

Substance Abuse Programs for Federal Offenders

Canada's Drug Strategy is the federal response to the harmful use of substances. These include illegal drugs, alcohol, pharmaceuticals, inhalants and solvents. The Strategy takes a balanced approach to reducing both the demand for, and the supply of, drugs and substances. It contributes to a healthier, safer Canada through prevention, treatment, enforcement, and harm reduction initiatives.

Substance Abuse Programs for Offenders

Approximately 80% of federal offenders have a history of alcohol and/or other drug abuse. A number of studies have shown a clear relationship between substance abuse, past criminal behaviour, and the risk of future criminal behaviour. It is also known that this risk increases dramatically with the severity of the offender's substance abuse problems. Drug use also results in the transmission of infectious diseases, and violence in institutions.

By investing in partnerships and intervention initiatives, such as substance abuse programs for offenders, governments can take a collaborative approach to addressing problems, reduce the risk of re-offending, and contribute to the safety of our communities.

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is recognized internationally for the progressive programming it provides to offenders. CSC developed and implemented the first substance abuse programs for offenders in the late 1980s. Recently, the CSC introduced significant enhancements and updates to current substance abuse programs.

There are now three internationally-accredited substance abuse programs for male offenders: the National Substance Abuse Program (NSAP) high, moderate and low intensity. An international

panel of experts has described these programs as 'state-of-the-art', and as examples of best practice in substance abuse intervention. High and moderate intensity programs are provided in institutions as soon as possible in the offender's sentence. Those who complete the programs also participate in maintenance programs. Low intensity programs and maintenance programs are also available to offenders while under supervision in the community.

The CSC is also responding to the special needs of Aboriginal and women offenders. The Aboriginal Offender Substance Abuse Program (AOSAP) is currently being implemented as a pilot project, and the Women Offender Substance Abuse Program (WOSAP) is also being implemented. Methadone Maintenance Treatment Program is available for offenders who meet the program criteria, and Intensive Support Units are in place for offenders who are committed to living a drug-free lifestyle while incarcerated.


The CSC has been a pioneer in the use of a para-professional model for treatment delivery and correctional intervention. More than 200 CSC staff have been trained and certified to deliver these programs in institutions and in the community. More than 5,000 offenders are involved in substance abuse interventions each year, with some 3,000 per year participating in the accredited substance abuse programs.

Achieving Results

The CSC is committed to ensuring that correctional programs provided to offenders are effective and provide the expected result of reduced recidivism. To that end, NSAP is being evaluated at this time. The preliminary results of the high intensity pilot project suggest a positive outcome. Specifically, those offenders who completed the high intensity program have demonstrated a 19% reduction in re-admission to prison and a 50% reduction in new convictions compared to a matched sample.

More information on Substance Abuse Programs within the CSC is available at http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/correctional/sub_e.shtml





More information on Addictions Research within the CSC is available at http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/addictions/index_e.shtml

To learn more about Canada's Drug Strategy, please visit www.healthcanada.gc.ca/cds

Find out what governments, non-governmental organizations, and other partners are doing – National Framework for Action – Visit www.healthcanada.gc.ca/cds-nfa