

National Strategy for the Prevention of Suicide and the Reduction of Self-Injury

The need for an integrated approach to prevent suicide and reduce self-injury was highlighted by the Correctional Service of Canada's Task Force on Mental Health and by a series of recent internal studies. The urgency of this need was underscored by a recent and tragic series of suicides. In response, the Correctional Service of Canada has developed a National Strategy for the Prevention of Suicide and Reduction of Self-Injury. Goals and Objectives The goals of the strategy are to reduce suicide and self-injury and their impact on offenders, staff and significant others. To do this, a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach is being developed for the assessment, prevention, intervention, treatment, support, evaluation, research and training of staff.

Specific activities include:

- providing a safe, secure and humane environment for those who suffer from mental illness or who are unable to cope with the stresses of life in a correctional environment;
- increasing the awareness and understanding of both management and staff concerning suicide and self-injury;
- developing staff skills to prevent suicide and self-harm, including identifying suicide risk, monitoring pre-indicators and providing crisis intervention and support services;
- piloting, evaluating and implementing a suicide-risk screening instrument as part of the standard intake-assessment process;
- developing and implementing a comprehensive staff training plan;
- promoting research and program development for target risk groups, including male and female offenders prone to self-injury, native offenders, multiproblem sex offenders and offenders with a mental illness;
- implementing a data-gathering process to track the incidence of attempted suicides and self-injuries and to determine their precise circumstances through "psychological autopsies"; and
- developing and implementing support services for survivors, as well as affected staff and offenders.

Staff Support and Training The focus on staff is critical in this strategy. Because a matrix of factors contributes to suicide and self-injury, a multidisciplinary response is required. Therefore, the support of staff from case management, security, health care, staff training, chaplaincy and research is key to the success of the strategy.

Over the next three years, all staff having direct contact with offenders will complete a course in suicide prevention. While the overall co-ordination of the strategy will be provided by the Health Care Services Branch, active involvement of staff from institutions, as well as from the community, is vital.