

Seminar Connects Mass Incarceration and Health

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In the radio series “[Unprisoned](#),” independent producer Eve Abrams addresses how major public health issues like homelessness, mental health and drug addiction are often criminalized rather than treated, leading to the mass incarceration rates and subsequent health problems.

[Abrams spoke Wednesday](#) about the effects of mass incarceration on Louisiana families and possible models to address it, standing in front of a packed room during the first installment of the Health, Racism and Communication Seminar Series at the [Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#).

“The project aimed to capture some of those stories and help amplify their voices,” said Abrams of the radio series. “The statistics are alarming; the power of the story helps pierce through the facts.”

The U.S. incarceration rate has increased in recent decades with 2.3 million people imprisoned—almost 1 percent of the nation’s population.

Ashley Wennerstrom, an assistant professor at Tulane School of Medicine, explained that studies show the chronic disease rate is two to three times higher in prisoners than in the general population, and mental illness is three to four times higher. Post-release, individuals face roadblocks with healthcare, housing and employment, among other challenges. Families of incarcerated people also suffer—children of incarcerated parents are more likely to suffer from ADD, anxiety, depression, obesity and even asthma.

“We’re trying to incarcerate our way out of a host of bigger problems that we’re not really trying, as a society, to systemically address,” said Abrams. “We’re in it

together, sink or swim. I think it's incredibly important to make sure we're not just looking out for our own, but thinking of our own more expansively."

The three-part seminar series is co-sponsored by the [Tulane Prevention Research Center](#), the [Tulane Center for Excellence in Maternal and Child Health](#), [Tulane Society of Young Black Public Health Professionals](#), [Tulane SPHTM Student Government Association](#), and the [Office of Academic Affairs](#).

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