



10 February, 2014

Mr. Don Head
Commissioner, Correctional Service of Canada
340 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa ON K1A 0P9

The Honourable Steven Blaney
Minister of Public Safety
269 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa ON K1A 0P8

Dear Mr. Head and Minister Blaney:

Re: Ashley Smith - Jury Verdict and Recommendations

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) joined so many of Canada's stakeholder groups and citizens in their concern about the death of Ashley Smith. We share in the hope that lessons learned from her death will inform and enhance the way in which the correctional system responds to the mental health needs of their inmates in the future.

The CPA is the national professional association of the country's researchers and practitioners in psychology. Many among our membership work in the area of criminal justice both as researchers and health service providers. Psychological assessments and interventions are core to the assessment and treatment of mental and behavioural health issues within Canada's correctional systems. Programs developed, run and evaluated by psychologists not only redress health and well-being at the individual level, they significantly reduce recidivism. As you likely know, Correctional Services Canada (CSC) is the largest employer of psychologists in the country. We share this information with you to underscore that Canada's psychologists understand very well the issues, needs and gaps within the country's correctional systems.

CPA read with interest the December 2013 recommendations of the Chief Coroner of Ontario following the inquest into Ms. Smith's death while in custody. We are writing to urge Correctional Service Canada to carefully consider and act on those important recommendations. Early and accurate diagnosis of mental illness and the delivery of needed and evidence-based services and treatments in correctional populations are of the utmost importance. Any correctional population will have mental health needs to which health care providers should respond within that setting. Effective intervention for mental health issues within a correctional facility requires the appointment of appropriately trained personnel, consultation and collaboration among health and correctional personnel, as well as policies and procedures that support both correctional and health mandates. The inquest's recommendations include many aimed at policy and procedure for responding to mental health incidents and to the conditions of custody for those with mental health problems. We urge CSC to consider these carefully and act on their counsel.

The interface of mental health and criminal justice is an extremely important one to CSC, the Ministry of Public Safety and, indeed to the well-being of Canadians. Many among the report's recommendations speak to the role, collaboration, and leadership of CSC psychologists. The CPA has considerable resource and expertise in the area of criminal justice among its membership. We would like to work with you in addressing and implementing the report's recommendations. Please call upon us as you chart next steps.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K.R. Cohen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

K.R. Cohen Ph.D., C. Psych.
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Psychological Association