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Report of the
**Auditor General
of Canada**
to the House of Commons

APRIL

Chapter 4
Correctional Service Canada—
Reintegration of Women Offenders

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The April 2003 Report of the Auditor General of Canada comprises seven chapters, a Message from the Auditor General, and Main Points. The main table of contents is found at the end of this publication.

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Chapter

4

Correctional Service Canada
Reintegration of Women Offenders

All of the audit work in this chapter was conducted in accordance with the standards for assurance engagements set by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. While the Office adopts these standards as the minimum requirement for our audits, we also draw upon the standards and practices of other disciplines.

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Correctional Service Canada

Reintegration of Women Offenders

Main Points

4.1 Over the last 12 years, Correctional Service Canada has accomplished a great deal in changing how women offenders are incarcerated and rehabilitated. Based on the work of its Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, the Service has altered the way women who are sentenced to two years or more serve their sentences. The Task Force brought about the closing of the Kingston Prison for Women, which was replaced with five new regional facilities across Canada during a period of significant growth in the population of women offenders. There has also been a renewed emphasis on developing rehabilitation programs for women.

4.2 While Correctional Service Canada has made progress, some challenges and problems remain. The Service has not tested the reliability of the instruments it uses to assess women offenders. In the short term, this testing is fundamental to making the right decision about an offender's security level and her program needs for successful rehabilitation. In the longer term, incorrect assessment could lead to reoffending and the social costs it brings.

4.3 There are gaps in the delivery of programs and services both in the institutions and in the community:

- Correctional Service does not consistently deliver rehabilitation programs on time for incarcerated women offenders. These programs are a critical factor in preparing offenders for a National Parole Board review at their parole eligibility dates.
- Correctional Service needs to implement a comprehensive, more gender-specific model for treating substance abuse, a much-needed program for the rehabilitation of women offenders.
- Women offenders have little access to meaningful work opportunities and employment programs while they are incarcerated. Gaining work skills is considered an important factor in their successful reintegration into the community.
- Correctional Service Canada has difficulty meeting the program and service needs of women offenders in the community. Lack of substance abuse programs and inadequate mental health services are critical areas for improvement.

Background and other observations

4.4 Correctional Service Canada is responsible for maintaining the security of federally sentenced women offenders and preparing them for reintegration

into the community, both while they are incarcerated and while they are on parole. Since 1995, the number of women offenders in federal correctional care has increased more than 30 percent.

4.5 Of the \$57 million spent in 2001–02 on women offenders in federal institutions, about \$13 million is for institutional reintegration activities. The Service does not report total annual expenditures for women offenders under its supervision and care in the community.

4.6 We also found that Correctional Service needs to

- review the process of developing correctional plans for women offenders to determine the causes of late completion, and
- examine the use of other mechanisms for offenders' reintegration (temporary absences, work releases, and special custodial and release arrangements for Aboriginal women) and identify opportunities to improve existing practices.

Correctional Service Canada has responded. Correctional Service has generally accepted our recommendations. Its responses indicate what it is doing or plans to do to address them.

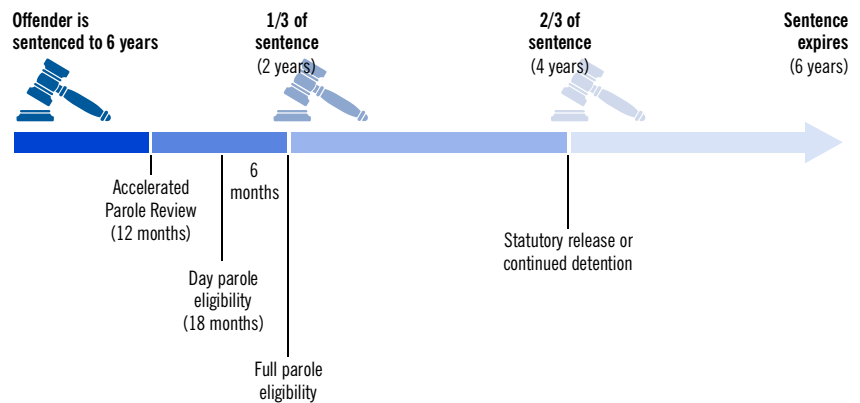
Introduction

4.7 Correctional Service Canada has two main responsibilities: the incarceration of offenders and their safe reintegration into the community. In 2001–02, there were 810 women serving federal sentences of two years or longer. Of those, 452 (53 percent) were supervised in a large number of communities across Canada. About 5 percent of all federal offenders are women.

4.8 In 2001–02, institutional costs for women offenders totalled about \$57 million. This is about 5 percent of the total federal expenditures in all institutions (excluding capital costs). Custody-related costs totalled \$44 million, with another \$13 million spent on activities to prepare offenders for reintegration. The costs of supervising women offenders in the community are not reported separately. Correctional Service has made some attempts to collect that information but has been hampered by the lack of gender-specific coding in its financial information systems.

4.9 The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (1992) gives the National Parole Board the authority to release offenders on full parole conditionally when they have served one third of their sentence. Offenders become eligible for day parole six months before the date of their eligibility for full parole (Exhibit 4.1). Under Accelerated Parole Review, offenders who are serving their first federal sentence and have not been convicted of a violent crime or serious drug offence can be released on day parole after serving one sixth of their sentence, unless there are reasonable grounds to believe they will commit a violent offence before their sentence ends. According to the Act, the purpose of conditional release is to contribute to public safety by releasing offenders at a time and in a manner that increases their chances of successful reintegration into the community.

Exhibit 4.1 Milestones in a fixed-term sentence of six years



Source: *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*

A brief history of the incarceration of women offenders

4.10 In 1934, the Prison for Women was built in Kingston, Ontario. It housed all federal women offenders from all regions of Canada at all security levels (maximum, medium, and minimum). Federally sentenced women had previously been incarcerated in a wing of Kingston Penitentiary, a men's institution.

4.11 Government commissions and parliamentary committee reports over the past several decades have expressed concern about the conditions under which women serve federal sentences.

4.12 Most of these reports raised three main problems:

- the incarceration of women far away from their families;
- the quality of rehabilitation programs available to women in the institution; and
- the incarceration of women offenders in a facility with a higher security level than required.

