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## Housing Challenges and Barriers of Senior Adults Being Discharged from Provincial and Federal Correctional Facilities in the Greater Edmonton Area

**FINAL REPORT  
SEPTEMBER  
2018**



Final Report Draft

**In partnership with the University of Alberta with the  
generous support of Homeward Trust Edmonton**

**Funded by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy  
through Homeward Trust Edmonton's Community-Based Research Projects**

# Executive Summary

The results of our qualitative interviews of clients and service providers supports the findings within our literature review of the challenges facing seniors upon release. There are many barriers to successful reintegration upon release from a correctional institution and one of the most significant is the lack of suitable and affordable housing. This research project supports that a lack of shelter and control over one's life affects released seniors' ability to maintain a consistent and healthy lifestyle and successful reintegration. Further challenges faced by seniors after lengthy incarceration include mental illness, addictions, and the stigmatization of criminal records. Further, because of a lengthy incarceration period, many have lost their social connections to family and friends. These challenges coupled together impact the ability of seniors to secure appropriate and sustainable housing. In addition, the lack of permanent and stable housing contributes to the inability to become gainfully employed. This in turn limits one's ability to afford housing. Finally, the research revealed that the mere presence of housing alone may not be adequate. That is, we recommend a supported housing program to mitigate the other challenges that accompany lack of appropriate and sustainable housing.

## Introduction:

Since 1949, The John Howard Society of Alberta has conducted research into crime, its causes and consequences. Of specific importance to us, is the growing number of seniors within Provincial and Federal Correctional Institutions. Canada's population is aging and will continue to do so for the next couple of decades. According to Statistics Canada, 25% of Canada's population will be over the age of 65 in 14 years (Ries, 2010, p. 577). Along with the aging of the general population, the prison population is increasingly getting older. The year 2000 saw about 13% of the prison population consisting of inmates over the age of 50 however, as of 2016, the prison population of inmates over the age of 50 was 25% (McKie, 2016; Sapers, 2016, p. 12). With a growing number of senior inmates, there is a growing number of senior inmates being released from prison, which greatly affects the housing needs and risk of homelessness for this population. A lack of shelter and control over one's life affects their ability to maintain a consistent healthy lifestyle and to gain employment. Criminal records are also stigmatic barriers to accessing housing and remaining in the community (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2007, p. 14). According to past research, "the relationship between homelessness and incarceration is bi-directional," due to the fact that homelessness has been found to increase one's chances of "ending up in jail" and that upon release from jail, unsuccessful reintegrative strategies ultimately lead to a higher chance of recidivism (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p. 1; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2007, p. 34, 46). "If a goal of corrections in Canada is to make Canadians safer through reducing recidivism, then we need a deeper understanding of the relationship between incarceration, prisoner re-entry, and homelessness" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2007, p. 2). At some point, almost all of these senior inmates will be released from prison and we need a clear understanding of how their special needs of reintegration can be met.

## Methodology

It is largely self-evident that in order to understand the needs of the seniors' population that are released from incarceration it would be ideal to interview the seniors themselves. This approach however is wrought with challenges, not the least of which are privacy issues and the feasibility of even making direct contact with the individuals involved as many would have been released directly into the community from the institution.

The methodology we developed therefore considered the following key challenges:

1. It is extremely challenging to find clients willing to be interviewed for the purposes of this study. First, just having access to clients was challenging. The street-involved clients were difficult to contact owing to the fact that they had no fixed address, no fixed phone number, and had irregular scheduled. All of the meetings with street-involved clients were done by a drop-in basis at a day shelter. Meetings with clients were facilitated by their service providers, therefore it was easier to organize interviews with individuals who were living in government custody (halfway houses) as it was easier to make regular contact with them.
  2. While Indigenous persons make up a significant proportion of the population of Edmonton and Alberta that has been incarcerated, we were unable to interview a proportional number of Indigenous clients. This is likely owing to two reasons: Indigenous persons receive parole at a rate substantially lower than non-Indigenous persons. As a result, there were less opportunities to have interviews with Indigenous clients facilitated when visiting halfway houses. Additionally, Indigenous persons tend to experience more extreme forms of homelessness than non-Indigenous persons. (Indigenous persons tend to do more sleeping in the streets, abandoned buildings, and camping, compared to non-Indigenous persons who are more likely to couch surf, stay with friends or family, and utilize transitional housing and shelters). As a result, Indigenous persons were harder to access at the shelters we worked with.
- \* Sources that support these assertions would be the report by the Auditor General on Indigenous persons and conditional release, and the 2016 report on Edmonton homelessness by Homeward Trust.

