



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada



Supporting Mental Health within the Criminal Justice System

HSJCC Virtual Conference

November 17, 2021





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Unlocking the Gates Services Society



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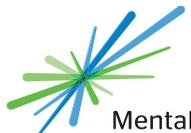
Land Acknowledgment

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) would like to acknowledge that the land on which its main offices operate is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People, and these lands are now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

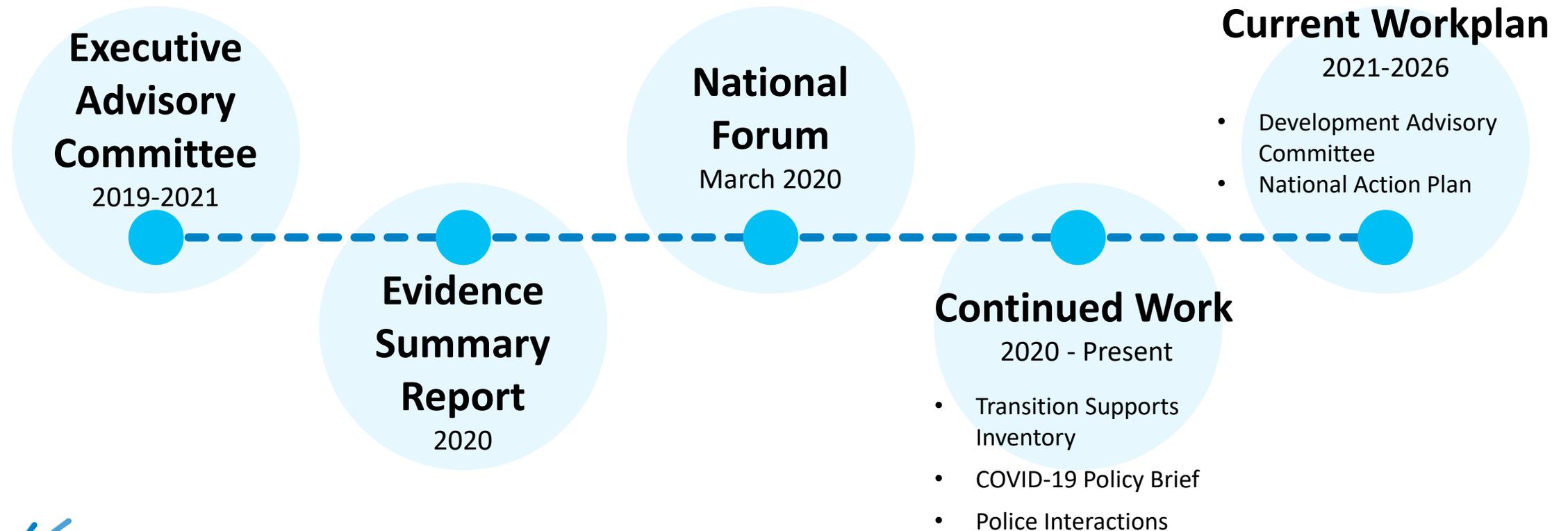
We would like to thank the Elders and caretakers of the land, both past and present, and acknowledge the strength and resiliency of Indigenous Peoples across Canada.

Today's Agenda

1. Our work in mental health and criminal justice
2. A new Inventory
3. Discussion
4. What are we currently doing?
What's next?



Overview of work to date



Scoping Review Infographics

A series of infographics depicting key messages from *The Mental Health Needs of Justice-Involved Persons: A Rapid Scoping Review of the Literature*



Who Experiences Mental Health Problems in the Criminal Justice System?

Academic researchers and policy-makers agree that people who live with mental health problems and illnesses are overrepresented in criminal justice systems, in Canada and globally.

The prevalence of mental health problems and illnesses among justice-involved people outpaces rates in the community:
73% of federally incarcerated men and 79% of federally incarcerated women met the criteria for one or more current mental disorders.

12% men
17% women

Rates of serious mental illness, such as major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder and psychotic disorders, are anywhere from two to three times higher for incarcerated persons in comparison to the community:
12% of federally incarcerated men and 17% of federally incarcerated women met the criteria for a current major mental illness.

Justice-involved persons who are incarcerated are nearly three times more likely to use psychotropic medications.
There is a concern that high rates of active psychotropic prescription, relative to those in the community (30% vs. 8%), may be a sign of its use for the purposes of behavioural control, rather than for therapeutic reasons.