4.13 Many of the reports recommended closing the Prison for Women; the first such recommendation came from the Archambault Commission in 1938. Plans for building a new women's prison started in 1956 but, like some later plans, they were not carried out.

4.14 In 1990, the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women issued *Creating Choices*, a report that became the foundation of an entirely new approach to corrections for women serving federal sentences.

4.15 The Task Force concluded, "The ability of CSC to meet its responsibility for federally sentenced women has been eroded by trying to fit a small, diverse, relatively low-risk group of women with multi-faceted needs into a system designed for a large, more homogenous and higher-risk population. In the process, inequality and insensitivity to the needs of federally sentenced women have become unanticipated consequences of our current system."

4.16 *Creating Choices* cited two critical elements for change:

- closing the Prison for Women and replacing it with five regional facilities and one healing lodge for Aboriginal women; and
- developing a comprehensive community release strategy that would expand and strengthen programs and services available to women offenders after their release.

4.17 The regional facilities and the healing lodge were intended originally to house women offenders at all security levels (minimum to maximum). The comprehensive community strategy was to provide for halfway houses, addiction treatment centres, placements in private homes, multi-resource centres, and accommodations that would allow women to live with their children.

4.18 Six years later, Madame Justice Louise Arbour restated many of the Task Force's conclusions in her 1996 report on a violent confrontation

between six inmates and correctional staff at the Prison for Women. She concluded the following:

- Women commit fewer violent crimes than men.
- When women do commit the same crimes as men, the underlying factors are considerably different and tend to indicate a much lower risk of reoffending.
- Women pose a lower security risk than men.
- A far higher proportion of women offenders than male offenders have the primary responsibility for child care.

4.19 Based on the research reported during the proceedings, Madame Arbour reached the same conclusions as the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women: that women offenders should receive services and programs designed for them specifically and not just ones adapted from programs designed for males.

4.20 By 1997, the five new regional facilities were operating; the Prison for Women in Kingston officially closed in July 2000.

A profile of Canadian women offenders serving federal sentences

4.21 The number of women offenders serving federal sentences grew from 646 in 1995 to 849 in 2000, an increase of 30 percent. Research by Correctional Service Canada indicates that in 1998–99, an adult woman convicted of a major crime was significantly more likely to receive a federal sentence than in 1994–95. In other jurisdictions (for example, the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia), the population of female offenders has seen similar growth.

4.22 The following are some key features in the profile of women offenders, based on Correctional Service data (see also the Appendix to this chapter):

- About 13 percent are classified as maximum security, 48 percent as medium security, and 38 percent as minimum security.
- One in three women offenders is incarcerated in Correctional Service’s Prairie Region, a large proportion of them Aboriginal.
- Nationally, 26 percent of incarcerated women offenders are Aboriginal.
- Drugs account for more than a third of offences by women.
- About 80 percent of incarcerated women are serving their first federal sentence; 37 percent are under the age of 30.
- More women offenders (42 percent of the total in 2001–02 compared with 31 percent in 1997–98) are returning to the community after serving two thirds of their sentence (statutory release) instead of earlier on parole.
- Almost half of all women offenders supervised in the community are in the Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton, and Vancouver areas.

A profile of the 42 women offenders in maximum security in June 2002

- Serving their first federal sentence: **81%**
- Identified as having a substantial substance abuse problem: **69%**
- Convicted of robbery, murder, or aggravated assault: **55%**
- Diagnosed with a mental health problem: **50%**
- Aboriginal: **43%**
- Under 25 years of age when admitted to maximum security: **41%**
- Serving less than 3 years: **26%**
- Serving a life sentence: **19%**

4.23 Our review of pertinent research and literature identified several characteristics that are common to women who offend and that illustrate the severity of their problems:

- Many had experienced some form of physical abuse.
- A higher proportion of women than male offenders had suffered from mental health problems.
- They had tended to harm themselves.
- They had abused substances.
- Many of their income-generating crimes (shoplifting, forgery, prostitution, robbery, transporting drugs) were directly related to supporting their addictions.
- They had less legitimate experience in the workforce than male offenders.

4.24 The literature also identifies factors that help women reintegrate into the community successfully when released from prison: safe and affordable housing that allows them to reunite with their children; participation in substance abuse treatment and recovery programs; and education and skills that lead to a job at a living wage.

Challenges in housing women offenders

4.25 Over the last 12 years, Correctional Service Canada has spent a great deal of time and resources to complete and expand correctional institutions for women offenders across Canada. The Service's first response to *Creating Choices* was an ambitious building program that saw five new facilities open in four regions between 1995 and 1997:

- Nova Institution in Truro, Nova Scotia
- Joliette Institution in Joliette, Québec
- Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener, Ontario
- Edmonton Institution for Women in Edmonton, Alberta
- Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan



Edmonton Institution for Women,
Edmonton, Alberta

4.26 The budget for this building program was \$55 million, with operating costs estimated at \$16 million a year. After the institutions were built, they had to be expanded to house an ever-growing population of women offenders. When more units and beds at minimum security were needed, Correctional Service added them to the existing regional facilities instead of building separate units without fences for minimum-security women.

4.27 Originally, women with maximum security ratings were to be housed in the regional institutions. However, after a series of incidents at the Edmonton Institution for Women in early 1996, the Service removed the maximum-security women from the Edmonton and Nova institutions and fortified the fences surrounding these institutions.

4.28 A few women remained at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario until mid-2000. All other maximum-security women were housed in special

units at three institutions for male offenders—in Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia. This situation lasted seven years, from 1996 to 2003.

4.29 In 1999, as part of its Intensive Intervention Strategy, Correctional Service directed that special units be built in each regional facility to house maximum-security women and those with mental health problems. The maximum-security units cost about \$25 million and began operating in early 2003. The mental health units cost an estimated \$6 million to build and have been operating since December 2001.