The approach that was adopted for this project consisted of the following elements:

1. Identify local community agencies that work with released offenders
2. Develop a standardized survey questionnaire for caseworkers/staff and senior offenders;
3. Have the questionnaire and interview selection process approved by the University of Alberta Ethics Committee;
4. Interview agency staff and case workers using the questionnaire;
5. Identify and interview a number of willing parole officers working with senior clients;
6. Approach those local agencies that operate Transitional Housing (Halfway Houses) and interview Staff;
7. Request an opportunity to interview a number of willing senior Transition Housing residents with the pre-approved questionnaire.

The agencies and service providers interviewed were:

Bissell Centre Mustard Seed	Stan Daniels Centre
Boyle Street	Edmonton Police Service
Edmonton Drug Court	Edmonton John Howard Society
Buffalo Sage	Corrections Canada Parole Officers

# Results

## Data Parameters

1. Interviews: Service Providers: 17 Clients: 12
2. Service Providers: Caseworkers at halfway houses, parole officers, police officers, community program facilitator at a shelter, housing support workers from a day shelter, mental health support workers from a day shelter. Clients: Individuals identified as senior (over 50 years) who were recently released from prison and currently be helped by a service provider.
3. Estimated Proportion of Caseload over the Age of 50: Caseload average of 28% is senior.
  - a. Is the number or percentage increasing over time? The general consensus from service providers is that it is either staying the same or that they are working with more older clients. The research does support an aging offender population.
4. Breakdown of Ethnicity:
  - a. Service Provider: Mostly Caucasian and Indigenous, with a handful of minority clients. Predominantly Caucasian clients however.
  - b. Ethnicity Reported by Clients: 8 Caucasian, 4 Indigenous
5. How Long was the Incarcerated period?
  - a. Clients interviewed and service provider caseloads indicate that incarceration periods ranged from short remand stays, provincial sentences (less than 2 years), and federal sentences (greater than 2 years). Similar answer by service providers.

## Client Housing Circumstance

1. Prior to incarceration: Most clients were in varying levels of unstable housing. This ranged from homelessness and camping in the river valley or inner city to couch surfing, staying with friends, and staying with relatives. Some clients, but not many, were utilizing capital housing or transitional housing. Very few clients owned their own homes or even rented before being incarcerated.
2. Post incarceration: Overwhelmingly, clients were either relying or already reliant on utilizing government assistance and community supports as means of housing themselves following their incarceration. Many clients require the use of AHS, CPP, and/or OAS as a means of supporting themselves. This money is often their only source of income post-incarceration which leads to other issues in terms of access to CPP and OAS post incarceration. Many individuals also rely on friends, family, or past associates to allow them to stay with them as they cannot afford other options that meet their lifestyle. Only one client interviewed would be returning to a family home that he owned.

## Challenges/Barriers Identified by Clients and Service Providers – Frequent Responses

### 1. Money

- a. Adequate places to rent are outside of the price range for many clients.
- b. Employment is difficult to obtain as many jobs do not want to hire someone with a criminal record, and those that do often pay very little.
- c. Deposits and application fees are typically required in addition to first month's rent. If a client is struggling financially, they often do not have the substantial sum of money to meet these requirements

### 2. Stigmatization

- a. Many interviewees reported that stigmatization was a reason why they were denied access to housing. Mostly, it was that housing complexes did not want clients with a criminal record. Many clients and service providers stated that this was usually not the reason identified by the housing option that the individual was not granted.

