

# The role and function of addictions research in the Correctional Service of Canada

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**T**he Addictions Research Centre (ARC) situated in Montague, Prince Edward Island, was established in November 1999, and officially opened on May 18, 2001 by the Solicitor General of Canada, Lawrence MacAuley, P. C., MP. The Centre is responsible for all addictions research and development activities within the mandate of the Correctional Service Canada (CSC). The creation of ARC has provided the Service a greater focus for addictions research and development, and ensures coordination of CSC's research related activities in addictions.

**T**he majority of offenders admitted to the federal corrections system have problems with alcohol and drugs. A recent study indicated that, on admission, 70% of offenders have substance abuse identified as a criminogenic need. In addition, approximately 56% of these offenders report that they were using drugs or alcohol at the time they committed their offences.<sup>2</sup>

## Role statement

*The primary role of the Addictions Research Centre is to advance the management of addiction issues in criminal justice towards the goal of contributing to public protection. In support of this role, the Centre is committed to enhancing corrections policy, programming and management practices on substance abuse through the creation and dissemination of knowledge and expertise.*

The first part of the role statement, consistent with the Mission of the Correctional Service, states that the work at the Centre must be directed to contributing to the protection of the public. Treatment of addictions, both in penitentiaries and in the community will help the Service in meeting this commitment.

The second part of the role statement refers to the creation and dissemination of knowledge and expertise. Knowledge creation will be accomplished through innovative research that takes into account both addictions and corrections issues. This is consistent with objectives of the Correctional Service.

## Goals

Five goals were established for the ARC. Achieving these goals will ensure the Centre fulfils its role within the Correctional Service. In addition, achieving

these goals will ensure that addictions research in corrections is expanded and developed.

## 1. Applied research and development

The first goal of the ARC is meeting the applied research needs of the Correctional Service of Canada. In the first year of operation the ARC initiated a number of projects to meet the Service's needs. In the future, research initiatives will be identified and prioritized through a broad consultation process.

### **Intensive Support Units**

Intensive Support Units (ISU) were established at five institutions, one in each of CSC's administrative regions, providing a secure environment and opportunity for offenders who want to deal with their particular addiction(s). As a prerequisite to live in the ISU, offenders must sign a consent form agreeing to more frequent urinalysis and searches for alcohol or drugs. In addition, staff on the units receives training about issues associated with addictions. This enables them to better assist offenders while they are undergoing treatment, after their specialized treatment has ended, or who are dealing with the temptation of drugs within the prison environment. While not directly responsible for managing these units, the ARC is responsible for conducting research to determine if the units are having the expected benefits. In particular, the research is looking at what offenders and staff expect to achieve through living on these units, how living on the units impacts their release and how it impacts their outcome after release into the community.

### **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome**

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE) result from the impact on the human fetus of alcohol use during pregnancy. Not all children exposed to alcohol during the prenatal period will develop FAS/FAE, but for those who do, the effects include learning difficulties, delayed development, characteristic facial features and associated behavioural problems, thereby making it difficult to learn from experiences. These impacts may result in conflicts with parents, teachers and eventually the legal system. At present, there is insufficient data available that provide a reliable estimate of the number of FAS/FAE offenders in the

federal correctional system. In addition, identifying adult offenders with FAS/FAE is difficult because characteristic facial features disappear, as the child becomes an adult. The research to be conducted will first attempt to develop an estimate of FAS/FAE within the federal correctional population using admissions to penitentiaries. In addition, screening tests will be evaluated as part of the research to determine if they can be used to effectively identify cases that require more thorough assessment. The results of the research will allow the Service to develop interventions that will meet the need of offenders afflicted with FAS/FAE.

### **High Intensity Substance Abuse Program**

The High Intensity Substance Abuse Program (HISAP) was developed by some of the Substance Abuse Program Coordinators working for the Service. The program development team has been assisted by the ARC through funding of the national pilot and through the development of the research protocol that is accompanying the program. Analysis of the data collected from the pilot program will be used to modify the program, to demonstrate its effectiveness with the most severely addicted offenders, and to assist the Programs Branch and the program developers in having the program approved by the international accreditation panel.

### **Random drug testing**

Random drug testing has been underway in the Correctional Service since 1994 and a considerable amount of data has been collected. To date, however, there have been limited opportunities to examine these data. The ARC is now looking at the data to determine changing patterns of drug use, the degree of randomness in the testing, and how we can use these data as part of ongoing management of the drug problem. A more detailed article, by Patricia MacPherson, describing some of the work on random drug testing appears in this issue of *Forum*.

### **Women offenders Substance Abuse Program**

A review by an international panel of experts identified a number of deficiencies in the substance abuse programming available for women offenders. To address these limitations, the ARC initiated the development of a new program. This program, guided by an expert panel, will provide state of the art treatment to women offenders. The program is being designed to meet the specific needs of women offenders taking account of their pathways to addiction and its impact on their lives.

