

Seniors, Prisoners and the Plight of the Detroit Majority

Nursing homes, correctional facilities are serving as sources for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic within a city which is 80% African American

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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Statistical indicators from the city of Detroit and the state of Michigan reveal that the rate of infections and deaths resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are on the decline.

During the early weeks of April the state of Michigan was ranking third in the number of deaths and the city of Detroit held the undesirable position of having the highest mortality rates above any other region in the United States.

By the conclusion of the month, it appears as if the shelter-in-place and other emergency declarations issued by Governor Gretchen Whitmer have had an effect on curbing transmissions. Many more people are wearing masks and engaging in social distancing on the streets and in businesses declared essential which remain open.

Data provided by the authorities say the city suffered 251 deaths between April 6-12, 240 deaths from April 13-19 and 124 during April 20-26. As of April 29, nearly 1,000 people have died in Detroit while 8,811 people have been infected.

In the state of Michigan altogether there are 39,262 cases reported resulting in 3,547 deaths since March 10 when the first patient was confirmed. The U.S. as a country is leading in the number of confirmed COVID-19 infections with 1,046, 426 out of 3.5 million worldwide. There have been over 60,000 deaths in the U.S., out of 225,000 internationally, with concentrations of infections and deaths in states such as New York, New Jersey, California, Massachusetts, Illinois, California and Pennsylvania. At the time of this writing Michigan was listed as having the seventh highest number of infections and the third largest in regard to deaths.

Locations	Prisoners confirmed
Detroit Reentry Center	11 *1 has since paroled
Charles E. Egeler Reception and Guidance Center/ Duane Waters Health Center	7 *1 Prisoner transferred from DRC to DWH
Kinross Correctional Facility	1 *once released from the hospital the prisoner was transferred to Duane Waters Health Center
Lakeland Correctional Facility	25
Macomb Correctional Facility	46
Newberry Correctional Facility	1
Parnall Correctional Facility	90
Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility	24
Woodland Center Correctional Facility	2

Michigan chart showing number of COVID-19 infections

Nonetheless, the problems in Detroit have by no means been resolved amid continuing significantly high rates of infection and deaths. Hospitals are allocating substantial resources to treat COVID-19 patients while healthcare institutions have laid-off employees. At least 2,200 nurses, doctors and various healthcare workers have contracted the virus requiring quarantine and hospitalization.

Nursing Homes Expose the Capitalist Crisis Related to COVID-19

A major concentration of infections and deaths has occurred in the senior and convalescent homes located in the city and suburbs. The problem was largely hidden due to the focus on hospitals and public service agencies. Relatives and others concerned about the health status of patients living in nursing homes say they were denied information from administrators.

A major testing initiative conducted by the City of Detroit and Wayne County revealed that hundreds of infections occurred in these facilities among both the patients and workers. The conditions prevailing among senior residents in Detroit are reflective of the challenges facing working and poor people around the U.S.

In the state of Michigan there are 2,637 COVID-19 confirmed cases in the nursing homes. The bulk of these infections are being reported in the Detroit Metropolitan area. This problem has been allowed to persist due the substandard living conditions prevailing in the senior homes where staff members are often low-paid and overloaded with employment responsibilities.

[Kim Russell of WXYZ](#) said of the situation in Michigan:

“If you take a look at state data you will see that across Michigan there are nursing homes reporting cases of COVID-19, but most cases are in the communities hardest hit in Metro-Detroit. Taking a look at the three facilities with the most in the state they are Imperial Healthcare Centre in Dearborn

Heights with 76 cases, Ambassador Nursing and Rehab Center in Detroit with 70, and Regency A Villa Center in Taylor with 65.”

The Michigan Department of Health finally in late April released the names of nursing home facilities where there have been COVID-19 cases and deaths. 75% of the infections are reported in the tri-county areas surrounding Detroit which are Macomb, Wayne and Oakland.

Governor Whitmer issued an executive order after the large-scale infections in nursing homes were uncovered. The order is ostensibly designed to ensure the safety and well-being of residents and employees.

However, the question becomes why have these horrendous conditions in the senior long term health facilities been allowed to deteriorate to such a level? Where was the State of Michigan, Tri-county officials and the City of Detroit administration prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the nursing homes?

