



CSC Applauded for Leadership on Safer Tattooing

Toronto, 28 January 2005 – Correctional Service Canada’s safer tattooing pilot programs are a step forward for the health of prisoners, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network said today.

“Prisoners have been tattooing for years, despite the risk of HIV and hepatitis C transmission and the fact that possession of tattooing equipment is illegal in prison,” said Glenn Betteridge, Senior Policy Analyst. “With this program CSC is taking seriously its legal responsibility to provide prisoners with the means to protect their health.”

Tattooing is a recognized part of Canadian prison culture, despite the fact that up until now it has been illegal in federal prisons. Studies have shown that tattooing performed in unhygienic conditions risks transmitting HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) and hepatitis C (a serious blood-borne disease that attacks the liver). Under the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) is responsible for “the care and custody of inmates”.

In 1994, CSC’s own Expert Committee on AIDS and Prisons recommended safer tattooing programs. This recommendation has also been made in reports by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, the Prisoners’ HIV/AIDS Support Action Network, and the Correctional Investigator Canada. CSC recently announced that it was beginning to introduce pilot safer tattooing programs in six institutions across Canada. Under the programs, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, prisoner tattoo artists will be trained in infection prevention and control practices, and have access to sterile tattooing equipment. The programs will be evaluated at the end of one year.

“For years we have been asking CSC to work with federal public health officials, community organizations and prisoners to implement innovative measures to reduce the spread of HIV and hepatitis C in prisons”, said Betteridge. “These safer tattooing pilots are an example of the kind of federal inter-agency cooperation that has to happen if we are going to reduce the spread of these diseases.”

The Legal Network called on CSC to ensure that prisoners, and community organizations working with prisoners, have an opportunity to provide input throughout the implementation and evaluation of the pilot tattoo programs.

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The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network is a national organization engaged in education, legal and ethical analysis, and policy development, with over 250 organizational and individual members across Canada. Information about our activities and copies of our publications are available at www.aidslaw.ca.
