



Research in Brief

Monitoring Canadian Federal In-custody Population Trends 2010 to 2016

Systematically monitoring and analyzing population trends can facilitate correctional management

Why we did this study

The national average monthly federal in-custody population increased a total of 610 inmates (or 4.1%) from 14,027 in March 2010 to 14,637 in March 2016. While the federal custody population had peaked at 15,276 in March 2014, it has since declined by 639 (4.2%). Albeit the annual growth rate was highest at 4.5% in 2010-11; it leveled off at 1.8% in 2011-12 and 1.9% in 2012-13; then flattened to .5% for 2013-14; and declined by 2.7% in 2014-15 and again 1.6% in 2015-16.

Knowing where, when and why jumps or kinks in custodial trend lines occur can facilitate the allocation of operational resources and accommodation planning. Since the turn of the millennium, uptrend lines for many jurisdictions have been reflected in forecast estimates resulting in a net demand for increased capacity. A systematic monitoring of in-custody population counts or occupancy rates (actual counts/rated capacity level) can signal when a break below the longer-term uptrend line might be occurring. Essentially, it would indicate that net-demand for accommodation capacity has weakened and a change in trend could be imminent.

What we did

Since March 2010, monthly average actual “physically-in” population (does not include offenders on Temporary Absences, Exchange of Service Agreements, in outside hospitals, provincial custody) counts have been reported using CSC’s Corporate Reporting System. Analyses of population counts for men and women were conducted separately, as historical trends for these two groups differ significantly. Computing counts and graphical analysis across the five administrative regions added important information by taking into account variations that occur over time with these sub-populations.

What we found

The federal population of men in-custody showed an increase in March 2016 relative to March 2010 of 413 (or 3.1%) from 13,522 to 13,935. On the other hand, the federal population of women in-custody showed an increase in March 2016 relative to March 2010 of 197 (or 39.0%) from 505 to 702. Regionally, since 2010 the Prairie region has proportionally grown the most with 16.4% (or 583 inmates) followed by Pacific with 9.7% (or 183 inmates) and Quebec with 7.2% (or 235 inmates). Noteworthy, both Ontario and Atlantic have declined (-361 or 9.2% and -33 or 2.4%, respectively). The Ontario closures during 2013 and interregional transfers explain the trend breaks.

Monitoring and analyzing regional trends revealed upward trends nationally and across all regions except for Ontario which showed a downward trend. More important, however, is a structural break reflected below the trend lines nationally as well as for the Atlantic and Quebec regions. It is notable that while a break appears below the trend line for the Prairie region the population count has since moved upward towards long-term growth.

What it means

Overall, it appears that over the recent operating horizon that lower crime rates and fewer new admissions coupled with more discretionary releases have resulted in a general decrease of the federal offender population. Nevertheless, women offenders and the Prairie region remain exceptions to these general population trends.

For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

Prepared by: Larry Motiuk