### **Aboriginal offenders**

Aboriginal offenders have unique needs in the area of substance abuse based on their social and cultural

experiences. Accounting for more than 15% of offenders in federal penitentiaries, it has been long recognized that specialized programming would be more effective for these offenders than current core programs. The ARC is working towards the development of new programming, based on Aboriginal needs, that will better meet the treatment goals of these offenders.

### **Computerized Substance Abuse Assessment**

The Computerized Lifestyle Assessment Instrument (CLAI), first developed to assess the severity and nature of substance abuse problems, requires redevelopment because of recent upgrades in computer technology and the inclusion of many items that are not relevant to substance abuse treatment. Presently, the CLAI is being designed to focus on substance abuse recognition/treatment issues, and to improve its administration. The new system will include an audio component that will allow offenders to have questions read to them, rather than having to read them. New methods of transferring data to other systems are being investigated to reduce the need to re-enter data in different systems and ensure a fully integrated assessment system.

## **2. Partnerships**

Developing partnerships with other addictions and corrections agencies will assist the ARC in exploring new approaches to the treatment of addictions. As well, it will help to understand addiction issues as they apply to corrections.

At present, the ARC has a joint project with the John Howard Society of Moncton, New Brunswick, to develop and implement a community based program for working with the addicted offenders when they are released from custody. Using a process called "wrap-around" this new and innovative approach will see a coordinated effort by community agencies to deal with the problems of recently released offenders. The goal is to ensure that other agencies are comfortable working with offenders, and to ensure that there is no duplication of services by different agencies.

In addition, the ARC is working with community and health agencies in Prince Edward Island to evaluate a smoking cessation program. We are sharing our research expertise and are learning about the range of health and social issues related to smoking cessation programs. Cooperation of this nature ensures both organizations are learning and advancing through joint projects.

### 3. Research facilities

The second goal of the ARC is to provide a setting for both Canadian and internationally recognized experts working on addictions issues of importance to criminal justice agencies. These facilities include meeting and office space as well as access to computers and data. The Correctional Service of Canada, through its automated systems produces an enormous amount of valuable data. However, to make this information useful, the data must be studied and analyzed for any emerging trends and patterns. The provision of facilities for researchers to come to the ARC will be making effective use of the information resources we have.

### 4. Promote research

The third goal of the ARC is to promote research and development in the areas of addictions and corrections. We need high quality effective research if we are to understand the problems of addictions, and to determine which types of interventions will be effective with our offender population. However, research does not happen by itself. It must be encouraged and developed, and ARC will play a leadership role in this activity. A priority of ARC is to work to develop partnerships with other government departments, other levels of government and non-government organizations, and to encourage their participation in addictions research.

Increasing the capacity for research in addictions and corrections will require close cooperation with the academic community. Encouraging university based researchers to increase their attention to the problems of addictions, not only ensures high quality research, but sets the stage for developing the next generation of researchers being trained in academic institutions. Providing students with work experience and training placements at ARC will further develop the talents of young researchers.

An additional method of encouraging research will be to organize small conferences and meetings. The goal of these meetings will be to share information and knowledge, and to develop approaches to identify existing gaps in our knowledge. Research can then be designed to address the gaps.

### 5. Research training and development

Conducting research in addictions and corrections requires a wide variety of skills. By encouraging people from addictions and corrections agencies to come and work at the Centre, we will be able to achieve our fourth goal of providing research training and development experience. For example, an agency may have a specific project that they

would like to have completed, but do not have the resources or staff available with the necessary expertise. Their staff could be seconded to the Centre where they would work on the project under the guidance of ARC staff, and then return to their home organization with both the results of their work and a new set of skills they can use on future projects.

The training and development goals will also be achieved through the provision of short courses designed to meet specific needs. For example, courses in measurement, research methodology, use of archival data etc. could be developed and delivered at the Centre. These courses might be particularly useful for people from developing countries.

### Facilities

The Centre has office space for 20 permanent staff and 4 visiting experts. The majority will be social scientists with responsibility for managing, in-house, contract, and joint projects with other agencies.

The Centre has conference rooms and a resource centre with video conferencing facilities making it possible to hold meetings with staff at National Headquarters in Ottawa. Many of the projects undertaken by the Centre will require extensive consultation with other branches within the Correctional Service including Health Care, Programs, Security, Aboriginal Issues, etc.

The Resource Centre is being developed to provide traditional printed library materials, video and computer based training, access to scientific research journals through electronic data bases, and access to other research data bases. The Resource Centre also provides space for larger meetings (up to 40 people) and a place for staff at the Centre to meet informally to discuss projects. It is anticipated that the Resource Centre will also be the location for invited experts to deliver lectures for staff and visitors.

### Summary

The Addictions Research Centre exemplifies a state of the art for addictions research. ARC's objective is to encourage and support progressive addiction related research and evaluation. This will contribute to the continual development of scholarly excellence and knowledge base. As well, it will link Regional and National objectives, and promotes the creation of both public and private sector opportunities for discussion and exchange of information. ■

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<sup>2</sup> Correctional Service of Canada. *The Safe Return of Offenders to the Community: Statistical Overview*, November 2000. Ottawa, ON: Research Branch.