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Chair

The Honourable Kevin Sorenson

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. It's good to see each one of you here today for meeting number 127 of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Before we begin, I would like to welcome René Arseneault to our committee. He is replacing Rémi.

Welcome to this committee.

[Translation]

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I would now like to take a minute to express our sympathies and respect to the Office of the Auditor General on the passing of our Auditor General. This is the first meeting we have convened since going to the funeral, and last week we did not meet. I want to underscore, as I think Mr. Christopherson did so well in his comments in the House, that this committee appreciated the extremely good working relationship we had with our Auditor General and friend, Michael Ferguson. To say the least, all of us recognize that we lost the people's auditor, as someone said, and we also lost a very honourable man.

Before we move on with the meeting, I think we'll just take a moment out of respect for him.

[A moment of silence observed]

Thank you.

We're here today in consideration of report 6, "Community Supervision—Correctional Service Canada", of the 2018 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

I'll remind everyone that we are televised today, so please turn your phones to silent.

Today we are honoured to have with us, from the Office of the Auditor General, Mr. Andrew Hayes, Deputy Auditor General; and Nicholas Swales, principal.

From Correctional Service Canada we have Ms. Anne Kelly, our commissioner; Larry Motiuk, assistant commissioner, policy; and Alain Tousignant, senior deputy commissioner.

We welcome you all here this morning.

We'll begin with you, Mr. Hayes. The floor is yours, sir.

• (0850)

Mr. Andrew Hayes (Deputy Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General): Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to present the results of our report on community supervision. Joining me is Nicholas Swales, the principal responsible for the audit.

Most offenders become eligible for release before their sentences end, serving a portion of their sentences under supervision in the community. As of April 2018, almost 40% of all federal offenders were supervised in the community. The number of offenders in the community increased substantially between 2013 and 2018. Correctional Service Canada anticipates that this number will keep growing.

This audit looked at Correctional Service Canada's supervision of offenders in the community and the agency's accommodation of them, when required, to support their return to society as law-abiding citizens.

[Translation]

This audit is important because the offenders' gradual and supervised return to society leads to better public safety outcomes.

Overall, we found that Correctional Service Canada had reached the limit on how many offenders it could accommodate in the community. We also found that it did not properly manage offenders under community supervision.

In March 2018, nearly one third of the federal offenders on release required supervised housing as a condition of their release. We found that Correctional Service Canada didn't increase the number of housing spaces to keep pace with the demand. As a result, offenders who were approved for release into the community in 2017-18 had to wait on average twice as long for accommodation than did the offenders who were released into the community four years before. We also found that some offenders weren't being placed in their requested communities because of capacity constraints. This made reintegration more difficult for those offenders.

Furthermore, we found that Correctional Service Canada forecasted a need for more housing, but that it did not have a long-term plan to meet that need. This means that the housing shortages are likely to get worse.

With respect to the supervision of offenders, we found that Correctional Service Canada didn't provide parole officers with all the health information they needed to design release plans for offenders.

[English]

We also found that parole officers did not meet with offenders as often as they should have, and they did not always monitor special conditions imposed by the Parole Board of Canada as part of the terms of an offender's release. By not performing these activities, parole officers were not always able to conduct a timely assessment of progress against the offender's release plan or to identify changes to the offender's needs or the risk they present to society.

Finally, we found that Correctional Service Canada did not properly measure its success in meeting its mandate to reintegrate offenders into society as law-abiding citizens. The agency measured only convictions that resulted in the return of federal offenders to federal custody. The agency did not include data on post-sentence offences requiring the incarceration of offenders in provincial or territorial facilities. Without data on convictions recorded by other levels of government, the agency had an incomplete picture of the rate at which federal offenders were successfully reintegrating into society as law-abiding citizens.

We made five recommendations, and Correctional Service Canada agreed with all of them. The agency has shared with us its action plan, which includes actions and timelines for our recommendations.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hayes.

We'll now proceed to the commissioner, Ms. Kelly.