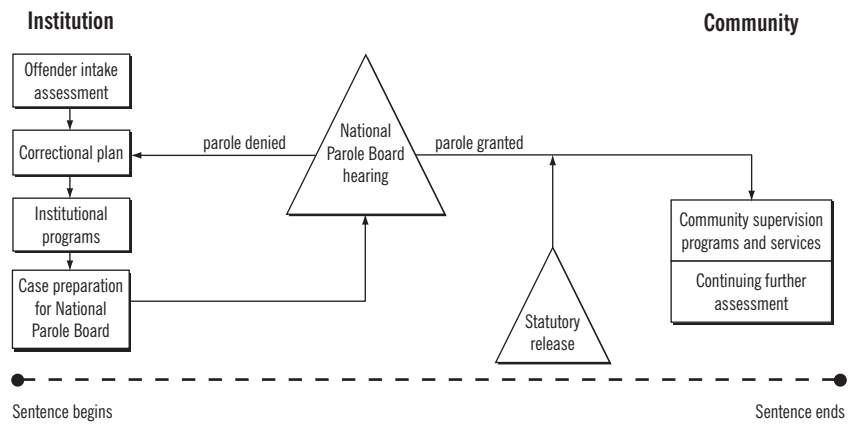
4.30 The Sumas Community Correctional Centre in British Columbia will be retrofitted in 2004 as a multilevel-security institution for federal women offenders. It will house federal women offenders currently incarcerated with provincial women offenders at the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women.

4.31 Today, these regional facilities are multilevel-security institutions and are fenced, with two exceptions. The Healing Lodge for Aboriginal women has no fence and houses minimum- and medium-security women. The Isabel McNeil House in Kingston, operated by Grand Valley Institution, houses a small number of minimum-security women.

The process for reintegrating women offenders

4.32 Correctional Service uses a case management process to manage the reintegration of offenders (Exhibit 4.2). The process is essentially the same for men and women offenders and consists of a number of stages that include the following:

- obtaining official documents required for assessing the security risk and the needs of each offender;
- assessing offenders to identify the factors that led to their criminal behaviour and developing a correctional plan to address those factors;
- assigning and scheduling offenders to participate in reintegration programs and other interventions to prepare them for release hearings before the National Parole Board;
- assessing whether participation in programs or other interventions has helped reduce the risk that an offender will commit another offence after being released;
- making recommendations to the National Parole Board on the offender's suitability for release to the community;
- releasing the offender—on parole by the National Parole Board, or by law after two thirds of the sentence (statutory release) or at the end of the sentence (warrant expiry);
- providing supervision, further programs, and assessment in the community until the end of the sentence; and
- reporting the case to the National Parole Board if an offender presents an elevated risk that warrants review by the Board.

Exhibit 4.2 The process for reintegrating offenders

Focus of the audit

4.33 The purpose of this audit was to assess how well Correctional Service Canada was managing the process for reintegrating women offenders. In May 2000, the subcommittee of the Justice and Human Rights Committee, having reviewed the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, recommended that the Auditor General “carry out an evaluation of the process of reintegration into the community available to women...” This recommendation was endorsed by the Solicitor General.

4.34 Some quantitative information presented in this chapter is based on data provided to us by Correctional Service. We have attempted to assess these data through a process of analysis, comparison, and discussion. Unless otherwise indicated in this chapter, these data should be treated as unaudited.

4.35 Further details on our audit objective and criteria are presented in About the Audit at the end of the chapter.

Observations and Recommendations

Assessing women offenders

Various tools are used to assess offenders

4.36 Correctional Service Canada uses various tools to assess women offenders when they enter the prison system and throughout their sentences. These assessments are critical to making the right decisions about the level of security at which women offenders will be placed and their rehabilitation plans. We reviewed these tools and the Service’s use of them.

4.37 Intake assessments. When they arrive at the institution, all new offenders go through an assessment process. The offender intake assessment identifies the factors that led to the individual’s criminality. That information then forms the basis for developing a correctional plan that prescribes programs to deal with the risk factors identified for the individual.

Throughout the sentence, Correctional Service assesses the offender's progress against the correctional plan to make various decisions, including conditional release to the community.

4.38 The initial intake assessment is a critical step in creating a suitable menu of programs for an offender. Therefore, it is essential for Correctional Service to ensure that the assessment tool itself is valid and appropriate. The Service has not completely tested this instrument. This is a concern because the issues surrounding criminality in women may need to be considered differently from issues surrounding criminality in men.

4.39 Initial security classification. When an offender enters an institution, Correctional Service Canada uses the Custody Rating Scale to determine what level of security is warranted—maximum, medium, or minimum (this scale was designed in 1987, based on the characteristics of the male offender population). Classification at the proper security level is critical because it will determine an offender's access to programs, temporary absences, and work releases into the community. Classification is also a means to guard against unduly excessive controls, in keeping with the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* that governs Correctional Service Canada's operations. The Act requires that the Service impose the least restrictive conditions possible on the offender's incarceration given the level of risk he or she presents.

4.40 To ensure the scientific integrity of any assessment instrument, it is standard practice to conduct a full set of tests for validity (does the instrument measure what it intends to measure?) and reliability (do different parole officers use the tool in a consistent way?). These standard practices are widely accepted and have been used in developing robust classification instruments in the field of corrections.

Tools used to assess offenders need more testing

4.41 Testing for validity. While Correctional Service has completed some tests of the Custody Rating Scale's validity for women offenders, more testing is required. For example, research has demonstrated that there are several factors (such as physical, mental, and sexual abuse; severity of the current offence; and employment history) that may need to be considered differently when dealing with women offenders. The Service needs to explore how it weighs these factors.

4.42 Another important area is how assessment scores are grouped in the assessment instrument. Research recently conducted in the United States on the risk classification of prisoners looked at 31,000 women and 238,000 men. It concluded that while using the same instrument to classify women and men may be appropriate, different cut-off points in assessment scores should be used to designate any given security level. Currently, Correctional Service Canada uses the same cut-off points for men and women offenders.

4.43 Testing for reliability. We found that the reliability of the Custody Rating Scale for classifying women offenders has not been tested. Correctional Service needs to complete a full test of the Scale's reliability for

women, including tests of inter-rater reliability. If an instrument is reliable, for example, regardless of who assesses an offender the assessment will indicate the same security level. If the instrument is not reliable, the same offender could be given a different, inappropriate security level, potentially limiting access to correctional programming. Further, the use of an unreliable instrument could call into question the testing of its validity.

4.44 Ongoing periodic tests of this kind are required to assess the adequacy of existing training and quality controls for those using this instrument. We did not conduct audit work to conclude whether initial security classification ratings have been appropriate. However, these ratings are considered critical and the Service has so far not conducted all the necessary work to ensure that the Custody Rating Scale is administered appropriately.