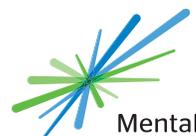
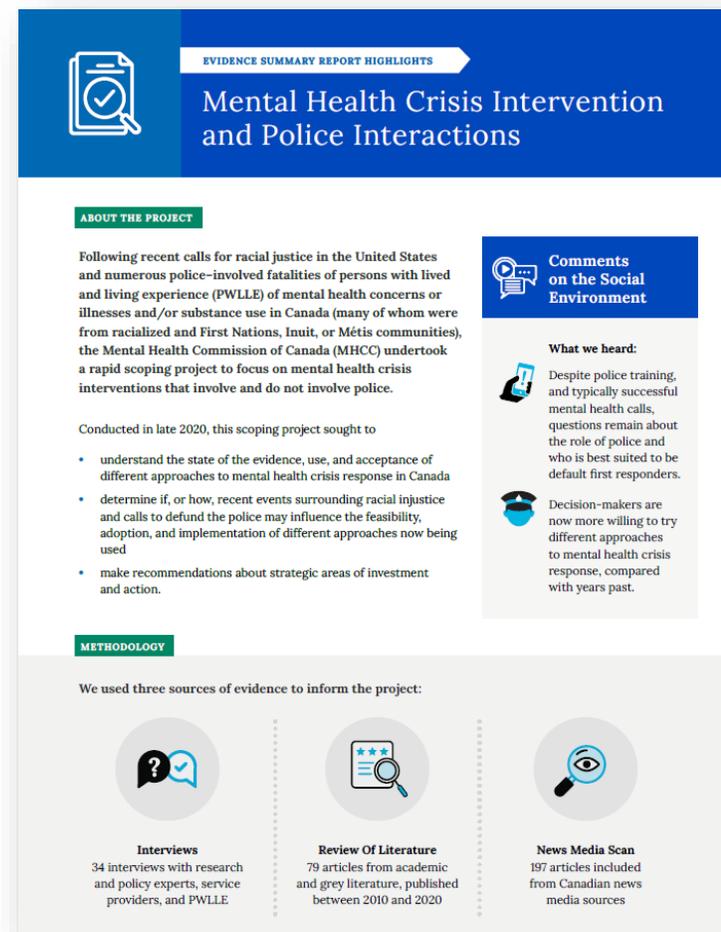
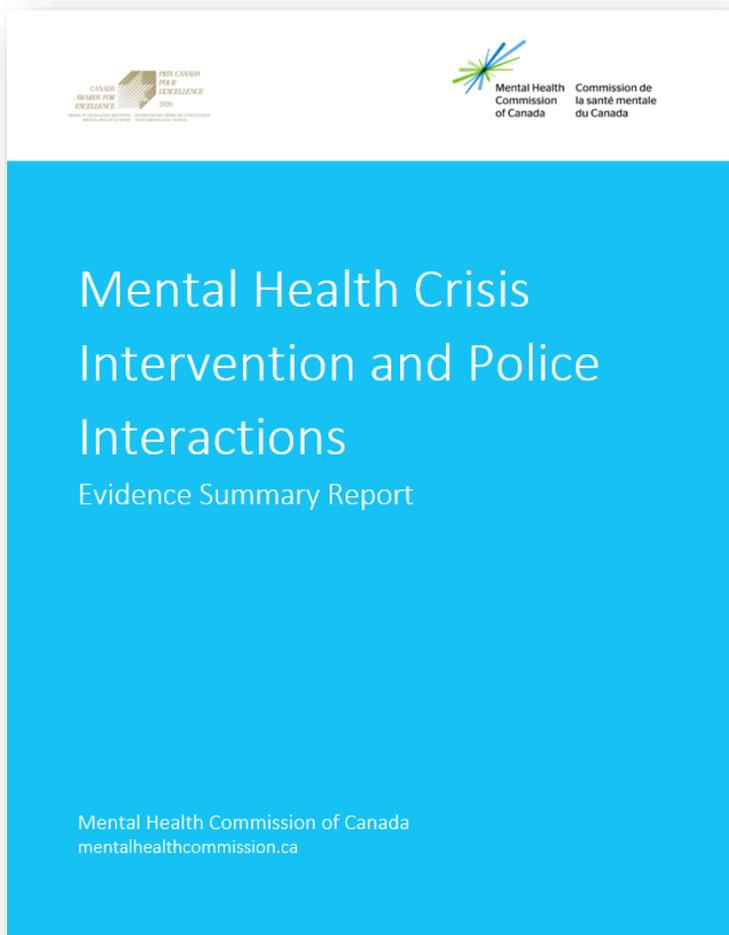
Experiences and histories of trauma, including sexual, physical and mental abuse, are more common among justice-involved persons than non-justice-involved persons.
This is especially true among First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM) men and women, and non-FNIM women.

