



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT:

RoiAnn Phillips, Communications Director
roiann.phillips@phimc.org
708.466.2650 (mobile)

Reentry Support in Illinois: State leaders, service providers, and community members strategize to advance criminal, health, and social justice amidst COVID-19 and continuing racism

CHICAGO, IL - On March 4, the 2021 Illinois Reentry Conference: Advancing Criminal, Health, and Social Justice Amidst Two Pandemics kicks off online at 10:00am CST. More than two hundred people have registered this year, representing leaders, community members, and activists in the fields of public health, healthcare, social services, and criminal justice. This annual conference is designed to build skills around health equity, social justice, and reentry services to support current and formerly incarcerated individuals. This year, the conference places specific attention on the impact of racism and COVID-19 on the reentry community. Twice as many people have registered for this year's virtual conference than have registered for the in-person conferences in past years.

Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago (PHIMC), through its Community Reentry Project (CRP), hosts the Illinois Reentry Conference annually. For more than twenty years, CRP has provided a comprehensive system of HIV prevention, care, and support services to ensure people living with HIV or at risk of HIV transition smoothly from incarceration to communities. Initially known as Corrections Demonstration Project, CRP was founded in 1999 by Centers for Disease Control and Health Resources & Services Administration. In 2010, Illinois Department of Public Health granted funds to PHIMC to lead CRP.

Annually, under PHIMC's direction, CRP provides HIV Health Education to approximately 3,170 detainees in the Cook County Department of Corrections, assists approximately 1,200 formerly incarcerated individuals with obtaining legal identification, and distributes approximately 6,780 discharge planning packets. Additionally, CRP hosts a variety of networking and training opportunities for people with lived experience and professionals working in reentry, HIV, behavioral health, healthcare, corrections, and criminal justice. These opportunities include bimonthly statewide meetings, quarterly corrections discharge planning trainings, and annual Illinois Reentry Conferences, engaging more than 300 individuals annually.

Conference sessions this year include:

- Plenaries by Dr. Rob Fullilove, Associate Dean for Community and Minority Affairs, Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences, and co-director of the Cities Research Group at Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University; Dr. Stephen Schrantz, Medicine/Pediatric Physician and Assistant Professor in Infectious Diseases and Global Health at the University of Chicago Medicine; and leaders from the Illinois Department of Corrections
- *Bridging the Gap: The Impact of Community Health Work on Returning Citizens* by a team from Illinois Public Health Association
- *Public Health and Public Safety: A Timely Connection* by Rebecca Levin, Senior Advisor, Cook County Sheriff's Office

- *Compassion: A Gendered Response to Emotional Resilience and Wellness During the Pandemic* by a team from Center for Women in Transition
- *Anti-racism: Because Being Not Racist Isn't Enough* by Sterling Haukom Anderson, Manager of Training and Development, Thresholds
- *Community Reentry Project Champion Award Presentation*

“This conference could not be more timely,” says Rashonda Johnson, Manager at PHIMC, who is in her fourth year of organizing the Illinois Reentry Conference. “This was made abundantly clear by the volume of registrations that poured in from the moment we announced our theme. Our team – staff, partners, presenters – are eager to rediscover, reimagine, and rebuild best practices throughout Illinois in criminal, health, and social justice at this year’s conference by sharing and discussing what has and has not worked and what we should do next to address both racism and COVID-19.”

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Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago (PHIMC) enhances the capacity of public health and healthcare systems to promote health equity and expand access to services. Through organizational development, systems transformation, fiscal management, and program implementation, PHIMC leads efforts to strengthen public health infrastructure in Illinois.

Community Reentry Project (CRP) is a multi-stakeholder project that coordinates efforts to ensure that people living with and at highest risk for HIV transition smoothly from incarceration to communities. CRP facilitates a comprehensive system of HIV care and support services throughout Illinois. Partners include Cermak Health Services of Cook County and Transforming Reentry Services.