However, it was typical that individuals be denied housing following the discovery of their criminal record. Additionally, many interviewees reported that they believed either themselves or their clients were denied housing because of Indigenous identity. They believed that many housing options were reluctant to allow Indigenous persons to live in their accommodations. The indigenous population often fall into many of the “vulnerable population” categories such as: Aboriginal, ex-offender, low-income, homeless, female, senior, and mentally ill (Community Plan Committee, 2015) and therefore face further stigmatization while trying to find stable housing.

### **3. Transportation:**

- a. Many clients cannot afford public transportation. As a result, many clients use the LRT without paying for a ticket. Many incur so many fines that they are given the option to “Pay or Stay” where they can either pay the fine or serve time in jail as a means of ‘paying’ the fine. Many clients do not have the means to pay the fine, and therefore they end up forced into jail as they have no other choice. However, the researchers note that the changes to Bill 9 should start to alleviate this issue.

### **4. Lack of Adequate Housing Overall**

- a. The housing programs that is currently available in Edmonton experience long wait times. Many clients are required to wait longer than they are in the care of their service providers to have access to adequate housing programs. There is currently fewer spots in adequate housing programs than there are persons who require access to it according to the service providers interviewed.

### **5. Support**

- a. Many clients lack the support they need in the housing they qualify for. Specifically, those clients who manage conditions through medication often require assistance in remembering to take medication and obtaining the correct dose. Without this support, clients may spiral downwards either mentally or physically and it is believed by the some of the clients and the service providers that this is a major issue in terms of keeping stable housing.

### **6. Existing housing solutions can be problematic**

- a. It was noted from the clients and the service providers that many clients struggle in the housing they do qualify for as it does not meet several of their needs:
  - i. Conditions: some housing may cause a client to breach their existing conditions (avoid certain persons, avoid criminal associates, distance proximity to schools, malls, parks, etc.)
  - ii. Staying straight: Some of these housing options require individuals who are trying to distance themselves from criminal or drug/alcohol behaviour to engage with individuals still participating in those negative behaviours. This exposure can often result in relapse behaviour or recidivism.
  - iii. Proximity to essential services: the housing options available to clients ends up being far away from essential services (see Transportation). This can cause clients to have problems reaching their parole or probation officers, social workers, community programming, or court appearances. As a result, clients end up missing crucial appointments then may even cause a breach in conditions.

## **7. Housing Requirements are beyond client capability**

- a. Some clients lacked the cognitive or literacy skills to actually complete the application process independently, and as a result require significant assistance from community services to obtain housing.
- b. Many clients were unable to provide a strong credit score as a result of being incarcerated and/or homeless. This is something the majority of housing options are requiring of their applicants in Edmonton.
- c. Many clients were not employed when seeking housing and as a result were denied housing.

All of these barriers play a role in limiting the access to stable housing for those post-incarceration. As was found in previous research and the current study, homelessness upon release from custody can be "...the result of systematic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination" (Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society, 2013, p.2, as cited in Canadian Homeless Research Network, 2012, p.1). Upon release from custody, older populations also experience a loss of access to financial and social benefits within the community along with "ageism in the job market" (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p.3; Goldberg, Lang, & Barrington, 2016, p.1; Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society, 2013, p.2). Finding housing for these individuals is the foundation to getting them reintegrated into the community and having the ability to care for themselves.

### **Implications**

Many clients and service providers reported that clients lacked sufficient resources and support following their immediate release from remand/correctional centres. Inadequate support following release from incarceration seemed to work hand in hand with housing but many believed that adequate support is necessary before housing could be accomplished. Previous and current research finds that individuals "often need help navigating complex application processes for public benefits programs" (Goldberg, Lang, & Barrington, 2016, p.5). Clients can be released at all hours of the day, with only the possessions they had upon their admission into these centres. As a result, very few individuals have money or a working cell phone as tools to enter a safe housing situation upon their release. They have little means of contacting supports (which may be closed or they do not know how to access them). Many clients have to resort to contact with previous criminal associates or negative family relations as a means of survival upon their release (this may also result in a breach of conditions). Research completed by Gaetz & O'Grady (2007) found that discharge planners within institutions stated it was "extremely difficult to meet the needs of all releases" due to "inadequate resources within correctional institutions" and "the inadequacies of community based resources to make referrals..." (p.88). The John Howard Society of Toronto (2010) found that fewer release related supports and services were available to provincial inmates compared to federal inmates (p. 3-4). They also found that federally sentenced inmates are almost always provided with a parole officer and are therefore given more support in the community to aide in navigating available resources and ultimately appropriate housing in the community (p.3-4).

