



SPECIAL REPORT

Inmate Services and  
Conditions of Custody in  
Saskatchewan  
Correctional Centres

October 2002

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Bed Space



## Inmate Services and Conditions of Custody in Saskatchewan Correctional Centres

# Bed Space

## Introduction

The demand for bed space in Saskatchewan's four correctional centres has been increasing since at least the early 1980s. This was evidently not anticipated, as both the Saskatoon and Prince Albert correctional centres, which became operational in 1981, were housing more inmates than their designed capacity by 1990. They accomplished this by placing more than one inmate in a cell (double-bunking) and converting program space and sections of some units to open dormitories. This practice gave rise to the term "operational capacity", which means the maximum facility population level at which daily operations and programs can be conducted safely and effectively.

By 1990, all four centres were exceeding their design capacity but were still able to meet rising bed space demand. In a somewhat fortunate coincidence, at the same time that demand for bed space was increasing, contemporary research was showing that programs delivered in a community environment result in lower rates of recidivism than those delivered in a traditional correctional institution. As a result, Corrections was able to ease bed space demand and at the same time incorporate new research results by initiating several programs that involved supervising low security inmates in the community.

Corrections' response to bed space demands has had consequences for both inmates and staff. Working at operational capacity has resulted in less privacy for and more tension among inmates, and increasingly strained relations between inmates and staff. Moving low-security inmates from the correctional centres into the community has resulted in a remaining inmate population that is, on average, more aggressive and violent than inmate populations have been in the past. In fact, it has occasionally been the case that placements in community programs are left empty because there are no

eligible low-security inmates in the correctional centres to fill them. These factors, coupled with an increase in gang-related activity, have created an environment in Saskatchewan's jails that is less safe for both inmates and staff.

Although the demand for bed space has been relatively stable for a couple of years, there are indications that the long-term trend will continue and demand will increase. For example, a Statistics Canada report published in May 2001 states that Saskatchewan's case rate for youth courts was more than double the national average.<sup>1</sup> Many of these young people will progress to adult court. Since many low-security inmates will be supervised in the community, bed space will be required primarily for medium- and high-security inmates. Under these circumstances, it remains to be seen how Corrections will address bed space demand that exceeds operational capacity. Unless it is decided that the criteria for placement under community supervision should be and are relaxed, the only answer at this point appears to be additional bed space.

The rest of this section addresses Corrections' response to increased bed space demand and the implications this has had for inmates and staff.

## Corrections' Response to the Increase in Bed Space Demand

At the same time that Corrections was expanding the operational capacity of its correctional centres, it initiated several community-based pre- and postincarceration programs that reduce the number of bed spaces required for remand and sentenced inmates.

All of the pre- and postincarceration programs are administered in accordance with strict criteria, including that the inmate has to present a low risk of reoffending to avoid placing the

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, "Youth Court Statistics," *The Daily*, May 30, 2001.



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community at risk. Many inmates are not eligible for these programs.

Each of the programs involves supervising inmates in the community rather than in a correctional centre. The level of supervision required is determined by the level of risk the inmate presents to the community and the likelihood that he or she will succeed in completing the program.

Bail Supervision is probably the best-known preincarceration program. Under this program, people accused of a crime that would not otherwise be eligible for bail are released on bail under the supervision of a probation officer.

Ideally, this system would enable inmates to serve time at the centre closest to their home, but this does not always work out because the catchment areas' boundaries are occasionally redrawn to accommodate shifting bed space demand. For example, the Regina catchment area currently includes inmates sentenced in Meadow Lake.

To address short-term, significant changes in bed space demand, Corrections will redirect inmates sentenced to serve time at one centre to another. Since Regina has the largest capacity, inmates are most commonly redirected to Regina.



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Examples of postincarceration programs include community training residences, camps, and the Administrative Release Program. The first two programs offer inmates an opportunity for transition to release in a non-institutional yet custodial setting. The latter allows inmates to be released from jail up to 60 days prior to their statutory release date. Conditions are attached and varying levels of supervision are imposed. The penalties for violation of any of the conditions include a return to jail.

By 1995, the combined effect of the pre- and postincarceration programs was a reduction in bed space demand by approximately 460 spaces. Even so, Corrections was still operating above design capacity.

