



# Research at a glance

## Summary of Emerging Findings from the 2007 National Inmate Infectious Diseases and Risk-Behaviours Survey

**KEY WORDS:** *risk-behaviours, harm-reduction, health education, HIV, HCV, testing, treatment, infectious diseases, inmate survey*

### Why we did this study

Correctional Service Canada (CSC) conducted this study to obtain information about inmates' health risk-behaviours, use of health programs, and knowledge of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV). This information will help CSC to better address the health needs of inmates.

### What we did

In collaboration with inmates and the Public Health Agency of Canada, CSC developed a self-administered questionnaire. A random sample of men and all women were invited to complete the questionnaire. Inmate participation was voluntary. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, an external private company administered and retained the anonymous questionnaires, and provided CSC with an anonymous database for analysis. In total, 3,370 inmates across Canada completed the questionnaire in 2007.

### What we found

Inmates have high awareness about CSC's policy to provide condoms, lubricant and bleach. Men are less aware of the policy in regards to dental dams.

The majority of inmates who report engaging in sex, injecting drugs, tattooing, and/or piercing in penitentiaries attempt to access and/or use harm-reduction items like condoms and bleach. Some experience access problems, such as broken or empty dispensers.

Seven percent of inmates were participating in the Methadone Maintenance Treatment Program (presently known as Opiate Substitution Therapy).

There was some evidence that knowledge of HIV and HCV was related to safer behaviour.

More than 70% of men and 80% of women have been tested for HIV and HCV infections during their current sentence. The most common reported reason for not being tested was not being offered the test. Few cite fear of being reported and/or discriminated against at CSC as reasons for not being tested. Inmates who have

HIV, however, worry about discrimination in federal penitentiaries.

The self-reported rates of HIV and HCV infections are substantially greater among inmates than the Canadian population.

Inmates who have HIV may experience interruptions in their HIV medication due to practical operational issues, such as a temporary unavailability of medication at the institutional pharmacy or transfers between institutions. Inmates may also take themselves off treatment.

Offenders entering federal penitentiaries report a high rate of drug- and sex-related risk-behaviours during their last months in the community, but these behaviours decline substantially during incarceration.

### What it means

The results of this survey are being used to assess the need to enhance current education, prevention, testing and treatment interventions at CSC. For example, the survey identified that some inmates have problems accessing harm-reduction items. Thus, one of the actions resulting from the survey will be to address these issues.

### For more information

Zakaria, D., Thompson, J., Jarvis, A., & Borgatta, F. (2010). Summary of Emerging Findings from the 2007 National Inmate Infectious Diseases and Risk-Behaviours Survey. Research Report R-211. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.

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