



News Release / Communiqué

Correctional Investigator Releases Third Status Update on COVID-19 in Federal Corrections

For Immediate Release

Ottawa, February 23, 2021 – Today, the Correctional Investigator, Dr. Ivan Zinger, released his third public update on the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on federal corrections. This report covers the second wave of the pandemic, which began to emerge in federal prisons in early November 2020.

“The second wave of COVID-19 in federal corrections has resulted in more than double the number of affected institutions and case counts that are 2.5 times higher than experienced in the first wave,” said Dr. Zinger. “Since the start of the pandemic, just over 10% of the total inmate population has had a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, which is a significantly higher rate of infection than in the general population. I am particularly concerned by the fact that Indigenous inmates accounted for close to 60% of all positive COVID-19 cases in Canadian prisons since November.”

The status report includes a statistical and demographic overview of COVID-19 case counts in federal corrections, as well as an investigation into the resumption of correctional programs and interventions suspended or interrupted due to the pandemic. The report finds inmates are spending more time behind bars because of reduced access to core programs and are serving their sentences in harsher conditions of confinement compared to pre-COVID circumstances. “Through no fault of their own, inmates are being denied or delayed access to parole hearings and community release because they have not completed their program requirements,” stated Dr. Zinger.

Dr. Zinger’s report makes five new recommendations, including these three:

1. In recognition of the undue hardship, unusual circumstances and extraordinary measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic on the federal inmate population, I recommend that CSC develop and fund a plan that significantly shifts program access and delivery to the community rather than prison. This approach is consistent with evidence-based research, which suggests that the

same programs delivered in the community yield better outcomes than those delivered in prison.

2. I recommend that CSC collaborate with the Parole Board of Canada on early and prioritized release of elderly and medically compromised inmates who pose no undue risk to society.
3. I recommend that the Minister of Public Safety examine alternatives to incarceration, and address the failings of Canada's aging, antiquated and costly federal prisons. Beyond the impacts of COVID-19, a more rigorous, humane and cost-effective community-based approach to corrections is long over-due. With more than 3,800 cells sitting empty across the country (equivalent to seven average size penitentiaries), the timing is now to reallocate staff and resources to better support safe, timely and healthy community reintegration and to examine the gradual closing of some aging and antiquated penitentiaries.

The report cited in this release is available at www.oci-bec.gc.ca.

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