Ms. Anne Kelly (Commissioner, Correctional Service of Canada): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the findings and recommendations of the Auditor General's performance audit on community supervision.

Again with me today are the senior deputy commissioner, Mr. Alain Tousignant; the assistant commissioner of policy, Mr. Larry Motiuk; and, the assistant commissioner, health services, Ms. Jennifer Wheatley.

While I have appeared before this committee as interim commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, I'm honoured to appear before you today as the commissioner, which became effective at the end of July 2018.

• (0855)

[Translation]

I'd like to take a moment to mark the recent passing of Michael Ferguson, the Auditor General of Canada. He was a highly respected public servant who dedicated his career to Canadians. The impact of his passing is being felt by many.

[English]

The Auditor General's reports under the leadership of Mr. Ferguson have significantly contributed to our ongoing mission to

assist offenders with their rehabilitation and to keep Canadians safe, and this fall 2018 report is no exception. This most recent report examined whether CSC adequately supervises offenders in the community and assists them with accommodation and health care-related services that facilitate and support the reintegration process.

[Translation]

As the committee knows, CSC is responsible for offenders sentenced to two years or more. It's important to note that the majority of offenders will be released back into Canadian communities. CSC keeps Canadians safe through the effective rehabilitation and successful reintegration of offenders.

[English]

Beginning at sentencing, parole officers and other institutional staff work closely with offenders to prepare them for their eventual release into the community. While incarcerated, offenders are encouraged to participate in various correctional interventions, such as educational and correctional programs and vocational training, in order to learn the skills necessary to help them return safely to the community and to become law-abiding citizens.

[Translation]

It's important to note that offender rehabilitation doesn't end once the offenders are released into the community. Research demonstrates that society is best protected when offenders are gradually reintegrated into society through a supervised release, rather than released at the end of their sentence with no controls or support.

[English]

The gradual release of offenders into the community under supervision allows them to be assessed, monitored, guided and encouraged to become law-abiding citizens. Assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens upon their release from prison is the most significant contribution CSC can make to keeping Canadian communities safe.

With the appropriate level of structured supervision by their community parole officer coupled with the assistance from their community case management team and members of the community, offenders can continue to apply the skills they have gained while in custody and benefit from new opportunities available to them in the community.

CSC is experiencing a shift in how and where it is managing its offender population, with a greater proportion of federal offenders serving their sentence in the community. For example, CSC saw an increase of approximately 1,500 offenders managed in the community in the last five years, from approximately 7,600 at fiscal year-end 2012-13 to over 9,100 in 2017-18.

The community-supervision population continues to grow. At the end of 2018 it exceeded 9,400. Moreover, the numbers of both indigenous and women offenders on conditional release have increased substantially over the past five years, an increase of 36% for indigenous offenders and of 50% for women offenders. In fact, there are now more women under community supervision than in federal custody. In addition, in 2017-18 we saw the highest number of day parole releases reported since 2012-13, an increase of 43%. As well, we saw the lowest number of revocations, with a decrease of 27%.

These results are positive for CSC. However, they also present a challenge, particularly with regard to community accommodation. There are approximately 200 community-based residential facilities in Canada, which are operated by CSC partners and accept offenders with residency conditions at their discretion. If one of these facilities is unable or unwilling to offer an offender residency, it is the responsibility of CSC to provide the offender with accommodation through one of its 14 community correctional centres.

Our efforts to manage, monitor and support offenders beyond institutional walls are as important as ever. Community supervision is critical to our ability to successfully reintegrate offenders into the community while ensuring the safety and security of all.

● (0900)

[Translation]

As you know, the Auditor General made five recommendations to address identified issues concerning community supervision. CSC fully accepts the Auditor General's findings and recommendations. Work is already under way to implement measures to address these important findings.

[English]

With respect to a long-term approach to accommodations, we are creating a national long-term community accommodation plan. We have also begun developing a comprehensive solution to better manage bed inventory, match offenders to community facilities and manage wait-lists.

