

QUESTIONNAIRE ON COVID-19



HOW IS ADC COMMUNICATING DURING THIS CRISIS?

OVERVIEW

As a state agency with over 42,000 people under its care, it is imperative for the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) to communicate transparent and accurate information about the services it provides to people who are incarcerated. To assess what is happening inside, from March 13, 2020 to March 20, 2020, AFSC-AZ offered an online questionnaire for loved ones of people who are incarcerated to share their experiences on obtaining facts and information about coronavirus (COVID-19) from ADC, which is summarized below.

WHAT WAS ASKED?

The questionnaire asked the following questions:

- 1) At which state prison complex is your loved one incarcerated?
- 2) Which Unit?
- 3) What information have you or your incarcerated loved one(s) received, if any, from ADC regarding COVID-19?
- 4) What sources of information have you relied on as COVID-19 has spread?
- 5) What information are you seeking that you have not found?

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Total number of questionnaires completed: 65*

Even after ADC released their Management Strategies on [March 18](#) and [March 20](#), many family members did not know of the actions being taken to address COVID-19 inside state prisons.

Sixty-four percent of respondents said they had received little to no information about COVID-19 in the prison where their loved one is living. Some indicated they had spoken to their loved one, but no information was disseminated to the people inside. Only 3 respondents (4%) said their loved one received information from a prison warden or “meeting” inside. While 24.2% of respondents said they saw the March 13 announcement of [Visitation Temporarily Suspended](#), this small number exhibits the inadequacies in ADC’s communication methods with the public.

Most families and loved ones of people incarcerated in Arizona prisons relied on television news, print/online news articles, social media support groups, and the Arizona Department of Health Services for information around COVID-19. **Respondents noted that they only relied on information from ADC 13.4% of the time.**

ADC’s releases of two Management Strategies still left many questions and concerns from families and loved ones. Of the 14 respondents who completed the questionnaire after the March 18 release, the following questions remained:

- *What they are going to do when the virus gets in?*
- *Will there be quarantines other than restricting to pods/runs/dorms?*

*Of the 62 completed, 77.4% (48 of total) were completed prior to the ADCRR COVID-19 Management Strategies released on March 18 and 20.

- *Are they really going to stop the store/SecurePaks?*
- *Is it legal for them to halt legal visits as part of their visit suspension?*
- *Why haven't [those incarcerated] received soap yet?*
- *How are they monitoring individuals for signs of COVID-19, and is this consistent at all yards?*

CONCLUSIONS

ADC has not properly communicated with people who are incarcerated in their care, families and loved ones of incarcerated people, and the general public about their plans to prevent an outbreak of the highly contagious COVID-19. Many questions remain about how the strategies announced on March 18 and March 20 are being implemented and how people inside are being treated.

ADC does not make it a priority to communicate with families or loved ones. While other agencies will allow for releases of information and emergency contacts to be coordinated, ADC does not actively communicate with families who are directly impacted. This causes fear and frustration among loved ones who have to call prison facilities, often waiting on hold and ultimately being denied information.

These concerns are compounded by the recent visit of ACLU and Prison Law Office lawyers to review facilities per the *Parsons v. Shinn* lawsuit and their [emergency motion filed](#) due to deplorable conditions. ADC needs to improve communications, prevention processes, and public transparency of this issue to ensure that prevention of a COVID-19 outbreak is the highest priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To restore trust and ensure accountability, ADC should implement the following recommendations:

- Facilitate daily press conferences to provide updates on ADC actions, medical updates and prevention procedures of COVID-19 for the duration of this public health crisis.

These should be livestreamed online, open to the public, and allow media/journalists.

- Allow the Arizona Department of Health Services (AZDHS) and journalists full access to tour prison facilities to ensure compliance with standards recommended by AZDHS, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Any issues found should be addressed within 24 hours to ensure containment.

- Create a procedure for ADC facilities to maintain records for families or loved ones of a person incarcerated via a standard "Release of Information" form. ADC must then ensure communication with these people when they reach out to the prison for information and updates.

This should apply for all people currently incarcerated and should start at intake for any new admissions.



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