In federal institutions, instances of self-injurious behaviour or non-suicidal self-injury more than doubled between 2008 and 2013 with fewer individuals having more experiences.
Men are more likely to self-injure because of feelings arising directly from being incarcerated, whereas women are more likely to self-injure because of feelings arising from emotional pain and past trauma.

The Mental Health Needs of Justice-Involved Persons: A Rapid Scoping Review of the Literature (2020) - Key Messages
To access the full report, visit the MHCC's [Mental Health and the Justice System](#) page.



Mental Health Crisis Intervention and Police Interactions



COVID-19 and Corrections Policy Brief



POLICY BRIEF

COVID-19, Mental Health and Substance Use in Correctional Settings

ABOUT THE ISSUE

During a pandemic, attention to mental health and substance use is needed more than ever. For people involved in the justice system, including those who are incarcerated, the risks and service gaps are particularly pronounced.

People in correctional facilities often face multiple vulnerabilities, including the double or triple stigma of justice involvement, mental illness, and substance use, which make it difficult to access the services they require. At the same time, the very nature of the corrections system has made it hard for facilities to adhere to public health guidance or maintain continuity of their health and social programming. Together, these factors put people experiencing incarceration at disproportionate risk of contracting COVID-19—while intensifying their existing mental health and substance use risks.

CHALLENGES

People experiencing incarceration have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Higher rates of pre-existing health conditions among incarcerated populations increase the likelihood of infection and can lead to poorer health outcomes post-infection. Environmental factors (e.g., overcrowding, reduced airflow in older buildings, movement of staff between communities and facilities) also contribute to a higher risk of infection.	The heightened COVID-19 risk is having an adverse impact on mental health. Concerns about dying, financial worries, and other mental health impacts of COVID-19 are intensified for incarcerated people because they have little control over their risk of exposure. These impacts are particularly challenging for people with pre-existing mental health issues or substance use concerns, who are over-represented in the correctional system.	COVID-19 has added to the service delivery challenges in correctional settings. Routine assessment, treatment, and referral are affected not only by the infection control measures adopted by correctional facilities but also by difficulties recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals to work in those facilities during a pandemic. Some specialized programs and services (e.g., harm reduction) have also been disrupted or suspended due to COVID-19.
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Key Facts

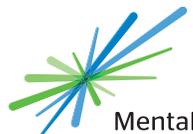
- COVID-19 infections were **6-9x higher** in federal/provincial correctional facilities vs. the general population
- 65-70%** of people who are incarcerated are living with problematic substance use
- Some people have been kept in their cells **23 hours a day** due to lockdowns and restrictions



COVID-19, Mental Health, and Substance Use in Correctional Settings: Considerations for Addressing Systemic Vulnerabilities

Policy Brief

Mental Health Commission of Canada
mentalhealthcommission.ca



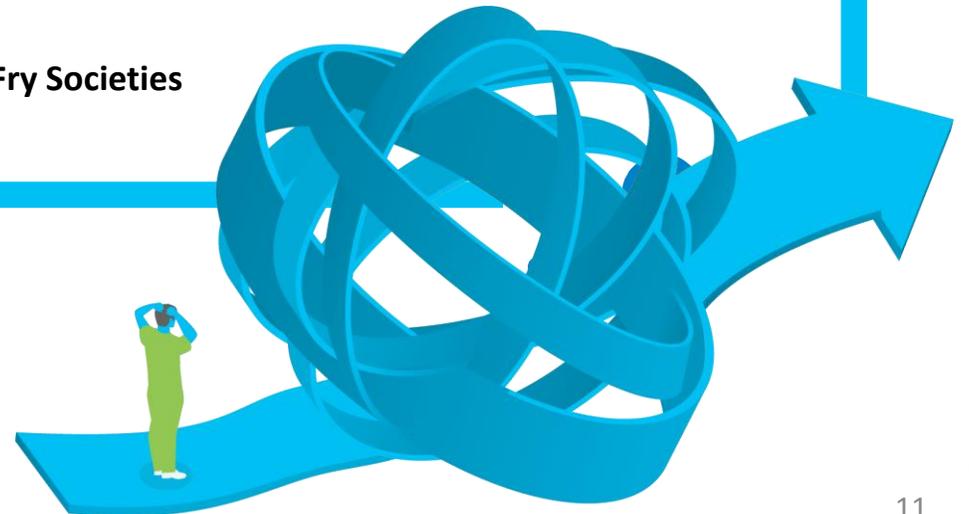
Transition Services and Supports Inventory



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“It can be disorienting to try to re-establish ties in community or to forge a new community. Being able to look up the supports that are closest to you and are tailored to your needs takes so much of the guesswork out of an already disorienting experience. Supports can alleviate feelings of frustration, abandonment, and loneliness and replace them with feelings of security, hope, and motivation.”