These developments illustrate that the current profit-driven privatized healthcare system in the U.S. represents a serious threat to the security of the people who reside inside the country. There are still large segments of the population in cities like Detroit, Chicago, New Orleans, New York City, Boston, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, among others that have no medical insurance.

Despite the rapid and pervasive spread of COVID-19 among seniors, there is no reference within the corporate media in regard to the need for universal guaranteed healthcare coverage for everyone living in the U.S. The lack of medical coverage is becoming even more calamitous with the loss of tens of millions of jobs and incomes since mid-March.

Jails, Juvenile Detention Centers and Prisons: Infections Spread Along with Resistance

The U.S. has the highest per capita prison population in the world and the advent of COVID-19 is confirming the dangerous situation which this creates for those inside and outside of the prison-industrial-complex. There are approximately 2.5 million people incarcerated in jails and prisons where inmates are disproportionately African American and Latin American descendants.

Where there has been testing in prisons in various states across the U.S., the infection rates have been extremely high. This phenomenon holds true for the state of Michigan as well where inmates and their families are demanding testing, personal protective equipment (PPE), medical treatment and early release.

Image on the right: Michigan Lakeland Correctional Facility in Coldwater



[A report published by WZZM](#), an ABC News affiliate, says:

“The first round of mass testing at a Michigan prison facility revealed that more than half of the prisoners there had COVID-19. Of the 1,403 inmates tested at Lakeland Correctional Facility in Branch County, 785 of them tested positive for the virus. There are about 30 inmates still awaiting results as of Monday (April 27) morning.”

[Another article](#) addressing the problems at Lakeland Correctional Facility emphasizes that:

“The coronavirus has swept through Lakeland unabated, three inmates told HuffPost. At least 13 men have died and more than 50 have been hospitalized. Of 266 inmates that the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) tested for the virus in units that hold patients with other health issues, 208 came back positive. Overall, about 57% of Lakeland’s 1,400 prisoners have tested positive.”

A class action lawsuit has been filed on behalf of inmates across the state which accuses the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) of failing to provide protection for prisoners and even deliberately allowing them to be infected. The legal action was taken by the Michigan State University Civil Rights Clinic on behalf of 37,000 prisoners in the state where in some facilities the infection rate is as high as 87%.

Prisoners say they have been told by guards that there is nothing the system can do to protect them from COVID-19 spreading in the facilities. The lawsuit demands that the prisons implement the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines which were issued during the month of March.

Juvenile detention centers in Michigan are also a cause for concern. There was a recent case of COVID-19 reported in [Muskegon County](#) where dozens of youth are being held.

The Kent County Juvenile Detention Center reported five cases during early April, three among staff and two inmates. Although Governor Whitmer signed an executive order mandating the release of people from jails and youth detention facilities who posed no risk to the public, the measure provides nothing in regard to relief for those endangered by the MDOC. (See [this](#))

Capitalism, Racism and the Quest for Self-Determination

There has been some cursory discussion in the corporate media as it relates to the

disproportionate rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths among African Americans and other nationally oppressed groups in the U.S. The data released by various municipalities and state governments confirms clearly that the U.S. is not an egalitarian society.

The national and class struggles of the majority of people in Detroit and in the key municipalities around the state of Michigan is a direct result of the undemocratic implementation of corporate policies which only benefit the financial institutions and the wealthy business interests. In the administrative and legislative branches of Detroit's city government, the leadership has failed in the recent period to protect the welfare and public health of the majority African American majority.

Corporate-oriented and bank-imposed Mayor Mike Duggan said in a press conference on April 28 that he wants to establish the most rigorous health screening methods in the U.S. Interestingly enough, this is the same individual who opposed a moratorium on water shut-offs and property tax foreclosures since he was installed in office during the illegal period of Emergency Management and Bankruptcy in 2013-2014.

The Duggan-Gilbert program is designed to facilitate the rapid transfer of public assets and taxes to private interests. This has been actual source of the healthcare crisis in Detroit where the majority 80% African American residents are routinely ignored and suppressed in favor of the outside corporate entities subsidized through abatements and revenue captures.

These conditions in Detroit can only be resolved through the independent actions of the people geared towards the eradication of the capitalist methods of production and distribution. The pandemic has proven that only the transformation of the U.S. towards socialism can address the existing and worsening conditions of working people and the oppressed in the current period and the foreseeable future.

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Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of Pan-African News Wire. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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