In terms of the Auditor General's recommendation regarding the monitoring of offenders, we have added a responsibility to those of the district directors to monitor, on a monthly basis, compliance with the frequency of contact and special conditions. In addition, CSC has reinforced the need for and the monitoring of documentation to be completed in cases where exceptions to the frequency of contact requirements are warranted.

[Translation]

Regarding the recommendation concerning the facilitation of access to health care services, CSC is reviewing its policies related to the sharing of health care information and determining the most effective approach to ensuring that parole officers receive the information they require in a timely manner.

CSC is also continuing to work with provincial and territorial health care authorities to remove barriers to accessing health care cards and to ensure that offenders obtain proper identification prior to their release.

[English]

Finally, with respect to post-sentence outcome data collection, CSC is collaborating with the Department of Public Safety on work in the area of recidivism rates, including information held by provinces and territories on adult reconviction.

The Auditor General's findings and recommendations have given us much to consider moving forward. Please rest assured that we are working diligently to address the audit recommendations.

I will conclude my remarks by saying that I have been lucky over my 35 plus years with CSC to witness its evolution in its approach to corrections, as well as the considerable progress we have made in ensuring the effective rehabilitation and safe reintegration of offenders serving a federal sentence.

CSC's contributions to creating safer communities would not be possible without the dedication and passion of Correctional Service employees, our partners and stakeholders and our volunteers—to all, thank you.

With that, I thank you for the opportunity to meet today and welcome any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

With that, we'll move into our first round of questioning, which is a seven-minute round, and we'll begin with Mr. Arya, please.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner Kelly, welcome back. You rightly pointed out that it is important to note that offender rehabilitation does not end once they're released into the community. You also said, "Assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens upon their release from prison is the most important significant contribution CSC can make to keep...Canadian communities safe."

Tell me this in your own words. You know that is the main objective, and the Auditor General's report says you have not met that objective. Why? You have been there for 35 years. You have seen how CSC has evolved. What are the things that were being done 10, 15 or 20 years back, and what are the things that are being done now? Why is that still not satisfactory for the Auditor General?

Ms. Anne Kelly: I started my career as a parole officer 35 years ago. I worked both in the institutions and in the community, and it was among the best jobs I have had.

Certainly as a community parole officer, frequency of contact, which is mentioned by the Auditor General, is one key element among many elements that comprise the community supervision framework. Frequency of contact is established when the offender is released into the community. It's based on the offender's risks and needs. That's how you establish whether you're going to see the offender eight times a month, four times a month, twice a month, once a month. Sometimes when they have been in the community for a long time, it's more sporadic.

There are other elements to community supervision. Almost 3,000 offenders in the community are residing in community-based residential facilities. When you reside in what we call a halfway house, you are seen on a daily basis by the people who work in the halfway house. There are other things in place in the community as part of the community supervision framework. Normally the offender has to report to the police so they are seen by the police. We also have electronic monitoring in the community to assist in supervising the offenders.

Offenders in the community are also expected to participate in community maintenance programs, which means they are seen by program officers. Many offenders also have to see a psychologist as a special condition, which means they are seen by a mental health professional. Many offenders also go to work. We also reach out to their family. In some cases, we do urinalysis testing with the offenders, and we do curfew checks. As you can see, community supervision includes a lot of elements.

When the Auditor General looked, frequency of contact is supposed to be documented in a certain place in the casework records. That's not always done. I fully admit we need to be better at documenting.

The other thing is frequency of contact. The offender is continuously assessed, so frequency of contact can change. When released, an offender may be seen by the parole officer four times a month, based on their progress it may be reduced to twice a month. That needs to be clearly documented. Otherwise, the auditors are going to look for four contacts a month and not two. That's something else we need to document.

There are times where it's impossible for the parole officer to see an offender. The Auditor General has raised this, and he has talked to us about it. For example, there was a forest fire in a community, and the parole officer couldn't speak to an offender. The parole officer in that case clearly documented that in the casework record, and the Auditor General's Office accepted that. These are the things we need to do.

● (0905)

Mr. Chandra Arya: My time is getting short. I have a couple of other questions.