4.45 Recommendation. Correctional Service Canada should complete its validation and reliability tests of classification instruments used for women offenders and take any necessary action indicated by the test outcomes.

Correctional Service's response. We have conducted a variety of research studies examining our tools for women offenders. The results have been published and therefore are available for peer review. We accept the suggestions that there are additional assessments that could be done; therefore, as part of the 2003–2004 Research Program, the Service will embark on a further review.

An appropriate tool for security reclassification is not in use

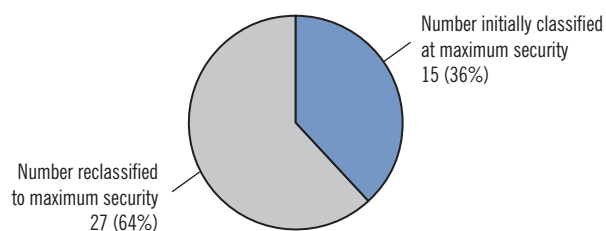
4.46 Security reclassification. There are two ways of placing women offenders in maximum security: initially, using the Custody Rating Scale; and throughout the sentence, in subsequent reclassification. As already noted, about 13 percent of women in institutions were classified as maximum security. Exhibit 4.3 shows that of the 42 women in maximum security at June 2002, 36 percent or 15 women were placed directly in a maximum-security facility in the initial intake process. The remaining 64 percent or 27 women were transferred to maximum security in the reclassification process.

4.47 All of the women who were reclassified were moved to maximum security as a direct result of their misconduct while incarcerated—for example, drug or alcohol use, violent disagreements with other inmates, or verbal abuse of Correctional Service staff. In reviewing their files, we found two frequently identified factors that contributed to their misconduct: continued substance abuse and adjustment problems related to mental health.

4.48 File information indicated that half of the women who were reclassified suffered from various forms of mental impairment. For example, several suffered from cognitive impairment or mental retardation. Their behaviour caused disruption within the institution and their transfer to maximum security was deemed to be the only feasible option. In some cases Correctional Service was unable to provide appropriate psychiatric intervention, mainly because of lack of bed space at correctional psychiatric units.

Exhibit 4.3 Women offenders—Route to maximum security

(Figures are from June 2002)



4.49 Many of the women reclassified to maximum security had severe substance abuse problems; some were cross-addicted to several substances. Despite the Service's zero-tolerance policy, several of these offenders managed to continue their substance abuse. Although the Service makes an attempt to keep disruptive women in medium security, we found that some of them had not been treated for their substance abuse before being transferred to maximum security.

4.50 The limited number of programs available in maximum security units and the level of motivation of the offenders can make it difficult for Correctional Service to meet its rehabilitation objectives for these 42 women. Although attempts were made to move them back to a lower security level, we found that almost half of the women have been or will be released directly from maximum security into the community after serving two thirds of their sentence. Women offenders released at the statutory release date are less likely to reintegrate successfully into the community than those released on parole.

4.51 The Service has undertaken to develop a tool for the reclassification of women. It has taken almost five years to design and test this new reclassification instrument. At the time of our audit, it had not been implemented. In its absence, parole officers can recommend increasing the security level to maximum if the offender is considered to be a "high risk" because of adjustment problems in the institution.

4.52 Recommendation. Considering the significant impact of reclassification decisions on an offender's rehabilitation, the Service should increase its efforts to implement the new reclassification tool for women offenders as quickly as possible.

Correctional Service's response. The Service agrees with this recommendation. The Service had already initiated extensive research over the past three years and is reaching the final stages of the national field test for a gender-specific security reclassification instrument, which is expected to be completed in the fall of 2003. This tool has been designed to provide a standardized and objective method to guide security reclassification decisions for women.

Programs for women offenders



Computer room—program area
Grand Valley Institution, Kitchener, Ontario.

4.53 Section 77 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* stipulates that Correctional Service Canada must “provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of female offenders; and consult regularly about programs for female offenders with appropriate women’s groups and other persons and groups with expertise on, and experience in, working with female offenders.”

The Correctional Program Strategy represents progress

4.54 In 1994, Correctional Service Canada developed the Correctional Program Strategy for federally sentenced women offenders. Drawing on an evaluation of programs then available at the Prison for Women, the Service set out to assess the most important programs and services for women offenders. The strategy led to the development of a menu of core program areas: living skills; survivors of abuse/trauma; literacy and continuous learning; and substance abuse.

4.55 Since 1994, the Service has developed many programs for women offenders: Survivors of Abuse/Trauma, Substance Abuse (Phases I and II/ Solutions), Parenting Skills, and the Mother and Child Program. Others are modified versions of programs for male offenders, such as Anger and Emotions Management and Cognitive Skills.

4.56 Specifically for Aboriginal women, Correctional Service provides the Family Life Improvement Program (FLIP) and Spirit of a Warrior, a violence prevention program. Both are available to Aboriginal women in maximum security units in the Prairie Region. Correctional Service also offers Circle of Change, designed to help Aboriginal women at the Healing Lodge gain living skills they may lack.

4.57 Correctional Service has made considerable progress in developing programs for women offenders. However, management still needs to focus on improving its data on referrals, program completions, and expenditures. The Service has taken steps to improve these data.

4.58 While Correctional Service Canada has moved ahead in implementing its correctional program strategy, it still has not evaluated the effectiveness of its intervention programs for women. These programs are generally based on the cognitive behavioural approach (changing behaviour by teaching critical thinking and problem-solving skills) currently used in Canada, Europe, and the United States. However, little research has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of this approach for women.

Delays in program delivery can lead to postponements of parole hearings

4.59 It is a major challenge for Correctional Service Canada to deliver the programs prescribed for individual offenders, especially those serving sentences of less than three years. The Service has a limited number of days to move these offenders through the appropriate programs. In that time, staff must also document the offenders’ cases for National Parole Board release hearings. Even minor delays in moving offenders through the prescribed programs can result in the postponement of their hearings.

4.60 Delays in developing individual correctional plans can contribute to offenders' inability to meet their parole eligibility dates. Correctional Service data indicate that the on-time completion of correctional plans from April to October 2002 ranged from 41 percent to 85 percent across all women's institutions. In our file review of women whose parole eligibility dates had passed, 22 percent of the cases showed correctional plans finalized less than a month before the first parole eligibility date or after the date had passed. Correctional Service reports some improvement in the completion rate of correctional plans.