Another way Corrections has managed bed space demand is by establishing three catchment areas for the three men's centres (Pine Grove serves women from the entire province). This means that inmates sentenced within a certain geographic region serve their time at the correctional centre in that area.

The Prince Albert Healing Lodge, which opened in 1997, has had a small impact on bed space demand. The healing lodge delivers a holistic, spiritual healing program that respects Aboriginal cultural traditions. It is designed for low-risk inmates who are considered likely to benefit from such a correctional program while serving a custodial sentence. The lodge has room for twenty-five inmates from the provincial correctional system and five from the federal system.

Although the above measures have been effective in reducing bed space demand, some correctional centres still have to address populations that occasionally exceed their operational capacity. One method of dealing with excessive bed space demand is to transfer some inmates to another centre. Inmates who volunteer for a transfer are moved first, and then the most recent admissions.

Centres normally transfer sentenced inmates with an assurance that they will be returned when space permits. Corrections estimates that most inmates are returned within two weeks to one



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month; however, we are aware of some inmates who have remained outside their home area for much longer.

Since transfers usually mean moving sentenced inmates away from their home area and consequently limiting their community supports and contact with family and friends, they also reduce opportunities for programming in the community. As a result, the inmates' opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration are diminished.

Remand inmates are occasionally transferred when remand space is full. The transfer of remand inmates can be just as disruptive as it is for sentenced inmates, and in some cases even more so due to the complications that arise as a result of reduced contact with their lawyers.

Another response to bed space demand is to encourage inmates who are eligible for early release programs to apply for early release and to expedite applications that are pending. This can be effective in reducing demand, but it raises the question of why Corrections doesn't do this as a matter of course.

### Assessing Corrections' Response

It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of Corrections' response to bed space demand because some of the factors that can significantly affect it have changed. Some of these changes were predicted and some were not. For example, the White Gull Camp north of Prince Albert was closed, but this was balanced by the opening of the Prince Albert Healing Lodge.

There has also been a change in the types of crime being committed. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics' Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, incidents of violent crime in Saskatchewan have risen from 13,051 in 1995 to 17,025 in 2000. In addition, inmates serving intermittent time became eligible for conditional release, and incarceration of fine default inmates ceased.

Perhaps the most significant change resulted from the Supreme Court decision in *R. v. Gladue*



(1999 1 SCR), which encouraged alternative sentencing for aboriginal inmates. Finally, the general population has become less tolerant of crime and is demanding harsher punishment.

Some of the above changes have assisted Corrections in managing bed space demand, while others have worked against them. Regardless of the net effect, Corrections has managed to bring bed space demand within operational limits, at least for the time being.

In 1995, there was a shortage of approximately 75 bed spaces in the Prince Albert catchment area, which meant inmates had to be transferred to Regina and Saskatoon. At the same time, there was a shortage of 20 bed spaces in the northern catchment area, which meant transferring inmates to Prince Albert. By 2002, these shortages no longer existed, owing to a favourable combination of crime trends and pre- and postincarceration programs based in the community.

While the number of inmates in correctional centres has recently remained within operational limits, increasing numbers of remand inmates nevertheless pressure the system. The average daily remand count increased from 179 in 1995 to 304 in 2001. In addition, the length of stay for remand inmates increased substantially from 16.4 days in 1997-98 to 25 days in 2001-02.



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### Implications for Inmates

The demand on bed space, besides presenting substantial operational problems for Corrections, also results in undesirable consequences for inmates. Reduced privacy and diminished access to limited resources are addressed in the section on Living Conditions. Other important issues are discussed below.

#### Reduced Programming Opportunities

To meet the demand for bed space, rooms that were originally designated for programs are being used as dormitory space. This limits programming opportunities. At the same time, many low-risk inmates are being placed under community supervision, leaving primarily medium- and high-risk inmates in the correctional centres.

The programming needs of the medium- and high-risk inmates are greater than those of the lower-risk inmates. This means that the programming needs of the average inmate in the centres are increasing at the same time that programming opportunities are decreasing. If Corrections is to meet its rehabilitation and reintegration objectives, one or both of these trends will have to be reversed.

Corrections is aware of this problem and has drafted an Integrated Case Management

Strategy (discussed fully in the section titled "Case Management") that, when fully implemented, will attempt to meet the programming needs of the inmate population.

