

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA MUST FIX FUNDAMENTAL FLAWS WITH PRISON NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Statement by 70 organizations Canada-wide

August, 2019 — We, the undersigned, represent many different communities and interests. But today we speak with one voice, firmly committed to health and human rights, to urge the federal government to fix the flaws in its “Prison Needle Exchange Program” (PNEP), so prisoners have easy and confidential access to sterile injection equipment.

While we welcome the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC)’s decision to implement PNEPs in federal prisons, PNEP details reveal serious deficiencies that are not keeping with public health principles or professionally-accepted standards for such programs. Most fundamentally, the PNEP violates prisoners’ confidentiality at many points. No working program in the world uses the approach adopted by CSC, which will operate as a very strong barrier to access. As a result, prisoners will continue to be exposed to the risk of HIV, hepatitis C virus and other harms to their health. There is no justification for this approach.

The evidence also shows that in more than 25 years of functioning prison-based needle and syringe programs, there has not been a single reported incident of assault with needles from such programs anywhere in the world. Occupational safety is better — not worse — where these programs exist, because staff are far less vulnerable to accidental needle-stick injuries and also less likely to experience such an injury with equipment that has been used by many people. Resistance from correctional officers to PNEPs has been seen elsewhere. But the experience in other jurisdictions has also shown that with appropriate education and training, correctional staff will come to agree that these programs lead to a safer prison environment.

Together, we call upon CSC to fix fundamental problems with the program’s design to comply with public health principles and professionally-accepted standards so that prisoners who need this health service will be able to gain access, thereby protecting their health. Failure to remedy these flaws is an ongoing breach of prisoners’ human rights, as outlined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

For more information please visit www.prisonhealthnow.ca

Organizations who have endorsed this message:

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Aboriginal Legal Services
Action Hepatitis Canada (AHC)
AIDS Committee Of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo & Area (ACCKWA)
AIDS Committee of Durham Region

AIDS Committee of Ottawa (ACO)
AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)
AIDS Committee of York Region (ACYR)
AIDS Network Kootenay Outreach and Support Society (ANKORS)
Alliance for South Asian Aids Prevention (ASAAP)
Amelia Sloan Therapy
ARCH Disability Law Centre
Association des intervenants en dépendance du Québec (AIDQ)
Association Québécoise pour la promotion de la santé des personnes utilisatrices de drogues (AQPSUD)
Atira Women's Resource Society
AVI Health and Community Services Society
Blood Ties Four Directions Centre Society
British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
CACTUS Montréal
Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE)
Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW)
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (CDPC)
Canadian Public Health Association
Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy (CSSDP)
Centre Associatif Polyvalent d'Aide Hépatite C (CAPAHC)
Centre francophone de Toronto (CFT)
Centre Hospitalier de L'Université de Montreal (CHUM)
Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC)
Clinique Droits Devant
Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-Sida)
Community Legal Assistance Sarnia (CLAS)
Criminalization and Punishment Education Project (CPEP)
Cultures du témoignage
Defence for Children International-Canada (DCI Canada)
Dopamine Society
Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic
Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan
Geipsi
George Spady Clinical Access Team (CAT)
Harm Reduction Nurses Association
HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO)
Houselink Community Homes
International Human Rights Program, Faculty of Law, University of Toronto
John Howard Society of Canada
Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (JPP)
Maggie's: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project
Médecins du Monde Canada
MIELS-Québec
Ottawa Inner City Health Inc. (OICH)
Pacific AIDS Network (PAN)
PACT de rue
PARN - Community-based HIV/STBBI Programs
Pivot Legal Society
Portland Hotel Society Community Services Society (PHS)
Positive Living Niagara

Prisoners' Legal Services
Prisoners with HIV/AIDS Support Action Network (PASAN)
Realize
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC)
Réseau ACCESS Network
Sandy Hill Community Health Centre
Sidaction Mauricie
South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC)
Stella, l'amie de Maimie
Street Works Edmonton
Toronto Harm Reduction Alliance (THRA)
Vancouver Island Persons Living with HIV/AIDS Society (VPWAS)
Vancouver Prison Justice Day Committee
Warden Woods Community Centre
Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy (WGDS)