4.61 File information showed that lack of timely access to programs is a major factor contributing to delays in the case management process. In about one third of the cases we reviewed, some of the core programs prescribed in the correctional plan had not even begun by the date of the individual's eligibility for review before the National Parole Board.

4.62 How programs are offered can also cause delays—for example, offenders generally can take only one program at a time. Moreover, one of the most frequent programs, which takes six weeks to complete, must be preceded by another that takes three months. And the small population of women offenders can make it difficult to fill a course so it can be delivered.

4.63 With a steady increase since 1996 in waivers and postponements of reviews for full parole, it is important that Correctional Service review how programs are delivered to better ensure that they prepare offenders for parole by their eligibility dates. Almost 60 percent of women offenders admitted in 2001–02 are serving sentences of less than three years, and problems in program delivery could affect most of them.

4.64 Recommendation. Correctional Service Canada should review the process of developing correctional plans to determine the underlying causes of late completion. It should also set a target to improve the timely completion of correctional plans for women offenders and meet it within a year.

Correctional Service's response. The Service agrees with the recommendation. We have focussed our attention in this area and have already seen improvement. Our efforts will continue.

4.65 Recommendation. Correctional Service Canada should review how it delivers programs to women offenders and make the necessary changes to better prepare incarcerated women offenders for parole at the earliest possible date.

Correctional Service's response. Correctional Services Canada benefits from an array of partners and community agencies that assist in research and program development to help fill the void in this area. We will continue to look for further opportunities in this field. At this time, programs are being designed for women on the basis of open entries to provide more timely access. Additionally, the standard on minimum group size for program delivery for women has been removed, allowing for smaller groups of women offenders to complete desired programs.

The new substance abuse program needs to be implemented

4.66 The literature, assessment data, and our discussions with staff and offenders indicate that substance abuse is one of the most serious problems of women offenders. Research by Correctional Service indicates that women offenders have more severe problems with both drugs and alcohol than male offenders have. Relapse into substance abuse is the main reason why conditional releases of women offenders are suspended.

4.67 Since 1995, Correctional Service has provided a variety of substance abuse programs for women (the Offender Substance Abuse Prerelease Program, Solutions, and Substance Abuse Phases I and II) and in 1999 it created a panel of international experts to assess the existing programs. The panel found the need for a more comprehensive model—a more intensive, more gender-specific program with built-in continuity inside the institution and into the community.

4.68 Correctional Service Canada has used the panel's recommendations and the subsequent input of staff and inmates to develop a new model for treating substance abuse, and pilots are scheduled across all regions in 2003. The new model considers more effectively the rehabilitation environment—the importance of drug-free units, peer support, and a detoxification protocol. It also ensures that newly admitted women are brought into the program quickly to minimize the risk of continued substance abuse while incarcerated.

4.69 Correctional Service Canada is also developing separate substance abuse modules specifically for Aboriginal women. Training and pilot tests are scheduled for winter 2004.

4.70 Given the magnitude of the substance abuse problem among women offenders both in federal institutions and in the community, we encourage Correctional Service to implement this new model as quickly as possible.

4.71 Recommendation. Correctional Service Canada should undertake, on a priority basis, the full implementation of the proposed intensive, gender-specific substance abuse program for women offenders.

Correctional Service's response. The Service agrees with this recommendation. The program has been developed and training of program facilitators is already scheduled for May 2003, with program delivery expected to begin in June 2003.

Other mechanisms for reintegration

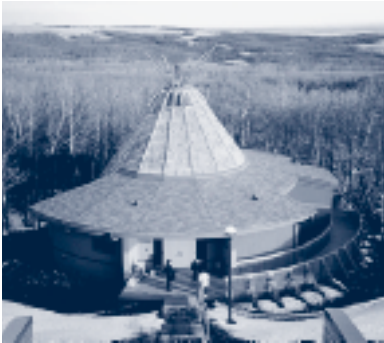
4.72 Correctional Service Canada strives to help offenders with their rehabilitation mainly through a series of core programs aimed at altering criminal behaviour. It also supports other activities that both law and practice have recognized can help offenders rehabilitate themselves. Most such activities are designed to help offenders maintain positive contacts in the community.

The use of temporary absences and work releases can be improved

4.73 Correctional Service uses temporary absences from the institution to prepare offenders for re-entering the community. Temporary absences

(escorted or unescorted) can be used for medical and other administrative purposes or for maintaining family contact or attending programs in the community.

4.74 We found that the use of temporary absences is highly inconsistent from region to region. In 2001–02, for example, two of Correctional Service’s smallest regional facilities supported as many unescorted temporary absences as Grand Valley Institution and Edmonton Institution for Women, yet they have less than half the offender population of both those institutions.



Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge—Maple Creek, Saskatchewan

4.75 Work releases are another opportunity to sustain rehabilitation. They provide for on-the-job training and potential job contacts in the community. According to Correctional Service data, only about 7 percent of women offenders in minimum and medium security participated in work releases during 2001–02. Our file review indicated that work releases are not regularly built into correctional plans for women offenders, even though developing marketable skills contributes to an offender’s successful reintegration into the community.

Little use is made of legislative provisions for Aboriginal offenders

4.76 Sections 80 to 84.1 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* dictate that the Service shall provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of Aboriginal offenders. The overrepresentation of Aboriginal offenders in the federal correctional system has been recognized for some time. Aboriginal women are more overrepresented at 26 percent of the incarcerated population than are incarcerated Aboriginal males at 18 percent.

4.77 Section 81 of the Act authorizes Correctional Service to enter agreements with Aboriginal communities for the provision of services and the care and custody of inmates. Agreements under section 81 require the Solicitor General’s approval.

4.78 Section 84 allows an inmate to apply for parole into an Aboriginal community. It provides the Aboriginal community with an opportunity to propose a plan covering the inmate’s release to, and integration into, that community. The objective is that Correctional Service will work in partnership with Aboriginal communities to provide more effective rehabilitation opportunities for Aboriginal offenders.