- Emilie Coyle, Executive Director, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies



Elizabeth Fry Society local/regional programs

Agency/organization/provider name: Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies	Province/territory where located: Multiple
Geographic reach or focus of program: National	Language of services: English and French
Contact information: Phone: 1-800-637-4606 Email: admin@caefs.ca <i>Note: Local branches have additional local contacts</i> Website: caefs.ca/get-in-touch for regional advocacy teams across Canada Main address: 190 Bronson Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1R 6H4 (national) Single or multi-site: Multi	Specific services available for:* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="radio"/> First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis <input checked="" type="radio"/> Women <input checked="" type="radio"/> 2SLGBTQ+ <input checked="" type="radio"/> Other (gender-diverse individuals)
Specific focus on criminal justice-involved populations: Yes	Referral required: For some services
Costs associated: Not specified	Supporting evidence/evaluation available online: Yes
Program description and objectives: At the national level, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) does not provide direct services, but instead takes on key issues that affect criminalized women and gender-diverse people in Canada. This national advocacy includes defending the rights of people who are incarcerated, building capacity, and raising awareness. As an organization, CAEFS is focused on prison abolition.	Span of services and supports: The 24 local Elizabeth Fry societies across the country provide a range of specialized services to support mental health and address substance use needs among women and gender-diverse individuals. For example, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Peterborough in Ontario offers community services such as a series of groups and one-on-one supportive counselling. These programs include anger solutions, self-esteem, life skills, and healthy relationships.

 This information is based on program information available online. Not all organizations indicate specific populations, but may still offer programs or services tailored to particular population groups.

Additional notes:

Many local Elizabeth Fry services are evidence-informed. Local Elizabeth Fry Societies were mentioned by a number of stakeholders consulted for this inventory due to the specific work they do.

John Howard Society local/regional services

Agency/organization/provider name: John Howard Society of Canada and provincial/territorial John Howard Societies		Province/territory where located: Multiple	
Geographic reach or focus of program: National		Language of services: English and French	
Contact information: Phone: 613-384-6272 Email: national@jhscan.wpengine.com <i>Note: Local branches have additional local contacts</i>		Specific services available for:* <input checked="" type="radio"/> None Specified	
Website: johnhoward.ca/services-across-canada for branches and affiliates across Canada			
Main address: 809 Blackburn Mews, Kingston, ON K7P 2N6 (national)			
Single or multi-site: Multi			
Specific focus on criminal justice-involved populations: Yes		Referral required: For some services	
Costs associated: Not specified		Supporting evidence/evaluation available online: Yes	

Program description and objectives:

John Howard Society of Canada is a federation of provincial/territorial and local societies whose goals are to

- understand and respond to issues related to crime
- work with people who have come into contact with the criminal justice system
- review, evaluate and advocate for changes in the criminal justice process
- engage in public education on matters involving criminal law and its application.

John Howard Society has branches and offices in more than 60 communities across Canada, provincial offices in all 10 provinces and the Northwest Territories, and a national office in Kingston, Ontario. Local branches and affiliates are associated with their respective provincial/territorial societies. Direct service to individuals is delivered primarily by the local branches and affiliates. The provincial/territorial societies work mainly on reform and community education activities, and also provide administrative support for the branches and affiliates. There are currently no provincial societies for Nunavut or Yukon.

Span of services and supports:

Local branches and affiliates provide a range of specialized services that connect people transitioning from incarceration with various community supports, including mental health and substance use services. John Howard Society does not maintain a national inventory of transitional supports largely because its local offices are community oriented and tend to know what other services and supports are available in the communities to which they provide service.



This information is based on program information available online. Not all organizations indicate specific populations, but may still offer programs or services tailored to particular population groups.

