



# Research at a glance

## Correctional Health Promotion and Health Education Initiatives: A Review of the Literature

*Health education interventions improve offender health knowledge and attitudes and, in some cases, health behaviours.*

### Why we did this study

Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) public health program provides health services to federal offenders to prevent and control disease and promote good health. One of the strategic areas in this program is health promotion and health education. The purpose of this report was to provide a summary of the existing literature relevant to brief offender health promotion and health education initiatives. This information can be incorporated into future plans to develop and revise health promotion programs within CSC.

### What we did

A literature review of various health education and awareness interventions implemented with offender populations outside of CSC was conducted. Brief descriptions of the initiatives and outcome studies reporting on their effectiveness were compiled. Promising practices for program development were formulated based on these results, taking into consideration CSC's offender health context.

### What we found

Results indicated that all intervention formats described in the review, including self-directed, case management, outreach clinics, peer counselling, and prison-based education and awareness sessions, reported some level of improvement in health knowledge and more proactive attitudes toward health behaviours. To a lesser extent, several of these initiatives also reported better compliance with health behaviours. The decision as to which format to implement depends on the resources and the circumstances of the correctional agency.

### What it means

The following are selected promising practices following from this review that could be considered when designing health promotion initiatives in CSC:

- It is important to provide offenders with information on the risk of intravenous drug use and sexual behaviour on health and how to access services that assist in reducing the risk for contracting or spreading blood-borne viruses.
- General wellness sessions highlighting the importance of strategies to improve health through the monitoring of blood pressure and cholesterol, improving nutrition and the frequency of exercise, and reducing or quitting smoking and substance abuse have a role to play in improving the health of any population.
- Materials should be modified for the intended audience respecting specific health requirements and culture; for example, intravenous drug users, problem drinkers, women of child-bearing years, and Aboriginal offenders.
- Clear and measurable intervention goals should be defined and methods of recording offenders' participation and progress should be established.
- Information and awareness sessions should bridge the transition from incarceration to release to the community.

Overall, the key message is that well-designed, evidence-based health awareness interventions play an important role in a comprehensive correctional health services menu.

### For more information

Nolan, A., & Stewart, L. (2015). *Correctional health promotion and health education initiatives: A review of the literature* (Research Report R-355). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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