



# Research in Brief

## A Profile of Veterans within the Correctional Service of Canada

*Approximately 3% of new incoming offenders are veterans. Many require interventions to address several areas.*

### Why we did this study

This project was undertaken as a component of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and Correctional Service Canada (CSC) partnership action plan. The aim was to determine the current number of offenders with Canadian military service in CSC and provide a general profile that would assist in planning services provided through programs offered by VAC. This updates a previous survey of male offenders in three regions (Farrell, Gileno, & Grant, 2009).

### What we did

Offender characteristics were assessed using demographic information from the Offender Management System (OMS), the Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (CASA), and the Computerized Mental Health Intake Screening System (CoMHISS). As well as mental health data, CoMHISS provides self-reported indicators of Canadian military service. All offenders who had entered CSC on new warrants of committal between August 2014 and August 2015 and had completed CoMHISS ( $N = 3,956$ ) were included. Descriptive analyses on veterans were conducted and, where possible, comparisons made between veteran and non-veteran offenders.

### What we found

Of the 3,956 offenders, 117 (3%) had self-reported Canadian military experience, similar to the rate estimated by Farrell et al. (2009). Almost all incarcerated veterans were men (97.4%); 17% were of Aboriginal ancestry. Their average sentence length was 3.2 years. Forty-six percent were in a marital or common-law relationship. Veterans were significantly older at admission than non-veterans (42.5 versus 36.5 years) and significantly more likely to be incarcerated for a sexual offence. Among veterans, 37% had a current or past sexual offence history and 14% were repeat sex offenders.

Veterans had similar static and dynamic risk ratings to non-veterans; almost 90% were classified as

medium to high static risk and 89% were medium to high need. Areas of highest need for veterans were personal/emotional (73%), attitudes (65%), associates (47%), substance abuse (47%) and employment (43%). Most veterans had low rates of alcohol dependence (92%) but substance abuse was a factor in their offences for 35% of them. Screening indicated that 20% of veterans' have cognitive deficits serious enough that they would require assistance with planning and accessing resources.

Reflecting their high needs in the personal/emotional domain, nearly 25% of veterans reported they had a previous diagnosis for depression, a rate similar to non-veterans. While incarcerated, 33% of veterans received treatment oriented services (e.g., counseling, psychiatrist services, suicide or self-injury intervention, etc.).

On a positive note, the majority of veterans had medium to high reintegration potential (72%) and 80% had moderate to high motivation, suggesting a willingness to engage in their correctional plans.

### What it means

Most offenders with Canadian military experience in this sample require interventions to address personal/emotional problems and antisocial attitudes, and a significant number will also require interventions and community follow-up to address a sexual offence history. Although their rates of substance abuse were lower than non-veterans, almost half had some or considerable needs in this area. Over 40% require assistance with employment. The majority had been rated as having a high potential for reintegration suggesting that they had resources required to remain offence free on release.

### For more information

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