4.79 From April 2001 to November 2002, there were eight section 84 releases of Aboriginal women and no section 81 agreements. We conducted file reviews of women offenders whose first parole eligibility dates had passed and of women in maximum security. We found that sections 81 and 84 are generally not discussed at any length with Aboriginal women offenders during the intake process. Even when there are references to these legislative provisions in developing the correctional plan, discussion appears to be cursory.

4.80 While we note that interest in these provisions by offenders and communities is an important prerequisite to their use, Correctional Service

has a critical educating role to play. It needs to place more emphasis on actively encouraging Aboriginal women offenders and Aboriginal communities, especially in urban settings, to take advantage of the benefits and advantages of these provisions. It also needs to inform parole officers more about the legislation and the parole officer's role in its application.

4.81 Recommendation. Correctional Service Canada should examine the present use of temporary absences, work releases, and the use of sections 81 and 84 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* across all facilities; identify practical solutions; take action to increase their use; and assess progress within a year.

Correctional Service's response. The Service agrees with this recommendation. We are currently examining these issues and will take advantage of opportunities on a case-by-case basis where appropriate. The Service will continue to work closely with the Aboriginal communities to build active co-operation in developing these initiatives. The Service recognizes the importance of unescorted temporary absences and work releases in the gradual reintegration of offenders. However, they can be used only if they are consistent with our mandate to contribute to public safety. We will continue to monitor this on an ongoing basis.

Few employment programs are provided

4.82 Corcan is a special operating agency responsible for prison industries, employment, and vocational training programs for all offenders. The literature indicates that women offenders need assistance in developing marketable skills for future employment. Without job skills, they tend to revert to their former lifestyle, which then leads them back to criminal behaviour.

4.83 Women offenders have minimal access to meaningful work opportunities while they are incarcerated. Furthermore, they have few opportunities for job training that will prepare them for eventual employment in the community. An inventory of current work opportunities for incarcerated women reveals two modest Corcan enterprises—a men's underwear sewing shop in Joliette that employs up to 18 women and a silk-screening and embroidery shop in Edmonton that employs about 15 women. Grand Valley, the largest facility for women, does not have a Corcan shop.

4.84 Nor are there more than a few vocational programs available to women offenders. Those that are offered teach specific skills in areas such as horticulture, dog training, food preparation, home maintenance, and cosmetology. The programs offer about 60 seats in total and vary from two days to six months. Some provide for certification by an external body.

4.85 Women offenders under community supervision have access to the same employment counselling centres as male offenders. However, the centres could improve their services by addressing the unique challenges facing women parolees who look for employment—challenges such as child care responsibilities and lack of recent work experience and qualifications.

4.86 Corcan reported that its employment counselling centres to some degree helped 61 women find employment. Examples of the jobs women found include telemarketing; clerking in a grocery store, a coffee shop, and a sandwich shop; and groundskeeping in a cemetery. However, Corcan does not track the number of women parolees who seek help at its employment counselling centres. Nor does it track the number of women parolees who enrol in its job-readiness program.

4.87 In our 1999 Report, Chapter 1, on the reintegration of male offenders, we indicated that Correctional Service Canada needed to develop a clear operational strategy for employment programs. In April 2000, Correctional Service introduced the Employment and Employability Program to ensure that offenders are “job ready” when they are released into the community. At the time of our audit, however, the program had not been implemented in any of the women’s institutions and Correctional Service had no employment strategy designed specifically to meet the unique needs of women offenders.

4.88 Recommendation. Correctional Service Canada should develop and implement a women’s employment strategy that includes certification of marketable skills in order to better prepare women for future employment.

Correctional Service’s response. The Service will look to increase viable employment opportunities designed to focus on marketable skills. However, the length of sentence, coupled with programming requirements, will continue to be a challenge.

Reintegration practices in the community

4.89 Correctional Service delivers various programs and services in the community that are aimed at helping offenders complete the process of their rehabilitation and reintegration. These services allow offenders to build on programs provided to them in prison in preparation for adjusting to life outside. *Creating Choices* recognized the importance of providing offenders with programs and support in the community.

4.90 Our audit found that despite some improvement in community-based programs for women offenders, many of the problems identified in *Creating Choices* continue. Some persist because usually there are relatively few women offenders in any one area. Other problems arise from the absence of a management structure and controls to guide reintegration activities for women offenders in the community.

Community accommodation for women is a challenge

4.91 A fundamental part of reintegrating in the community is having safe and appropriate housing. Correctional Service’s review of community resources in 2001 indicated that nationally, the total number of bed spaces for women in halfway houses was sufficient. However, the review emphasized that district directors needed to work on providing enough access to alternative types of accommodation, such as placements in private homes and supervised apartments.

4.92 Correctional Service has indicated that it has at least one halfway house for women in each of four regions. In the Atlantic Region, temporary funding has been made available to provide appropriate housing for women

until a community correctional centre can be completed in 2004. Challenges remain, however, especially when women seek releases to locations other than the cities where these accommodations exist.

4.93 Correctional Service has temporary funding for three years (2001–02 to 2003–04) to develop accommodation in the community for offender groups with distinct needs. There are four target groups: women, Aboriginal people, the elderly, and the mentally and physically handicapped.

4.94 Recommendation. Correctional Service should ensure that each region develops an action plan to meet the need for alternative accommodation for women and that the plan is funded appropriately.

Correctional Service’s response. The Service agrees that for women offenders alternatives to incarceration, for example, parole, become viable when accommodation such as private home placements and satellite apartment initiatives are available. We are seeking such opportunities in areas where larger facilities are not practical. The geographic dispersal of women coupled with their small numbers has a significant impact on developing sustainable accommodation options.

Women are being returned to institutions for parole violations

4.95 According to data provided by Correctional Service, since 1999 there has been an increase in the proportion of offenders returned to the institutions for revocations without reoffence—that is, technical violations of conditions set by the Parole Board (Exhibit 4.4). Of all women offenders’ parole revocations in 2001–02, 75 percent were for technical violations (compared with 64 percent among male offenders). This high percentage of technical violations exists despite the fact that women offenders are generally co-operative and receptive to assistance by parole officers. The return of offenders to institutions due to revocations has an impact on both the Service’s operational activities and its use of resources.

