



Volume 3, Chapter 1—Adult Correctional Institutions

2019 Value-for-Money Audit

Why We Did This Audit

- In the last five years, many reviews have been done and recommendations made to improve the adult correctional system, but while problems have been extensively studied, they have not been resolved.
- The Ministry of the Solicitor General (Ministry) spent, on average, \$726 million in each of the last five years to run the 25 adult provincial correctional institutions.
- Correctional officers have been experiencing an increasing frequency of violence.
- We have not audited the adult correctional system since 2008.

Why It Matters

- The purpose of a correctional system is, first, to protect the public from crime, and second, to provide the necessary supports and programming to individuals who continually reoffend so that they can successfully reintegrate into the community and reduce future incarceration and cost to taxpayers.
- Seventy-one percent of inmates are on remand and have not been convicted or sentenced, but are occupying correctional institutions. In addition, the prevalence of mental illness in inmates has increased in a system that is not designed to accommodate them.

What We Found

- The recidivism rate—the percentage of inmates who are reconvicted within two years of serving a sentence of six months or more—has decreased from 45% to 37% in the last 10 years. However, this rate only relates to sentenced inmates. On average, three-quarters of remanded inmates admitted into custody in 2018/19 had 13 previous charges and half had six previous convictions.
- Historically, to deal with overcrowding—largely attributed to delays in the criminal court system—the Ministry has increased the capacity of 16 institutions by an average of 81% more than their original capacity when they were built. In most cases, the Ministry did so by adding beds in cells designed to have only one. However, in 2018/19, 14 of the 25 correctional institutions were still operating beyond the Ministry's optimal rate of 85% occupancy.
- About 33% of individuals admitted into custody in 2018/19 had a diagnosed or suspected mental illness—up from 7% in 1998/99. Despite this, correctional officers did not receive sufficient or ongoing mental health training on how to handle such inmates. Also, institutions had insufficient or no specialized care units and mental health staff (nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists).
- The Ministry placed little emphasis on providing supports to remanded inmates. Programming staff at institutions left it up to inmates to decide whether or not to attend life skills programs, and made little effort to identify and reach out to repeat inmates who might benefit from such programming. Staff also did not obtain information from inmates to determine what type of assistance they needed, if any, to help plan for their return to the community.
- The Ministry does not analyze the root causes of violent incidents in correctional institutions to prevent future recurrence. From January 2014 to October 2018, there were about 21,000 recorded incidents across the province, including altercations between inmates and inmates threatening or directly assaulting staff. Over half of the more than 1,800 Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) claims filed by correctional employees over the last five years in only the eight institutions we visited were due to injuries inflicted by inmates and exposure to violence.
- In 2018, the average number of sick days for permanent correctional officers was 31 days—27% higher than in 2014. Overtime payments to correctional officers have also increased by 280%—from \$11 million in 2007/08 to \$42 million in 2018/19—despite the number of officers increasing by only 30% from 3,400 to 4,400 in that period.
- Management and staff have a strained relationship. In the last five years, correctional employees filed 7,700 grievances and took 483 work refusal actions. Ineffective mentoring, insufficient ongoing training in dealing with inmates with mental illness, and inadequate amenities for employees were contributing factors.
- The rising contraband problem, both in weapons and drugs, in correctional institutions is not fully understood or mitigated. In fact, between July 2017 and August 2019, there were 101 overdoses in the 25 correctional institutions.

Conclusions

- Correctional institutions are not equipped to deal with the challenges resulting from the greater proportion of inmates held on remand and inmates with possible mental health issues. Also, as suggested by the high incidence of violence and sick days, they are not effectively creating a safe working environment for correctional officers.

Read the audit report at www.auditor.on.ca