

Press Release

Corrections in Ontario: Directions for Reform Released

Sapers report calls for significant reform for corrections in Ontario

Toronto, ON. October 3, 2017: Today the second report of Independent Advisor Howard Sapers was released by the Government of Ontario. Mr. Sapers' report, *Corrections in Ontario: Directions for Reform* makes 62 recommendations to enhance effective, evidence-based correctional practice that will increase community safety through a more responsible and accountable correctional system.

The key findings and recommendations cover a range of issues, including:

- The need for a principled and rights-based approach to all correctional operations, including searches, the inmate complaints process, inmate visits and the response to deaths in custody;
- Enhanced evidence-based correctional practice, including appropriate institutional placement and community supervision, targeted and effective programming, and enhanced discharge planning and gradual, supported release;
- The need to bring the management of pre-trial and immigration detainees in line with their legal status;
- Addressing the over-representation of Indigenous people in Ontario's correctional system; and
- The need for a new governance and service delivery framework for correctional health care.

"Ontario does not make full use of best practices that have been shown to enhance community safety by improving reintegration and safe release," said Mr. Sapers. "The vast majority of inmates in Ontario do not have access to targeted rehabilitative programming, effective discharge planning, or supported gradual release."

In the report, Mr. Sapers finds that the need for rights-based reform spans a range of current correctional operations. Ontario law, for example, provides little guidance or limits on the searches that take place within its institutions. There is no clear policy for dealing with inmate complaints, and when a written complaint is filed inmates are not generally given a copy and are not able to retain any written record of the complaint having been received, read, or dealt with. Visits from family and friends are also highly restricted. The minimum number of visits set out in law has, in many institutions, become a *de facto* maximum. Despite evidence that maintaining regular family contact greatly assists in rehabilitation, visit times are highly limited and there are no programs to help facilitate contact between parents and children or mothers and their newborns.

All of these issues disproportionately impact Indigenous peoples. Indigenous people account for approximately 2% of the total population in Ontario and yet in 2016 represented 13% of those in provincial custody. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and Calls to Action have breathed new life into efforts to meaningfully address systemic discrimination within corrections, much work is left to be done.

Despite laudable effort on the part of the clinical professionals working in corrections, Ontario struggles to meet the complex health needs of the incarcerated population. The Government of Ontario has recognized the need for change in the way health care is provided in its correctional facilities. This is a welcome and encouraging development; the transfer of health care responsibility should be pursued on a priority basis.

“The province’s correctional service needs to reaffirm a commitment to evidence-based practice and fundamental principles,” said Mr. Sapers. “I know that the government is committed to addressing many of these issues and moving forward with the necessary changes. There is a window of opportunity to make these aspirations into a reality and have Ontario become a leader in humane, evidence-based and rights-respecting correctional practices.”

The Independent Review of Ontario Corrections (IROC) provides arm’s length advice and recommendations on reforming Ontario’s adult correctional system. [IROC \(Independent Review of Ontario Corrections\)](#)’s activities are independent of the government and guided by public **Terms of Reference**.

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