You mentioned the huge increase of 1,500 in the number of people in the last five years...you are expecting it now to be 9,400 people for community supervision this year.

Have you had a proposed net increase in the number of federal officers?

Ms. Anne Kelly: We have a ratio of parole officers in the community: one parole officer for 13 offenders. Right now when we

look at the number of parole officers and the ratio, we have 715 parole officers, and the ratio is around 1:13. It varies a little.

Mr. Chandra Arya: So you already have a great number of parole officers?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Obviously one of the things that measures the success of CSC is if the offenders return to society as law-abiding citizens.

How are you measuring that? The Auditor General has pointed out that you don't have data if they reoffend and go to provincial jurisdictions. You mentioned you are working with the department of public safety on that.

What progress have you made?

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arya.

Ms. Anne Kelly: At this point, it's true. Once offenders have completed their sentences, we don't follow them up. However, we are working with both Public Safety Canada and StatsCan to look at an automated way of capturing that data. We do routine studies as well. With the social data linkage project with Stats Canada, we hope to be able to cover both post-release employment and income as well as health outcomes and also, obviously, readmissions to both province and territories.

I'll turn to my colleague Mr. Motiuk.

The Chair: Speak very quickly, because we're already over the time.

Dr. Larry Motiuk (Assistant Commissioner, Policy, Correctional Service of Canada): As Commissioner Kelly mentioned, we are engaging in joint projects with Stats Canada and Public Safety Canada, looking at reconviction rates post-federal custody. One of the difficulties is that having access to that data and routinely reporting requires some effort. We're looking at automation and whatnot. Work is well under way on this.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kelly, please.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Thank you.

Thanks, Commissioner Kelly. I noted that in your opening remarks you spoke of the revocations being down and the number of day parole offenders being up, reporting that as good news. Yet, much of the report really talks about offenders not being adequately supervised during community sentence.

How do we know that this is good news? If offenders are not monitored properly, which is what the Auditor General has said in this report, how can you assure Canadians that they are safe, when offenders are not being monitored adequately?

Ms. Anne Kelly: I would like to start by saying that we do have an increase in the number of offenders in the population, but we also have a corresponding decrease in the number of revocations, which speaks to the work that is done by parole officers. As I explained previously, frequency of contact is one element of a broader community supervision framework. I can assure Canadians that offenders are monitored in the community.

After the OAG looked at 50 cases, I asked Mr. Motiuk, who is the assistant commissioner, policy, and has research under him, to also review the 50 cases and look at casework records and all documentation that was on the files of those 50 cases. What we found in almost all cases was that certainly the offenders are met within 24 hours of release. We also found that the compliance issues identified by the Auditor General—and staff may want to speak to that—are not systemic, in the sense that there's a lack of contact month over month. In some cases, it may be one contact that's missed, one month. In other cases, what we found is again, some of the documentation.... This is something we're addressing.

Mr. Motiuk can speak more to it, but in reviewing the casework we found lots of evidence that parole officers were very engaged with the offenders.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Okay.

If I may, I will read from page 9 of the report:

For 19 of the 50 offender files examined (nearly 40%), we found that parole officers did not fully monitor offenders as required.

Now, you've said that you accept the findings of the Auditor General, yet I get a sense of defensiveness around this from you, Commissioner.

Do you accept this finding, that 40% are not being monitored as required? Are the requirements not correct? Should they be modified?

If all these other various forms of monitoring that you've spoken of are sufficient, why is the Auditor General saying that in 40% of cases they're not being monitored as required?

• (0915)

Ms. Anne Kelly: I certainly don't mean to be defensive. We accept the Auditor General's findings and recommendations. As I said before, in some cases, it's a question of documentation. In other cases, again on the frequency of contact, if the frequency changes during the month and it's not properly documented, unfortunately the Auditor General will be looking for four contacts a month when actually there are two that are required.

As a result, we're amending our policy. We've added a responsibility to the district directors to monitor compliance with the frequency of contact.