## **Implications (cont'd)**

What is significant to note is that many interviewees linked a number of risk factors together and talked about how these factors cannot necessarily be separated from each other (e.g., what the authors call the silo'ing of criminogenic factors). That is, although many interviewees talked about housing issues because they were of concern and because they were specifically asked questions on this topic, they often spoke more holistically and linked housing to a lack of other services such as a lack of education and a lack of employment and lack of help with mental illness and addictions and so on. It is therefore important to note that although housing is of primary concern to all those interviewed, they indicate that housing alone does not necessarily prevent recidivism and that we have to look at housing as one piece of the puzzle, albeit a large piece, to prevent future offending.

## **Notable Observations**

1. Differences between the needs of senior men and senior women. In previous research, Shantz & Frignon (2009) found that women are more likely than men to struggle upon release from prison in terms of finding employment, earning enough money to live off and support their children with, all of which contribute to the revolving door in and out of prison and homelessness/poverty (p.5). The current study found that specifically, senior women are less inclined to utilize shelters that are not women's only facilities. This is owing to the fact that they feel unsafe in the shelters where men might be able to threaten and assault them. As a result, many women will opt for risky housing situations (staying with an abusive partner) or other means of supporting themselves (prostitution, etc.) in an effort to avoid what they consider to be a more dangerous option in the event they cannot get into a women's only shelter/transitional housing. They stress that they require more women's only housing facilities in Edmonton to meet their needs.

Access to AHS, CPP, and/or OAS. Many clients who are over 50 but under 65 experience the physical limitations of being senior. As a result, many cannot work to support themselves and are therefore reliant on AHS. However, many individuals are denied AHS/have their AHS terminated once they are eligible for CPP and/or OAS. Unfortunately, the process of applying for CPP/OAS is time consuming. It can sometimes take a year or more from the time an application is initiated for the client to begin receiving payments. As a result, this places individuals without financial support while they are waiting for their new financial programs to kick in. This is a serious problem specific to our studied population.

## **Recommendations from Clients and Service Providers Based on Their Personal Experiences**

- Overwhelmingly, interviewees (both service providers and clients) stated that the best way to remedy some of the barriers and challenges faced by our studied population was to create appropriate housing to meet their specific needs. The housing could be looked upon as transitional housing in that it would provide the supports needed for clients to become active members of society while at the same time providing a structure for them to live within.
- An ideal housing program would obviously be willing to accept those with criminal convictions, or that were still on parole or probation. This house program would have to abide by conditions that are sometimes imposed on our studied population (e.g. a certain distance away from parks, schools, daycares, etc.) according to all service providers.
- The housing program would have to accommodate both those who are currently entrenched in addictions and those who are looking for a sober living environment. These services would have to be separate from one and other. Something that was regularly identified by clients was that either residences would not accommodate them because of their active drug/alcohol use, or that they were uncomfortable using certain shelters or transitional housing because they were surrounded by persons still engaging in criminal or drug/alcohol behaviour.

## **Recommendations from Clients & Service Providers Based on Their Personal Experiences (cont'd)**

- The housing program would also include all the requirements for clients who struggle with mobility and accessibility given the age of the population studied. This would include elevators and proximity to additional services that might fall outside of the services from a justice system perspective.
- Services need to exist to assist individuals following their immediate release from remand/correctional centres. Considering that individuals can be released from these centres at any time of day or night, with only the possessions they have on them, many individuals find themselves in a compromising position. Services include, but are not limited to, help with accessing money and bank accounts and government programs like OAS and CPP, and access to mental health and addictions services to name a few.
- Some clients wished there was more public information about being released from jail and the struggles that ensue. They believe that if more people understood how important services including housing are then it might be more likely that more adequate housing will be created.
- Overall, the belief of the many clients and service providers is that there simply needs to be more available housing. Many interviewees identified that there were significant wait times for any of the existing housing. That wait time was sometimes so significant that clients returned to criminal behaviour as a means of supporting themselves in the meantime.