4.96 We surveyed all the community parole officers who had supervised women offenders whose parole was revoked or suspended between June 2001 and June 2002. We found that the most common reason for suspension was the offender’s return to substance abuse. The officers we surveyed suggested the following means that are within the Service’s control to reintegrate women more successfully:

- more facilities where women offenders could be housed, supported, and treated on a timely basis during temporary suspension (“halfway back”) instead of returning the offender to the institution during this period;
- more readily available appropriate housing for women;
- better access to specialized women-only programs, particularly for substance abusers;
- more continuity between programs offered in the institution and those offered in the community, especially for those with mental health problems; and
- more assistance with child care.

Exhibit 4.4 Revocations of parole—Women offenders

Type of revocation	Number of revocations and percentage of total				
	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–2002
Revocation for offence	23 (27%)	27 (30%)	35 (37%)	38 (29%)	31 (24%)
Revocation without offence	62 (73%)	63 (70%)	60 (63%)	90 (67%)	96 (75%)
Revocation for outstanding charge	0	0	0	6 (4%)	1 (1%)
Total	85	90	95	134	128

Source: Correctional Service Canada Offender Management System

4.97 The Service's review of community resources for women in 2001 identified various gaps in, for example, the provision of appropriate programs and services in the community related to substance abuse treatment, employment, and mental health. The review also raised concerns about compensating organizations fairly for their delivery of services to women offenders in the community, noting that these organizations often have viability problems because the number of women they serve is so small.

4.98 Our interviews with institutional and community staff indicated that timely access to substance abuse treatment programs for women is difficult, even in some urban areas. Access to mental health services is even more difficult, because many community services will turn away women who have psychiatric problems and criminal records. Parole officers must therefore devote considerable effort to finding hospitals, doctors, and bed space for women offenders who need assistance.

4.99 Although some offenders may not be motivated enough to engage in their rehabilitation, Correctional Service needs to provide suitable programs for all women offenders, especially in the most critical part of the transition period—the first three to six months after release. For some, the proper assistance and support at this critical time may be their best chance to gain some control over their lives and avoid returning to the conditions that led to their criminal behaviour. Making enough programs and services available in the community constitutes a preventive approach.

4.100 Recommendation. Correctional Service should examine factors that are contributing to the high number of revocations without offence and determine the steps it can take to reduce it.

Correctional Service's response. Every decision to suspend parole is based on our mandate to contribute to public safety. The Service monitors revocations to better understand the issues affecting women's potential for safe reintegration. We will continue to do so.

Partnerships with community resources can be effective

4.101 *Creating Choices* directed that institutional programs and services be provided in conjunction with community partners. The intent was to connect women offenders to community resources. These connections would help to create the social network the women would need upon their release into the community and beyond the end of their sentence.

4.102 Our field work identified some good examples of how Correctional Service has worked effectively as a partner with agencies and citizens in the community:

- the mentoring program at Edmonton Institution for Women, which links the individual offender with a volunteer citizen;
- Correctional Service's contract with the Marguerite Centre residence in Halifax, which provides a women-centred program of treatment for substance abuse;
- the Community Integration Program at Joliette, provided on contract by the Elizabeth Fry Society to help women prepare for their return to the community; and
- the Newfoundland multi-disciplinary team co-ordinated by Stella Burry Community Services, composed of representatives from Correctional Service, the community-based sector, and the mental health field. The team helps women with special needs adjust to community living.

4.103 Working with community agencies and volunteers to provide continuity of care is recognized as an effective way to help individuals who need a support network. It is also a cost-effective model.

The new community strategy for women offenders is a first step

4.104 As part of the continuum recommended by *Creating Choices*, Correctional Service set out to develop a community strategy for women offenders. This exercise began in 1995. It was finally completed in November 2002, building upon regional strategies developed in 1998–99. The national strategy outlines the basic principles that govern the supervision of women offenders in the community. It also provides broad national guidelines on all aspects of women's accommodation and the development and delivery of women's programs.

4.105 The current strategy is an important first step in setting needed direction for women offenders' programs and services in the community. But other elements are needed to make this strategy a reality: agreed-upon priorities, measurable objectives, and dedicated funding. As we noted earlier, the Service can identify all annual expenditures for women offenders in its institutions but not in the community. The Service knows what it spends on accommodation for women offenders in the community but can only estimate its spending on programs for them.

4.106 In an area as important as programs for women offenders in the community, it is essential that spending on women offenders and the results of that spending be known if the existing community strategy is to be achieved.

4.107 Recommendation. Correctional Service Canada should ensure that the necessary controls are in place to identify and dedicate the funds necessary to meet the program and service needs of women offenders in the community.

Correctional Service's response. The Service will develop and implement a more precise method to track and report the information required on women offenders.

Monitoring and reporting performance

4.108 Correctional Service regularly monitors reintegration activities for both men and women offenders. In our 1999 Report, Chapter 1, on the reintegration of male offenders, we indicated that the nature and extent of the Service's performance information had improved. Correctional Service continues to improve its ability to acquire and analyze information both on compliance with performance standards and on the results of activities to reintegrate offenders. For example, the Service regularly gathers information on the timeliness of women offenders' correctional plans, on the use of temporary absences, and on the number of parole revocations with and without offence.

4.109 Correctional Service uses some of this information to prepare its annual performance report to Parliament. The most recent report, in 2001–02, had a separate section on women offenders that outlined some characteristics of the current population and recent activities undertaken for women.

4.110 The Service can improve its performance report section on women by outlining progress achieved against approved plans, priorities, and performance objectives set each year and the results and outcomes of reintegration, including offenders' return to crime both before and after the end of sentence.

4.111 Recommendation. Correctional Service Canada should improve its annual departmental performance report section on women by outlining results against approved plans, priorities, and objectives.

Correctional Service's response. The Service agrees with the recommendation and is currently reviewing the structure of the departmental performance report to highlight outcomes as they relate to the safe and timely reintegration of women offenders.

Conclusion

4.112 Correctional Service Canada has made a significant investment in changing the conditions of incarceration for women offenders and strengthening programs and services for them. A great deal of effort and funds have gone into the construction of regional women’s facilities across Canada and later their expansion. The growth in the population of women offenders has presented an additional challenge to these building initiatives.

4.113 Classifying women offenders is key to properly assessing and placing them in correctional institutions. Correct assessments and appropriate placements are the foundation for rehabilitating offenders. Accordingly, the validity and reliability of the tools used to classify offenders are critical. Correctional Service Canada has not fully tested the reliability of its tools, nor has it completely validated them for use in classifying women offenders.

