



COMMUNIQUÉ

Canadian Psychologists and Psychiatrists Concerned About Mental Health Needs in Canadian Prisons: *Urgent Action Needed*

Attention: News, Health, Medical and Lifestyle Editors

Ottawa, ON, October 23, 2012—The Canadian Psychological Association and the Canadian Psychiatric Association remain concerned that inadequate access to mental health treatment and interventions in most penitentiaries persists. Over the last few years, the Correctional Investigator has identified significant gaps in Correctional Service Canada's (CSC) mental health framework and has recommended a series of measures to close those gaps. Today's report clearly outlines that urgent action on these recommendations is required.

In the last five years, the number of self-injury incidents in federal correctional facilities has almost tripled, particularly among Aboriginal and women offenders. Self-injury involves deliberate bodily harm and may include cutting, head banging, self-strangulation, burning, ingesting harmful objects and other forms of self-mutilation. This behavior is most often used as a coping strategy to deal with negative emotions.

The report also indicates that the proportion of offenders with mental health needs identified at intake doubled in the last decade and that 62 per cent of offenders entering a federal penitentiary are flagged as requiring a follow-up mental health assessment or service.

“Correctional Services Canada must develop comprehensive mental health needs assessments and treatment plans to respond effectively to the mental health needs of offenders,” said Dr. Suzane Renaud, President of the Canadian Psychiatric Association. “The use of force and control measures, such as physical restraints, segregation placements and pepper spray, should not be the first course of action when dealing with mentally-disordered offenders. Offenders who self-injure are often moved to segregation cells. The isolation and deprivation in these units can actually exacerbate symptoms of mental illness.”

“There are significant issues of resource and capacity when it comes to mental health needs among inmates. Front-line security staff needs support and training to respond safely and therapeutically, particularly to self-injury. Finally, there are mental health interventions that are proven effective within criminal justice settings. These interventions address mental health and disorders, reduce symptoms and reduce reoffending. These need to be supported by the recruitment and retention of appropriately trained mental health professional staff,” said Dr. Karen Cohen, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Psychological Association.

About

The Canadian Psychological Association is the national association for the science, practice and education of psychology in Canada. With over 6600 members and affiliates, CPA is Canada's largest professional association for psychology.

The Canadian Psychiatric Association is the national voice for Canada's 4,100 psychiatrists and more than 600 psychiatric residents. Founded in 1951, the CPA is dedicated to promoting an environment that fosters excellence in the provision of clinical care, education and research.

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