**Consideration of the above recommendations by clients and providers, a more holistic view of a process to address the needs of released senior offenders can be summarized as follows:**

1. Immediate temporary transitional accommodation available upon release;
2. Assessment made of the needs and services required of recently released senior offenders;
3. Identification of the most appropriate strategy in the best interests of the senior:
  - a) Long term housing in a supportive living environment;
  - b) Short term accommodation in transitional housing providing required services and programs to prepare the individual for:
  - c) Relocation to affordable and long term accommodation.

**This approach presents** somewhat of a hybrid model between a Housing First strategy and a Halfway House component. It tries to take into account the very different needs and challenges faced by individual and that a single standard cannot meet them all.

Clearly, this process can be applied to all offenders who are released from incarceration but our focus here is on a more vulnerable group – seniors. By providing affordable, permanent housing to homeless individuals, the cost to support them is ultimately reduced because their dependency on shelters and other homeless services would decrease significantly. If paired with supportive programming, their involvement in the justice system could also potentially be reduced or eliminated. Research has found that in general, since older offenders are less prone to recidivism, providing them with housing could be a long-term solution that allows them to access the healthcare they need and address the varying issues that older populations face (Graffam, Shinkfield, & Hardcastle, 2008, p. 674).

## **Further Research**

Issues of confidentiality and privacy as well as accessibility to recently released offenders will continue to present substantial challenges to more detailed quantitative data collection. In order to make any meaningful statistical statements, however, the sample size would need to be of a larger size than was currently available given our resources and timelines.

What would be of interest furthermore, in the light of what was identified in this survey, would be a better understanding of the government financial resources/programs available to seniors – CPP / OAS and AISH. Issues of ease of access to apply for and receive funding, the proportion of seniors in this group even accessing these resources and the differences encountered between indigenous and non-indigenous individuals would all comprise relevant additional data.

It would be critical to the implementation of many if not all of our recommendations for extensive and detailed research to be undertaken as to exactly what the various levels of support above would comprise and how they could be delivered in an effective, efficient and sustainable manner. Such research would require a valuable and unique elaborate multidisciplinary approach whose time we believe has certainly come.

#### Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge Homeward Trust Edmonton for their generous support of this project and we extend a special thanks to all of the clients and service providers who participated in our qualitative interviews to better understand and appreciate the housing issues facing seniors leaving correctional facilities.

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# Literature Review

## Introduction

It is a demographic reality that Canada's population is aging and will continue to do so for the next two decades. This is also reflected in Canada's prison population where the percentage of inmates over the age of 50 increased from 13% of the incarcerated population in 2000 to 25% in 2016 (Sapers, 2016). While this issue has not as yet been addressed in any formal way by the Federal and Provincial government correctional services, local community agencies that are seeking to address the needs of this segment of the released population have undertaken some studies that are public. This literature review attempts to summarize and highlight the key findings and challenges identified to date.

## Barriers Post-Incarceration

In relation to the incarcerated population, "the anticipated rate of homelessness increases [upon] discharge" (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p. 27). This means that more people will leave prison homeless than the amount that arrived homeless. Homelessness is often defined as lacking stable and affordable housing, therefore limiting one's ability to be safe, maintain their health and/or seek treatment, further their education and/or find employment (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2007, p. 36; Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society, 2013, p. 2, as cited in Canadian Homeless Research Network, 2012, p.1). This can be "... 'the result of systematic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination' " (Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society, 2013, p. 2, as cited in Canadian Homeless Research Network, 2012, p.1). With an aging prison population and more inmates leaving prison without stable housing, it is only reasonable to assume that we are going to have a larger senior homeless population being released from correctional institutions in the years to come. According to a study done in 2010, prisoners over the age of 50 who reported that they would be homeless upon their release from prison accounted for 22.3% of those saying that they would be homeless (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p. 27). Older homeless populations face even more difficulties accessing resources than younger homeless populations because they may experience a loss of access to financial/social benefits within the community, physical and cognitive difficulties, and "ageism in the job market" (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p. 3; Goldberg, Lang, & Barrington, 2016, p. 1; Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society, 2013, p. 2). The general senior population that is struggling financially would often rely on income support programs, however once in prison, access to those benefits is lost and re-applying for them upon release can be very difficult if the individual has never accessed those resources prior to incarceration and if they lack supportive resources to help with the process (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p. 27). Goldberg, Lang, & Barrington (2016) presented similar findings in regards to the accessibility of benefits post-incarceration:

...The lack of a permanent address can be a barrier to applying for and receiving benefits that provide basic income support and health care. Some homeless persons are unaware of their own eligibility for public assistance programs and face difficulties applying for and receiving benefits. Elderly homeless persons in particular often need help navigating complex application processes for public benefits programs (Goldberg, Lang, & Barrington, 2016, p. 5)

Along with the financial barriers, over 40% of seniors released from prison that were facing homelessness also had severe mental health problems (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p. 22). This is yet another issue that limits one's ability to access employment, resources, and support in the community. Mental illness has been found to strongly affect both the homeless and criminal populations. The prison system has the unfortunate ability to exacerbate one's mental health issues therefore, individuals are exposed to a greater risk of becoming homeless upon release if proper discharge planning and the appropriate transfer of care are not arranged (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2007, p. 16-17). Mental health issues often come along with various other health conditions, and substance abuse problems, therefore creating greater demand for a wide array of available programs and resources.

## **Women and Aboriginal Populations**

As of 2013, women over the age of 50 doubled to 10%, compared to 5% in 2003 (Correctional Service Canada, 2015). According to Correctional Service Canada (2015), 48% of those women "received their first federal sentence after the age of 50", so they are well represented in both provincial and federal institutions (Correctional Service Canada, 2015). The aging of the prison population is reflected in both male and female inmates and is predicted to continue to increase in the next decade. As of 2013, 56% of women were serving their sentence for a violent offence and 26% for a serious drug offence, which are both often a result of "poverty and lack of personal security (Quinn 2007)" (Correctional Service Canada, 2015; Walsh et al., p. 368-369).

Upon release, adding on to the stigma of having a criminal record, being homeless, and being over the age of 50 years old, women and aboriginal individuals face additional stigmatization. Shantz & Frigon (2009) found that women are more likely than men to struggle upon release from prison in terms of finding employment, earning enough money to live off and support their children with, all of which can contribute to the revolving door in and out of prison and homelessness/poverty (p.5). They also found that:

For some older women, years of imprisonment have led to their social isolation: family and friend networks have often broken down, and they lack knowledge of community resources and services. As these women try to re-establish their lives in their communities, they are impeded by age- and health-related limitations; the stigma of their criminalization; continuing state-imposed restrictions; and the after effects of their imprisonments. The intersectional problems older reintegrating women experience based on their age, race, gender, socio- economic status, and other factors, exacerbate their relatively 'smooth' integrations, in which they trade the pains of imprisonment for the pains of reintegration. (Shantz, & Frigon, 2009, p. 13)

According to Walsh et al. (2012), there is a "lack of prevention and intervention services to interrupt or prevent the cycle of homelessness and incarceration" (p. 22). Some women find themselves having to turn to illegal activity in order to support family members and themselves, which then eliminates their ability to access many, if not all of the homeless serving resources (p. 25). This acts as an example of how, for many women, their criminality is not due to negligent deviance, "but rather as what appears to be a last resort" (Walsh et al., 2012, p. 54). Appropriate community resources that recognize such barriers to success, especially for Aboriginal women, could have a great impact on the success of reintegration for this population.

The Aboriginal population of Canada faces a lot of racism and marginalization, especially within the context of the criminal justice system. In this context, they often fall into many of the “vulnerable population” categories such as: Aboriginal, ex-offender, low-income, homeless, female, senior, and mentally ill (Community Plan Committee, 2015). For the Aboriginal population, falling under many of these categories further exacerbates the stigma and struggle they experience post-incarceration while trying to find stable housing, employment, and connections within the community.