Mr. Pat Kelly: It says that...“9 cases in which parole officers met with offenders on several occasions over a short time period, which was not in keeping with the spirit of the policy”. Perhaps I'll put the question to Mr. Hayes. I thought that observation was somewhat curious. It sounded like you were suggesting that officers may be gaming the system, so to speak, squeezing in several visits in a short period of time as an expedient rather than actually fulfilling the requirements.

Is that what you found or...?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would point the committee to paragraph 6.46 where we mention that we found instances, and these are the nine cases that we're talking about, in which parole officers met with offenders in a compressed amount of time—for example, three times in six days. The point that we want to make with this is that this approach did not allow parole officers to perform timely assessments of changes to the needs of the offenders or the risk that they present to society.

The commissioner has mentioned that perhaps the requirements might change in terms of frequency of contact, and if they're not documented, the commissioner is correct that we would be looking for compliance with the policy or the requirements that were in place and documented at the time.

I'll ask my colleague if he has anything to add to that.

Mr. Nicholas Swales (Principal, Office of the Auditor General): The only observation I would make is that we didn't attempt to understand the motivation for the parole officers in meeting with the offenders in a particular pattern. We just observed whether it was consistent with the intent of the policy.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Commissioner Kelly, it's identified as a concern under paragraph 6.47 and then under 6.46. Are you troubled by that finding, or do you find that there are explanations that are acceptable in this?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Again, having worked in the community with offenders, if it's something that happens all the time, that every month you meet with the inmates three times within six days, that would be concerning if it's month over month.

But in the community, there are instances where offenders may go through a crisis. If they go through a crisis, you will find parole officers who may actually see the offender for four days in a row to help them get through the crisis, and then they may not see them, but may touch base through a call or a text message. That does happen, and there are reasons that you would sometimes see that a parole officer has seen the offender more often.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before we go to Mr. Christopherson, I want to be clear on this as well. Are you saying that never would a parole officer want to have the check mark that she or he has met with them so many times and so they do this over a few days? You're saying it wasn't gaming. It might have been for very good reasons.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes, for very good reasons.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson.

• (0920)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Hayes and Commissioner. I appreciate you all being here.

As you probably know, back in another life I was the minister of Correctional Services in Ontario for a few years, which I have found is sometimes to the advantage of witnesses in that I know what the challenges are in the real world and what you're facing. At other times, it plays to your disadvantage because I can see where the spin is in a way that I might not otherwise see.

I have some thoughts before I get into detailed questions.

First, Commissioner, you clearly know your file, and your 35 years show, but I have to tell you that I am not impressed with your written word. Your personal words are better. I won't blame you; I'll let you off the hook and say it's your communications people. It's like the military. They do not seem to have the ability to say, "We screwed up. We didn't do as well as we should have. We failed to achieve certain objectives." When the Auditor General report says that, it's not that it's a big secret. Acknowledge that. I got so furious the last two times we had the military. Clearly, blatantly, they screwed up. Do you think they would say so? It made for a very uncomfortable hearing that didn't need to happen.

So I say to you and the other communications departments that come before us, don't give us a lot of spin and tell us how wonderful you are. We know the good work you do. Acknowledge where you fell down and where you didn't meet the standards that are expected, as outlined in the report.

I leave that with you.

I also want to comment that, on page 5 of your remarks, Commissioner, you said, "In fact, there are now more women under community supervision (51%) than in federal custody (49%)." I just want to say that, with the exception of some cases, society is never really well served by locking women up, especially moms, in non-violent cases. I'm very glad to see there's a move to recognize that, if there has to be a sentence, where possible, we should keep women and moms in the community. It just makes, I think, good sense for all of us.

In the opening remarks of the deputy, we found "did not properly manage", "did not have a long-term plan", "did not provide", "did not meet" and "did not properly measure". I won't take the time, but I marked out the comments in terms of the focus of the audit and whether you passed or failed. Basically you failed. In most of the areas there were clear problems.

So let me delve into a couple of things.