On the other hand, many of the factors that increase bed space demand are beyond Corrections' control, including rising crime levels, changing socio-economic conditions, and public demand for harsher punishments.

#### COMMENDATIONS

- + For the implementation of progressive community-based programs that meet the needs of both the community and the inmates, and at the same time reduce bed space demand in the correctional centres.
- + For the Integrated Case Management Strategy, which will address the criminogenic needs of all incarcerated inmates when fully implemented.

#### Incarceration Outside of an Inmate's Home Area

Inmates who are incarcerated outside their home area face special challenges. For these inmates, there are fewer opportunities for community programming because they no longer have access to their local support network. They also receive fewer visitors, as friends and family are not close by and often have to travel long distances and spend a lot of money for visits that last for only a couple of hours. Some of these inmates and their families cannot even afford long-distance phone calls.

So far, there have been few concessions for inmates who are incarcerated outside their home geographic area. When the Regina catchment area was redrawn to include the north-west portion of the province, inmates who were held a long way from home received no special consideration other than modified visiting arrangements for families who had travelled a long distance to visit them.

For inmates who are transferred outside their home area as part of Corrections' effort to manage bed space availability, there is an unofficial policy of paying for some long-distance phone calls. In addition, if a family is unable to accept collect calls due to restrictions imposed by their





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phone company, Corrections will pay for some calls home. However, this policy is controversial, as many inmates who were sentenced in the Regina catchment area, which includes southern and north-western Saskatchewan, are further away from their home than some of the inmates who are transferred from another area, yet they receive no concessions.

While some male inmates may find themselves incarcerated far away from home, this is a common experience for female inmates, as the Pine Grove Correctional Centre in Prince Albert is the only facility for women in Saskatchewan. On average, about two-thirds of the inmates at Pine Grove are from Regina, Saskatoon, or northern

### COMMENDATION

+ To the Pine Grove Correctional Centre, for recognizing and addressing the additional challenges faced by inmates from outside the Prince Albert area.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- + Incarcerate all inmates at the centre nearest their home geographic area.
- + Provide concessions to inmates who are incarcerated outside their home geographic area to compensate for their isolation. For example, subsidize long-distance phone calls and travel expenses, and increase visiting privileges.
- + Limit the time that an inmate is incarcerated away from his or her home area.



The situation has also resulted in reduced privacy, elevated tensions, and an increased risk to health and safety for both staff and inmates.



Saskatchewan. All of these women experience the same difficulties as men who are incarcerated outside of their home area.

To Pine Grove's credit, it routinely allows special and extended visits to accommodate visitors travelling long distances, and pays for weekly long-distance calls for inmates who don't have the resources to pay for phone calls themselves.

Inmates have no legal right to be incarcerated near their home. Separation from family and community supports, however, is counterproductive to Corrections' rehabilitative efforts.

In the case of male inmates, since incarceration outside one's home area is the exception, it constitutes a condition of confinement that is harsher than that experienced by the vast majority of other male inmates. In this sense, it is clearly not fair.

## Conclusion

An increased demand for bed space is straining the correctional system in Saskatchewan. Although the justice system has attempted to contain the demand through pre- and postincarceration community-based programming, correctional facilities are operating beyond their design capacity.

This has resulted in the use of much-needed program areas for bed space at the same time that the program needs of incarcerated inmates are rising. The situation has also resulted in reduced privacy, elevated tensions, and an increased risk to health and safety for both staff and inmates. All of these factors put together have resulted in an environment less conducive to rehabilitation and reintegration. None of this bodes well for community safety. To make matters worse, a future increase in bed space demand is likely.



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To date, Corrections has responded to increasing bed space demand by placing low-security inmates in community programs when appropriate, but the number of medium- and high-risk inmates remaining is growing. As a result, the correctional centres may soon find that the bed space demand for medium- and high-security inmates exceeds operational capacity.

Corrections faces a dilemma. The increased demands on the correctional system and the need for expansion are taking place at the same time that the public is demanding improvements in other areas such as health care, farm aid, social services, education and highways.

This problem is not going to go away. We are likely to see a continued increase in bed space demand, and steps must be taken to ensure public recognition of the needs of the correctional system and public support for enhanced correctional services designed to minimize the rate of recidivism.



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