### **Provincial Inmates vs. Federal Inmates**

There is also a great deal of difference in the challenges faced by provincially sentenced inmates and federally sentenced inmates throughout Canada. Discharge plans are supposed to be available to all provincially sentenced inmates however, a recent study found that less than half of inmates actually received any form of a discharge plan. Discharge planners stated that it was “extremely difficult to meet the needs of all releases” due to “inadequate resources within correctional institutions” and “the inadequacies of community-based resources to make referrals...” (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2007, p. 88). On top of that, John Howard Society of Toronto (2010) found that fewer release related supports and services were available to provincial inmates compared to federal inmates (p. 3-4). Gradual releases for inmates are key in ensuring success, however provinces such as Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia have seen a decline in the use of gradual release (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p. 3-4). For this reason, a lot of provincially sentenced inmates are being released with no plan and no further support or supervision in the community. Federally sentenced inmates are more likely to receive discharge planning to help them find housing and are almost always provided with a parole officer and are therefore given a more concrete plan for release and are monitored and supported in the community (p. 3-4).

### **Cost**

There are both social and economic reasons to fill the gap of services provided to the growing senior population being released from prison. Finding housing for these individuals is the basis to getting them reintegrated into the community and having the ability to take care of themselves.

...Analysts have provided cost comparisons showing that provision of social housing or supportive housing is less costly than homeless individuals’ repeat, and frequently inappropriate, reliance on shelters, the emergency healthcare, social services, and the criminal justice systems, the latter including police, courts, jails, and probation services (City of Toronto 2009; Pomeroy 2005; Eberle 2001). (John Howard Society of Toronto, 2010, p. 2)

By providing affordable, permanent housing to homeless individuals, the cost to support them is ultimately reduced because their dependency on shelters and other homeless services would decrease significantly and if paired with supportive programming, their involvement in the justice system would also hopefully decrease.

## **Housing Programs in Canada**

The Post Incarceration Housing Program (PIHP) was developed in the city of Toronto as a community resource that supported those recently released from incarceration to obtain and maintain housing. Through the Streets to Homes Program, they also work with those with mental illness and those simply struggling with homelessness. Along with finding housing, the program also helps individuals access “treatment and rehabilitation services” within the community and “access income benefits and ID replacement” (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2015). Ensuring these other resources and supports are available to and used by their clients helps increase their chances of success when they find housing. Without a consistent income and consistent programming for any mental health or substance abuse issues they may face, their ability to successfully maintain their housing decreases.

PIHP follows a “Housing First” model that provides those in need of affordable and permanent housing “almost immediate access to permanent housing” (Falvo, 2009, p. 4). Participants are required to take a money management course and agree to have staff visit their home a minimum of two times per month (p. 4). Complete abstinence from drugs and/or alcohol is not a requirement to gain housing through this program, however harm reduction supports and programs are available to all participants (p. 4). Research has found “that between 85 percent and 90 percent” of participants have maintained their housing after 5 years of obtaining it (p. 5).

As for Edmonton, Homeward Trust has also employed the “Housing First” model to provide Edmonton’s homeless population with access to housing and resources to aide in maintaining that housing (Homeward Trust Edmonton, n.d.).

## **Conclusion**

To provide individuals over 50 years of age who are being released from prison with stable housing would help slow and potentially help eliminate the revolving door between homelessness and incarceration. Research has also found that older offenders are less likely to recidivate, so providing housing for them could be a long term solution that allows them to access the healthcare they need and address the varying issues that older populations face (Graffam, Shinkfield, & Hardcastle, 2008, p. 674). “Programs that support a transition to housing reduce the likelihood that released inmates will become homeless, a circumstance which undoubtedly exacerbates other risk factors facing ex-convicts, and increases the likelihood of recidivism” (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2007, p. 91). Ultimately, reintegrative programming that involves a discharge plan, support programs within the correctional institution and, support in the community post-release, should begin upon entry to the prison to help ensure higher rates of success (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2007, p. 20-21). Changes made to the way discharge planning is utilized within correctional institutions can be applied to all inmates, however with the rapidly aging population, our attention must shift to a population that society often turns a blind eye to.

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