



ViaPath's Mission to Improve Inmate Mental Wellbeing and Help Curb Rising Prison Suicides

ViaPath is Leveraging Technological Innovation to Mitigate the Escalating Crisis of Inmate Mental Health

Mental health concerns have spiked nationwide in recent years. The corrections system is no exception, with an alarming increase in inmate suicides emerging as a critical issue. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics highlights an 85% surge in prison suicides from 2001 to 2019.¹ While there are a variety of factors at play, this trend poses significant human, societal, and systemic implications that demand an immediate, comprehensive, and strategic response.

As a leading innovator in the corrections technology sector, ViaPath Technologies is focused on solutions that can help to reverse this trend and address some of the underlying causes. Over the past decade, ViaPath has delivered 500,000 tablets to incarcerated individuals through the company's Command platform. This suite of innovative solutions helps tackle the multifaceted crisis of inmate mental health and supports suicide prevention efforts.

These numbers are comprised of deeper personal narratives. As ViaPath's CEO Deb Alderson aptly put it, "Behind every statistic is a human story, and ViaPath is driving innovation within the corrections system to cultivate safer and more supportive environments."

ViaPath sees the power of technology as a tool for systemic change within the corrections industry and the potential for a more humane, rehabilitative approach to incarceration that equips inmates for reintegration and post-incarceration success.

While technology can be a part of the solution, it's also important to remember that it must be paired with comprehensive mental health programs and training for prison staff to truly be effective. A holistic focus on health is central to preventing suicides, and mental health is a key indicator of overall well-being. Protecting inmates' lives requires understanding and caring for their minds.

Role of Mental Health in Suicide Prevention

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on mental health. In 2021, nearly half of Americans surveyed reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, and in 2022, 90% of Americans believed the nation was in a mental health crisis. While mental health is not the only indicator of suicide risk, it is a significant one, with the CDC estimating that 46% of individuals who commit suicide have a known mental health condition.

"Behind every statistic is a human story...."

Deb Alderson
CEO ViaPath Technologies

¹ <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/msfp0119st.pdf>



Preventing suicide starts long before an inmate is struggling with suicidal thoughts – it starts in the mind, at the earliest stages of depression or anxiety. To that end, ViaPath seeks to promote holistic well-being through a variety of resources that provide hope and healing to those struggling with mental health conditions.

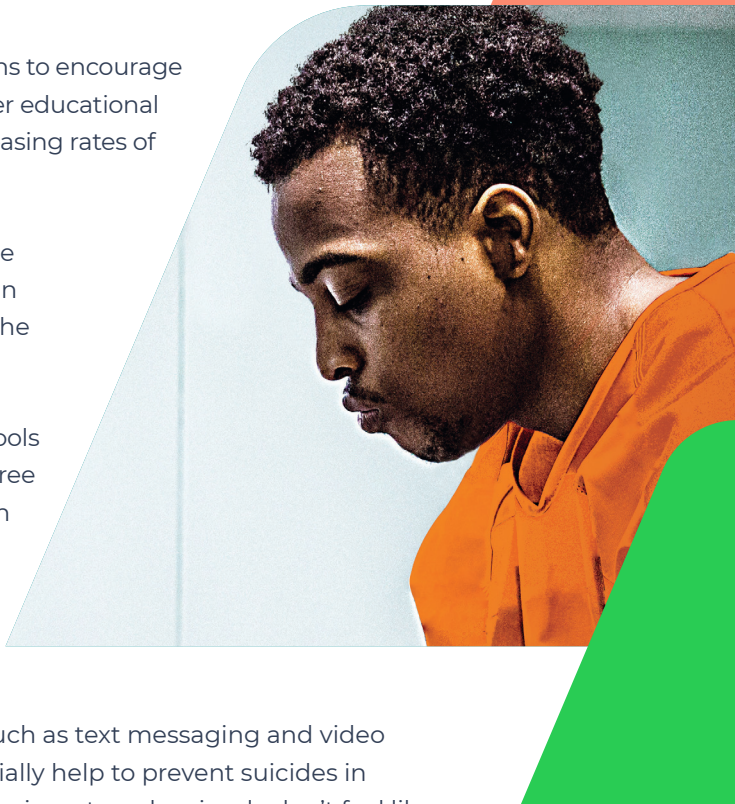
However, it's important to note that while ViaPath's technologies can offer valuable support, they are not a substitute for a well-funded, robust mental health system in the prison environment, complete with trained professionals who can offer in-person interventions and support. The implementation of ViaPath's programs also needs to account for issues like access to technology, digital literacy, and potential language barriers.

Facilities staff and support systems must commit to promoting and protecting inmates' mental health so that they can develop the skills and mindsets needed to reintegrate into society after incarceration.

Current ViaPath Solutions

Correctional organizations using ViaPath's suite of innovative solutions to encourage communication, improve access to mental health resources, and offer educational opportunities find that they can help address the challenges of increasing rates of mental health problems and suicides among the incarcerated.