First of all, on page 1 of the Auditor General's report, it states that "40% of all federal offenders...were supervised in the community", and yet only 6% of the budget goes to community corrections. Doesn't it make sense, even from an economic point of view, if not from a societal one, to be putting more money in there? It's 40% of the offenders, but they only get 6% of the budget.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes, that's true. It costs quite a bit less to keep offenders in the community than it does to keep them incarcerated.

Mr. David Christopherson: Indeed it does, which is why I found it perplexing in paragraph 6.11 that "It could take more than two years from the time a site was selected with a community partner to the time the first offender was placed at a new facility." I agree with you that one of the benefits to society with community corrections is

that it costs us a lot less money, and hopefully we're achieving the same goal, as Mr. Arya said, which is to return people to society as law-abiding citizens.

I want to come back to that point specifically. You knew the population was going to grow. You knew that; your own reports had said it, but you didn't plan for any more facilities.

[Translation]

I want to know why.

● (0925)

[English]

Ms. Anne Kelly: We're changing that. At the local level and at the regional level, a lot of work is being done. Both Mr. Tousignant and I have been regional deputy commissioners, I in the Pacific region, Mr. Tousignant in Quebec.

In the last three years, 200 beds have been added. This is in large part because of the work done at both the local and regional levels. I do agree with the Auditor General that we need to have a line of sight on this at the national level.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes. Commissioner, with respect, my question to you was you had studies in front of you that you knew with certainty the populations were going to increase. We know for citizens who find themselves in conflict with the law that community corrections is best. We also know that it's cheaper to do it that way.

Knowing you were going to have increased demand, why did you not plan and ensure you had the facilities you knew you were going to need?

Ms. Anne Kelly: At both the local and the regional level, work was being done.

Mr. David Christopherson: So everything's fine. No problem.

Ms. Anne Kelly: It's because they know their population. For example, in the Pacific region a lot of work was being done. We knew we had a number of offenders with mental health issues so we opened a halfway house called Maria Keary Cottage for those offenders. A number of offenders were aboriginal, so the district director was extremely involved in working with community partners to find available space.

The same thing was happening in every region, and that's why the Auditor General also recognized an increase in the number of beds. However, now we're developing a comprehensive long-term accommodation plan, a national plan.

Mr. David Christopherson: And my question was why didn't you do that before.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: We will now move to Mr. Sarai, please.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): I want to thank you. I have a lot of constituents, and a lot of family and friends as well, who are corrections officers and work in the force. It's a very admirable career. Most of them have had very satisfactory lives and currently are employed with them.

I also have a city with a lot of youth crime. Surrey Centre and Surrey in general have been exposed to that, so concern about people reoffending is a high priority.

One of the concerns I had was it appears that a significant portion of offenders did not meet parole officers enough. Was part of the problem the fact that there is simply a shortage of parole officers? Was that prevalent in the Pacific region specifically?

Ms. Anne Kelly: I don't have the information on where it was more prevalent. Frequency of contact, again, is one element of a broader community supervision strategy. I outlined some of the other things that occur when offenders are in the community. Certainly if they reside in a community-based residential facility, they are seen by the staff from the facility on a daily basis. There are curfew checks. They also participate in employment and in programs so they are seen by program officers.

We're changing our policies to ensure that the district directors monitor the compliance with frequency of contact, and, obviously, ensuring that it's properly documented.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Would you be able to table to the committee based on region? I would like to know particularly if there's a shortage of parole officers on the west coast, particularly in the Greater Vancouver Lower Mainland region.

Ms. Anne Kelly: As I said, based on the numbers I have on the west coast, the ratio for parole officers to offenders is 1:13, and in the Pacific it's 1:11.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Okay. That's good.

In Surrey there's a concern that some offenders are so dangerous—and this is more of a public safety concern for the parole officers themselves—that they have no place to meet them because the offender himself or herself is at risk of being a target, and therefore they are not meeting the offenders as stated by their conditions.

Is that the case? If so, how do you mitigate that situation where somebody is on parole or in a parole-like setting, however, their own lives are at risk, and therefore, the Corrections Canada officer is not able to meet them or meet them only in very secure areas such as a police station. Are there ways to mitigate this?