Across Boundaries

Agency/organization/provider name: Across Boundaries	Province/territory where located: Ontario
Geographic reach or focus of program: Local/municipal	Language of services: English, French, and other languages (see Additional Notes)
Contact information: Phone: 416-787-3007 Email: info@acrossboundaries.ca Website: acrossboundaries.ca Main address: 51 Clarkson Avenue, Toronto, ON M6E 2T5 Single or multi-site: Single	Specific services available for:* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="radio"/> First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis <input checked="" type="radio"/> Women <input checked="" type="radio"/> 2SLGBTQ+ <input checked="" type="radio"/> Immigrant, refugee, ethno-cultural, and/or racialized communities
Specific focus on criminal justice-involved populations: Yes	Referral required: For some services
Costs associated: Not specified	Supporting evidence/evaluation available online: None found

Program description and objectives:

Across Boundaries provides equitable, inclusive, and holistic mental health and substance use services for racialized communities within anti-racism, anti-Black racism, and anti-oppression frameworks.

Span of services and supports:

Across Boundaries provides community mental health and substance use supports and in-house programs that integrate

- individual support
- community outreach
- support groups
- alternative and complementary therapies
- skills building
- social and recreational activities
- and more.

Mental Health Association – Toronto. Clients in the program can also access other services and support programs at Across Boundaries.

The Mental Health and Justice Short-term Community Support Worker service offers case manager support to clients involved in the mental health court support system and assists with release planning out of incarceration and diversion out of the criminal justice system process.

More specific programming at Across Boundaries includes

- alternative healing
- art therapy
- peer support groups



This information is based on program information available online. Not all organizations indicate specific populations, but may still offer programs or services tailored to particular population groups.

Unlocking the Gates Services Society peer health mentoring program

Agency/organization/provider name: Unlocking the Gates Services Society (funded by First Nations Health Authority)	Province/territory where located: British Columbia	
Geographic reach or focus of program: Provincial	Language of services: English	
Contact information: Phone: 604-518-3261 (Intake) 778-938-2584 (after hours) Email: unlockingthegates@gmail.com Website: unlockingthegates.org Main address: 104 West Office, 22832 Lougheed Hwy, Maple Ridge, BC, Canada Single or multi-site: Multi	Specific services available for:* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="radio"/> First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis <input checked="" type="radio"/> Women <input checked="" type="radio"/> 2SLGBTQ+ <input checked="" type="radio"/> Immigrant, refugee, ethno-cultural, and/or racialized communities <input checked="" type="radio"/> Age 55+ 	
Specific focus on criminal justice-involved populations: Yes	Referral required: No	
Costs associated: No	Supporting evidence/evaluation available online: Yes	
Program description and objectives: <p>This program supports individuals who are leaving correctional facilities in British Columbia and transitioning into the community. Unlocking the Gates' peer health mentoring program works with community agencies inside prisons to connect with individuals during pre-release planning and to offer peer support and engagement during the days immediately following their release.</p> <p>This support and outreach helps transitioning people access the health and social services they need to increase their chances of a successful integration. The peer health mentoring program is grounded in participatory processes and restorative and social justice principles. It enhances individuals' integration efforts through supportive relationships and by encouraging community dialogue, collaboration, and capacity building.</p>	Span of services and supports: <p>The program is accessible seven days a week to people who are incarcerated and does not exclude anyone. Staff were all once incarcerated themselves and now work to provide support to help people connect with the health and community resources they need.</p> <p>Examples of program support include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ meeting people at the prison gates ■ accompanying people to welfare offices or substance use meetings ■ helping people acquire safe housing, clothing, family doctors, and more. 	

 This information is based on program information available online. Not all organizations indicate specific populations, but may still offer programs or services tailored to particular population groups.

“People need food, clothing, shelter, and support the day they are released, not just left back on the streets homeless. Supporting people on their journey out of the criminal justice system by connecting them with resources gives them the best chance to make the healthy decisions that will keep them alive.”

- Mo Korchinski, Executive Director, Unlocking the Gates Services Society



Discussion



Impact of Pandemic

Has the pandemic impacted how your organization supports people?

If yes, in what ways?



Inventory of supports and services

From your perspective, why is this inventory useful?

What kind of difference can it make?



Advice & Success

What advice would you offer to people who are transitioning back into the community, and to the people who are supporting them?

How can we collectively make this a successful process?



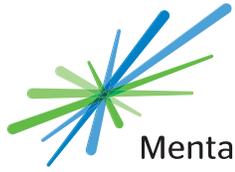
Discussion and Questions



What are we currently doing?

- Establishing a Development Advisory Committee
- Informing a National Action Plan
- Knowledge exchange activities





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Interested in staying connected? Email us to join our mailing list:



justice@mentalhealthcommission.ca



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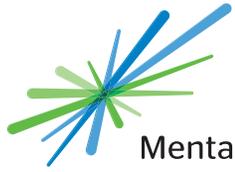
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