4.114 The Service has also given a substantial amount of attention to the design and adaptation of intervention programs for women. While many of these programs have been implemented, a more comprehensive model for treating women with substance abuse problems has not. The delivery of these programs to women offenders during their incarceration needs to be more timely to afford them better opportunities for release on parole at the earliest possible date.

4.115 Correctional Service is not using fully some of its important mechanisms for offender reintegration mandated under the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*. The use of tools such as temporary absences and work releases as well as the provisions in sections 81 and 84 specific to Aboriginal women offenders can be much improved.

4.116 Finally, women offenders’ needs for programs and services in the community are not being met consistently, particularly in such areas as substance abuse programs and mental health services. The recently approved community strategy for women offenders is an essential step in setting needed direction. However, a clear management structure and controls at the community level could help improve services by focussing on activities to reintegrate women, by spending on priorities, and by measuring results.

4.117 We have noted some good practices in community partnerships that demonstrate what can be done to support the reintegration of offenders. These partnerships are key if Correctional Service is to meet the various needs of women offenders in the community.

4.118 The current community strategy for women must evolve with changing conditions and developments. Correctional Service is embarking on the next phase in offender reintegration, “operating regimes.” This is a new approach to help specific groups of offenders achieve their correctional goals with the aid of a specialized team of correctional staff. A number of planned regimes will operate in the community. One of these is a transition regime to help incarcerated offenders prepare better for their release into the community.

Pilot projects are planned for male offenders. We would suggest that Correctional Service consider the benefits of running similar pilot projects for women offenders in the community.

4.119 *Creating Choices*, the 1990 blueprint for managing federally sentenced women offenders, is now 12 years old. Over this period, the Service has accomplished a great deal in changing how women offenders are incarcerated and rehabilitated. Now would be an appropriate time to update its vision for the management of women offenders, followed by a clear strategy, priorities, achievable objectives, and appropriate funding.

About the Audit

Objective

The objective of this audit was to assess how well Correctional Service is managing the process for reintegrating women offenders. Specifically, we assessed the extent to which

- Correctional Service Canada has established that the risk assessment instruments used to identify an offender's criminogenic factors and level of security throughout the sentence are appropriate for women offenders;
- offenders receive the rehabilitation programs that the Service has determined they require in a timely manner while incarcerated;
- Correctional Service uses mechanisms that assist in offenders' reintegration, such as temporary absences, work releases, employment programs, and legislative provisions for Aboriginal women offenders;
- offenders receive required programs and services while in the community; and
- Correctional Service monitors the effectiveness of its programs and services for women offenders and reports appropriately to Parliament.

Scope

Our examination focussed on the critical components of the reintegration process that contribute to effective rehabilitation of women offenders. In May 2000, the subcommittee of the Justice and Human Rights Committee, having reviewed the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, recommended that the Auditor General "carry out an evaluation of the process of reintegration into the community available to women..." This recommendation was endorsed by the Solicitor General.

Criteria

We expected the following:

- Assessment instruments used to identify the offender's criminogenic factors and appropriate level of security throughout the sentence have been validated and are reliable.
- Accurate and timely information on offenders both from outside sources and within Correctional Service is available to complete the offender's correctional plan.
- Good-quality, timely intervention and employment programs are provided by qualified individuals to offenders while incarcerated and while under supervision in the community.
- Other reintegration mechanisms are put to maximum use—temporary absences, work releases, and sections 81 and 84 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.
- Complete and timely reports that address criminogenic factors are provided to the National Parole Board for release decisions at the first parole eligibility date and for subsequent reviews.
- Appropriate and consistent levels of parole officer contact, supervision, and assistance (including provision of bed space and other services) are given to offenders while in the community.
- Correctional Service has the reliable and timely performance information it needs on all aspects of its offender reintegration operations in order to monitor the effectiveness of its programs and uses the information to manage for better results and report appropriately to Parliament.

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Appendix Women offenders serving federal sentences—A profile

Population

Offender location	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02
Institution ¹	318 (43%)	355 (43%)	342 (40%)	375 (42%)	358 (42%)
Community ²	377 (51%)	429 (52%)	472 (55%)	474 (53%)	452 (53%)
Total	695	784	814	849	810

Note: ¹ Institutional figures include federal offenders in federal or provincial institutions and those on temporary absences. Escaped offenders are not included.

² Community figures do not include offenders deported upon release or provincial offenders under federal supervision. Included are federal offenders unlawfully at large and offenders on parole who have been temporarily detained.

Population by institution (December 2001)

Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	Pacific
Nova Scotia 32	Joliette 55	Grand Valley 86	Edmonton 76	Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women 33
Springhill 13	Regional Reception Centre 10	Isabel McNeil House 6	Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge 21	
			Saskatchewan Penitentiary 23	
			Regional Psychiatric Center 10	

Profile of offences (May 2001)

Type of offence	Number	Percent of total
Drugs ¹	314	36
Murder	134	15
Robbery	114	13
Manslaughter	95	11
Assault	58	7
Theft and possession of stolen property	37	4
Fraud and forgery	22	3
Kidnapping	15	2
Attempted murder	13	1
Break and enter	13	1
Other	63	7
Total	878	100

Note: ¹ Includes 38 convictions of conspiracy to commit an indictable offense.

**Length of sentence
(2000–01)**

Length of sentence	Percentage of population
Under 3 years	57
3 – 6 years	32
6 – 10 years	6
Over 10 years	3
Life or indeterminate	3

Releases

(Percentages have been rounded off)

Type of release	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02
Day parole	142 (54%)	176 (58%)	192 (55%)	196 (56%)	165 (48%)
Full parole ¹	34 (13%)	35 (12%)	31 (9%)	22 (6%)	32 (9%)
Statutory release	82 (31%)	88 (29%)	125 (36%)	127 (36%)	142 (42%)
Warrant expiry	7 (3%)	4 (1%)	2 (1%)	3 (1%)	3 (1%)
Total	265	303	350	348	342

Note: ¹These figures do not include offenders who are moved from day parole to full parole. These are shown below.

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02
Day parole to full parole	81	111	133	117	87

Source: Correctional Service Canada

Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons—April 2003

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