• (0930)

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes. In terms of the frequency of contact, normally we try for a balance between home visits, where you can see where the offender is residing, and visits in the office. We also have what we call a “staff safety assessment template” that has to be completed. If there are concerns, the supervision can take place in tandem: it's not just one parole officer, but two parole officers who actually see the offender.

In cases where there are concerns about potential gang activities, you're quite right, the visit may also occur at the police station, the office or elsewhere, but certainly not in the offender's home.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: You also stated that there are delays in release to facilities due to offenders being rejected. Are people delayed in getting parole or access to neighbourhood facilities because the community-based organizations are rejecting them, so therefore there's a long delay in getting into one of the 14 Correctional Service Canada facilities? Would that be the issue? Is there a shortage of correctional facilities managed by Corrections Canada? Is that the cause of those delays in getting out?

Ms. Anne Kelly: There are different reasons.

You're quite right, the CBRFs that are operated by our partners have admission criteria. In a lot of cases, they may not accept sex offenders, for example. In those cases where the CBRFs are not willing to accept the offender, then it's CSC's responsibility to accommodate them in one of our community correctional centres. In the Pacific region, there is the Chilliwack Centre. Belkin House in Vancouver is an enhanced CBRF.

In terms of why they sometimes wait to be accommodated, there are a variety of reasons that we are now going to be tracking more closely. In some cases, the offenders wait to complete programs that they've started in the institution. Sometimes they'll wait for a specialized bed. In some cases, they'll wait for their preferred location; I will admit that we see that mostly in Toronto. We have two CCCs, one on Keele Street in Toronto and one in Kingston. If the offender wants to go to Toronto, sometimes it's full, so they go to Kingston first.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I think that my last question is a concern for Canadians in general, but particularly for my constituents. We're seeing a good pattern where people are getting placed into community-based facilities more prevalently. I just want to confirm that the reoffending rate has dropped, as a result of that, and not increased. There's always a public perception that we release people too early and they're about to reoffend, but I'd like to get it on the record that the rate has actually dropped, if I'm correct. Could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes. Larry can speak more to it, but we certainly track outcomes. The percentage of offenders who are not readmitted to federal custody within five years following the expiration of their sentence is 85%. The rate has been increasing, so we are quite successful. The other thing is that there has been a decrease in the number of revocations, which is when offenders are returned to federal custody. This is also a testament to the work being done by those who work in the community.

● (0935)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: This also includes new offences, so not just breaching any parole rules, right? Obviously, reoffending is a breach, but it includes reoffending in any new cases.

Dr. Larry Motiuk: That's right. We also split it out, in terms of those who are coming back for technical violations of their conditions, as well as reoffence. They're all on the decline.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nuttall.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the department for coming.

Thanks for the work done by the Auditor General's office.

I have a pretty specific question. One of the things that we're facing in our community—I know this is an issue that's expanding across the country and certainly isn't unique to Barrie—as former offenders are coming back into the community, is a heavy percentage being targeted for drug use by drug dealers. There seems to be a lack of supports available between the emergence of the individual back into the community and specifically what we're seeing in the opioid crisis as a whole.

Is there tracking done? I know there would be tracking done on drug use as a whole. Obviously, there would be requirements under the emergence back into the community.

Is there any information that would show, for lack of a better word, the rate at which individuals are using while they are in custody and then using in the community when they emerge back into it?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes. We do keep data in terms of in the community. It's possible that offenders will incur charges for drug-related offences. Definitely in terms of the opioid crisis, what's happening in the community at large we see reflected in our institutions and in the community, which is a concern to us.

We do offer programs to offenders. We also offer opiate substitution therapy to offenders. I would certainly ask Ms. Wheatley to speak to that.

In terms of the community, if offenders have difficulties with alcohol or drugs, normally a special condition is going to be imposed upon them by the Parole Board of Canada. That special condition has to be monitored.

The other thing that we're doing for offenders who are being released to the community is that we now have an initiative called the take-home naloxone kit, which they leave with. Also, through

communicating with health professionals, they can be directed to where they can go if they require more.

