organizations – including formerly incarcerated people – to guide the HIA. Organizations represented on the advisory committee included, for example: Californians for Safety and Justice, California Calls, PICO California, Community Coalition of South Los Angeles, Ella Baker Center, and Legal Services for Prisoners with Children.

The advisory committee set the scope for the HIA; organized and co-facilitated seven focus groups with formerly incarcerated individuals, family members of incarcerated individuals, and service providers; reviewed the HIA findings; co-developed the HIA recommendations; and disseminated the findings to over 20,000 of their members – voters who were the decision makers on the ballot initiative. To reach diverse audiences, the report was made available as a website, executive summary, research summary, technical report, and infographic.

## The HIA was used to build community capacity

Partner organizations – social justice groups already focused on issues related to equity – were already engaging their communities on Prop 47. For these partners, the HIA provided research that increased their credibility and backed up the arguments they were making. Partner organizations used the HIA findings to develop messages that resonated with community members, trained their leaders and phone canvassers around the state, and wrote Frequently Asked Questions and other outreach materials for their websites.

Through the HIA, partner organizations were able to increase their capacity in communities. The communities they reached benefited from reliable information about health and equity. As one organizer said, “The HIA helped broaden the audience. It made it so everyone can see themselves in the picture.”

## The HIA helped build power in the communities most impacted

Voting is a form of power. HIA partner organizations used the HIA to educate potential voters and increase voter turnout, aligned with a longer-term strategy to build power in communities of color and low income communities in California. In addition, partnerships between communities impacted by the criminal justice system and public health practitioners were created or strengthened as a result of the HIA process. These relationships represent access to power which communities facing inequities often do not have.

## The HIA helped achieve policy changes that reduce inequities

Since the passage of Prop 47, more than 5,000 people have been released from prison due to reclassification of their sentences from felonies to misdemeanors, and about 160,000 have applied to have their felony conviction changed. Release from prison can result in immediate mental and physical health gains. The long-term health impacts will largely be determined by the way in which the policy is implemented over time. HIP and their partner organizations remain engaged in this process.

### **Rehabilitating Corrections in California advanced equity through:**

- ◆ The close partnership between Human Impact Partners, advocates, and community organizing partners who were deeply involved in every aspect of the HIA, including its oversight. This partnership enhanced the capacity of groups that represent people facing inequities to advance policy change;
- ◆ Partner organizations using the HIA as part of their campaigns, and building power of those facing inequities through their voter engagement strategies; and
- ◆ Changes in social determinants of health for those involved with the criminal justice system as a result of felony convictions for minor offenses. People have been released from prison and formerly convicted felons no longer have these convictions on their records. For these individuals, the challenges of getting housing, finding jobs, and accessing government benefits may be reduced.

For more information, contact Kim Gilhuly at Human Impact Partners ([kim@humanimpact.org](mailto:kim@humanimpact.org)).

To read the full case studies and report, please visit the SOPHIA website:

<https://sophia.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/EquityMetricsWhitePaper.pdf>