- 1. Reduced Barriers for Communication:** ViaPath's suite of inmate communication solutions includes a number of features that can be used to increase the communication connections between the incarcerated and their support network.
 - **Free Communication Programs:** ViaPath's communication tools have a wide range of options to enable at least some form of free communication for all incarcerated people. Since 2021, ViaPath has, at a minimum, provided individuals at all customer facilities with either a free weekly phone call, a video visit, or messages, depending upon location and facility services.
 - **More Communication Options:** The introduction of more varied and accessible communication options for inmates, such as text messaging and video visitation, can greatly impact their mental health and potentially help to prevent suicides in prison. When additional communication options are available, inmates who simply don't feel like calling or handwriting a letter may elect to use messaging or video calling to reach out to their support network.
 - **Text Messaging:** Text messaging allows for more frequent, casual contact than phone calls provide, allowing communication to continue even when both parties are not available at the same time. This type of communication can reduce feelings of isolation and provide



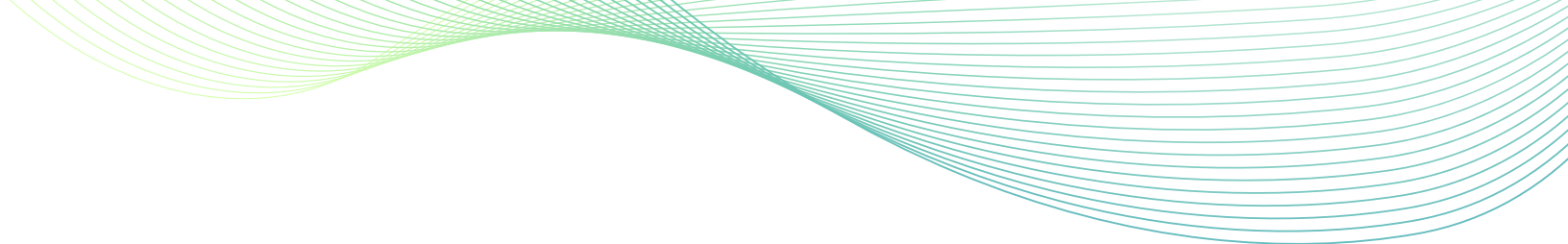
ongoing support. Short messages also allow inmates who feel too distraught to speak to still communicate with others who can provide support.

- **Video Visitation:** Video calls can go a step further than voice calls or text messages, offering a more personal and intimate connection. Seeing a loved one's face real-time can significantly enhance emotional connection and well-being. It also allows loved ones to recognize signs of depression that may not be evident from phone calls, messages or postal mail. ViaPath offers on-demand video visitation, allowing inmates to reach out to their support network immediately without scheduling, just as they would with a phone call. Additionally, ViaPath offers facilities the option of incoming video communication, allowing friends and family members to initiate calls to inmates via video. This allows family members who are worried about mental health to reach out immediately and see their loved one. It can also have an immense impact on combating loneliness, which is a significant trigger for depression².
- **Increasing Overall Communications:** When inmates are presented with a wide variety of communication options, ViaPath consistently sees a large increase in overall communication between inmates and their support network. Through an increase in overall communication, or through regular and varied communication (alternating communication methods), changes in an inmate's mood, behavior, or emotional state might be more easily and quickly noticed. This can allow friends, family, or staff to alert prison officials of any concerns so that they can provide timely intervention. ViaPath has helped major correctional organizations increase the average number of touchpoints between their inmates and the outside by as much as 15 times. California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation has increased inmate connections with the outside from 0.5 to 1 phone call per day, to 15 per day at a number of facilities that have introduced additional inmate communication options, such as video visitation and messaging.

2. Digital Inmate Requests: At many facilities, inmates request mental health support through written requests, which may take days or weeks to collect, process, and route to the medical group — and it may take even longer to receive a response. ViaPath's digital inmate request system gives correctional organizations the ability to create customized forms, allowing inmates to self-report mental health issues and have those forms electronically routed directly to medical staff. An additional feature allows medical staff to ask follow-up questions, respond, and schedule in-person or video consultations.

3. Education: ViaPath's robust education platform has a wide range of courses that teach inmates about the importance of self-awareness, self-management, and social-emotional learning, among other topics. These courses can provide inmates with valuable tools to understand and address their own mental health issues and enhance awareness, which is often the first step towards seeking help. Unlike live classes, these courses can be accessed in private whenever needed, which can encourage those who might otherwise avoid seeking help due to stigma around mental health issues. ViaPath also has a range of options for correctional organizations to provide incarcerated





individuals who are released with continued access to these courses, ensuring the continuity of care necessary for successful reintegration.

4. Mental Health Applications: ViaPath has a variety of tablet applications that are designed to help address anxiety, stress, and PTSD.

- **PTSD Coach:** This app was designed by the US Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans and military service members who have, or may have, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This app provides users with education about PTSD, information about professional care, a self-assessment for PTSD, opportunities to find support, and tools that can help users manage the stresses of daily life with PTSD.
- **Calm:** This application is one of the top applications for meditation and relaxation, helping inmates to manage stress, balance moods, and refocus their attention. The app provides guided meditation, soundscapes, breath work, and stretching exercises.
- **Relaxation:** This ViaPath-developed application allows inmates to select and blend a custom set of relaxing nature sounds, such as rain, waves crashing, or rainforest sounds, and use that background audio to assist in meditation or sleep.

5. Entertainment: Access to tablet entertainment can help to significantly reduce anxiety, stress, and depression in inmates.³ Acuity games can provide healthy mental engagement,⁴ offering a sense of accomplishment, while music has therapeutic effects,⁵ aiding in emotional expression and inducing calm. Movies or other forms of entertainment provide a source of enjoyment and connection to the outside world, which can prepare inmates for a smoother transition after release. This form of distraction helps to occupy unstructured time, reducing stress and anxiety by diverting attention away from the challenges of prison life.

Conclusion

By delivering impactful technology through its corrections technology platform, ViaPath is addressing the complex issue of mental well-being in prisons head-on. The commitment to fostering better communication, improving access to mental health resources, providing educational tools, and exploring groundbreaking technologies is more than a business initiative — it's a pledge to make a lasting difference in the lives of the incarcerated population.

A vital part of fulfilling that mission is staying alert and aware. If you or a loved one are struggling with suicidal thoughts, call the National Suicide Hotline at 988.

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8811339/>, <http://www.ijssh.org/vol11/1048-H254.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fdgth.2022.814248/full>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8941357/>

