

The Correctional Service of Canada Accepts Recommendations from Substance Abuse Task Force

The Executive Committee of the Correctional Service of Canada has recently endorsed a task force proposal to implement a national substance-abuse strategy that could alter the delivery of substance-abuse programs.

The organization of this task force included a Steering Committee, composed of senior managers from within the Ministry and from federal and provincial government departments and agencies as well as experts from the field of addictions, to establish broad parameters and provide general direction. A Working Group with similar representation was also established, charged with the task of developing and proposing the strategic model and framework.

The Task Force on the Reduction of Substance Abuse submitted 55 recommendations on issues pertaining to the development, management, delivery and evaluation of substance-abuse programs. The task force was created to establish a policy framework that would define the direction of substance-abuse programs and services for federal offenders for the next five years.

There will be a move toward the initial screening and assessment of offender risk factors in order to match offender needs with appropriate intervention. The new approach will stress the delivery of a continuum of treatment services, from admission to the institution until warrant expiry date in the community. In addition, efforts will be made to hire and train staff with the personal attributes, knowledge and skills necessary to deliver substance-abuse programs that have proven effective both in the institution and in the community. Finally, there will be increased emphasis on the sharing of information with provincial and community addictions agencies in order to develop and maintain high-quality substance-abuse programs and services.

The task force was convened in August 1989 to address the serious problem of substance abuse among Canadian federal inmates. According to the 1989 Mental Health Survey, 53.7% of offenders had a serious substance-abuse disorder. Concerns about substance abuse are reflected in the more than \$2,000,000 spent by the Correctional Service of Canada on substance-abuse programs in institutions and in the community in the 1989-90 fiscal year. However, a substantial increase in funding will be required to enhance programming initiatives.

The task force report outlines several intervention guidelines to help develop an action plan. Offenders should be:

- matched to the most appropriate, timely and cost-effective forms of intervention;
- provided with services in an environment that is supportive of and amenable to behavioural change;
- exposed to incentives and disincentives that are critical to their needs;
- supported in their behavioural change by the Correctional Service of Canada staff and by social networks, including peers, volunteers and families;
- provided with the necessary information and skills to sustain and strengthen their behavioural change; and

- given appropriate referrals to other helping agencies in cases of special need.

Following a review of the available literature on the causes and consequences of substance abuse, the task force adopted a conceptual model that considers the cause of substance-abuse problems to be rooted in a combination of biological, psychological and sociological factors. The approach recognizes that early identification and intervention of alcohol and drug problems are crucial to the recovery process and that a range of interventions must be available. The model supports health promotion and prevention approaches in preventing dependency and enhancing recovery. Prevention or health promotion initiatives seek to prevent alcohol- or drug-related problems before they occur or become inevitable. Such initiatives differ in several fundamental ways from treatment programs. They are impersonal actions that apply uniformly to large groups of people for whom treatment would be inappropriate. To be effective, they should be light and unburdensome and not powerful and controlling. Prevention is oriented toward the future, not the past. Its success is measured not in terms of immediate accomplishments but long-term goals. It requires a vision of the future, not only short-term results.

The development of a national strategy and regional plans to implement the task force recommendations reflects the commitment of the Correctional Service of Canada to expand prevention efforts and strengthen community health services for substance-abusing offenders. The implementation and maintenance of a support system with local, regional and national organizations should strengthen the Service as a whole. U.S. Task Force Reports Findings A similar substance-abuse task force in the United States has recently completed an assessment of current correctional substance-abuse strategies in that country. The recommendations of the Task Force on Correctional Substance Abuse Strategies recognize the effectiveness and necessity of a blend of control and treatment in corrections.

In its report, the task force describes strategies and treatments for offender rehabilitation. However, it points out that drug-abuse treatment programs are not simply a traditional health care service transplanted into the correctional environment. Supervision, monitoring and control measures are stressed as crucial to any effective correctional programming, whether therapeutic or non-therapeutic.

The task force was composed of federal, state and local correctional professionals, researchers, and clinicians. The report does not attempt to answer every question about substance-abuse programming, but offers guidelines for the development of strategies to address substance abuse in the correctional system.

The task force made several general recommendations, including the establishment of a national agency to disseminate regularly, as opposed to on a request-only basis, the most current substance-abuse literature and program information to federal, state and local program managers and administrators.

The task force also recommends that each state develop an action plan to guide and direct the management of substance-abuse offenders throughout the state.

The task force developed specific recommendations based on goals of correctional substance-abuse programming, which reflect the need for substance-abuse programs and strategies to be carefully planned, to target clear objectives and to make the best possible use of limited resources. The goals are:

- to assess the offender's substance abuse, supervision, control and service needs;
- to provide a range of quality programs consistent with the offender's control, supervision and treatment needs;
- to provide linkage to ensure effective communications across the entire criminal justice system and community-based agencies for transmission of information and co-ordination of services;
- to recruit and retain qualified staff to provide substance-abuse programming;
- to develop a safe, drug-free and productive environment that promotes offender change, as well as providing for staff, offender and public safety; and
- to apply accountability measures to substance-abuse programs.

These goals are each supported by a number of substrategies.

The task force believes that substance-abuse programs can be an instrumental and effective part of institutional and community corrections, particularly in view of their success record.

Correctional agencies in the United States are grappling with increasing numbers of offenders as a result of efforts to reduce substance abuse which include broader enforcement of laws against drug use and trafficking, longer sentences and mandatory sentencing statutes.

In more than 40 states, a range of intermediate sanctions/punishments have been developed to address supervision, control and service needs of offenders. These provide a policy-driven range of sanctions which can be utilized in providing community supervision for offenders. Examples of such interventions are intensive probation supervision, community residential care, fines, day fines, day reporting centres, halfway back programs, house arrest, and substance abuse treatment. (For further information on intermediate sanctions, please refer to "Offenders in Drug Abuse Treatment Programs" in the Research in Brief section.)

In the future, correctional agencies in the United States will be faced with significantly heavier workloads. In 1988, one in 49 American adults was under some form of correctional supervision. Demographic experts predict that prison populations will expand dramatically within the next four years.

Prisons are often so crowded in many jurisdictions that resources have to be shifted from substance-abuse programming to meet the priority of housing. While the task force recognizes the restrictions on correctional agencies, it stresses the need for jurisdictions to initiate some form of planning and program development to reduce the overall rates of substance abuse. The task force maintains that this responsibility rests not only with correctional agencies, but also with political bodies, health and social service agencies, and other community groups.

Task Force on the Reduction of Substance Abuse (1990). Report prepared by the Correctional Service of Canada.

Task Force on Correctional Substance Abuse Strategies (1990). Report prepared by the United States

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