Maybe I'll let Jennifer speak to that.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Before we get there, I guess this is what I actually wanted to draw out, Mr. Chair, just to focus.

The Chair: I'm not sure if she understood the question, the way that you asked it.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Yes, maybe I'll be more direct because I was trying to couch it a little bit, to be fair.

I have a real issue with.... We say "supervision". That's the language we're using, supervision of offenders in the community with drug use. It amazes me—and I've been doing a lot of research on this—that we have people moving back into the community as addicts still, which means they have been using while in custody within our penal system.

With regard to access to health care, is there not a route directly for those individuals? The correlation between drug use and reoffending is very real.

Is there not a system in place to at least do our best to make mandatory changes within those individuals' lives?

● (0940)

Ms. Anne Kelly: Maybe I'll try again, and I'll ask Ms. Wheatley.

Definitely, there are offenders who are released to the community who still have drug abuse problems. In those cases, as I mentioned, normally there's a special condition that's imposed upon them by the Parole Board of Canada. We can also do random urinalysis in the community, or if we have reasons to suspect that they are using, we do urinalysis. If it tests positive, then we can take action against the offender. The offender can be suspended or can be revoked and returned to federal custody, absolutely.

We do monitor that.

Jennifer.

Ms. Jennifer Wheatley (Assistant Commissioner, Health Services, Correctional Service of Canada): Problematic substance use is a very complex health need. We're fully committed to implementing all pillars of the Canada health strategy, which includes the enforcement elements that Commissioner Kelly spoke about and harm reduction such as take-home naloxone and treatment.

Whether an offender is using or not while they're incarcerated, they can still have a substance misuse problem. Sometimes using a substance is indicative of access to a substance. You can have offenders who don't use while they're incarcerated, but still have a substance misuse problem on release. Substance misuse is very difficult to treat. I won't get into all the technicalities. Whether you're in a community treatment centre for the average Canadian or whether you're in our services, there are very low success rates for substance misuse treatment. We're certainly committed to doing our best.

To improve our approach—particularly in response to the opioid crisis, and in addition to the take-home naloxone and the nursing teaching—we're reviewing our entire opiate substitution therapy program to make sure we have all the supports, including the medical supports, the psychosocial supports, etc., so that we can have the best outcome possible for this disorder that is very difficult to treat.

For example, we've seen a doubling of the number of offenders on opiate substitution therapy in recent years. It used to be 400; it's now 800. We know that's a stabilizing factor. Offenders on opiate substitution will be more ready for release into the community.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Arseneault, you have five minutes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank all the witnesses for joining us.

I'm a newcomer here. This is my first meeting. I want to apologize in advance, because my questions may not be relevant. I don't have the knowledge that my colleagues have accumulated over time.

Before I speak to Mr. Hayes, I'll start with you, Ms. Kelly.

The Auditor General's report highlights two issues. First, there's the lack of housing, which seems critical. Second, according to the Office of the Auditor General, the offenders under community supervision haven't been managed properly.

In your opinion, when did it become apparent that the number of offenders being released would skyrocket? When did this issue start being taken into account in order to find a solution?

Ms. Anne Kelly: The percentage of offenders under community supervision has increased in recent years. In 2012-13, they amounted to 33% of the offender population, and now they amount to 40%.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes. I've seen the figures. Since there was a change in culture, I suppose it was known that there would be an increase. On your end, when did you realize that this would happen and that the situation would need to be addressed?

Ms. Anne Kelly: We conducted an internal analysis in January 2017 to determine what was happening not only in the community, but also in our institutions, in order to make projections regarding the offender population. We then started looking at the issue. The audit also took place at this time.

As I said earlier, a great deal of work is being carried out at the local and regional level to increase the number of beds available in

the community. The district directors are working very hard in their regions. They know the offenders and they know what type of beds the offenders need.

However, there was no national plan. I fully agree with the Auditor General on this point. We need to know what's happening across the country. In addition, if something in the regions is blocking the increase in the number of beds, we can help the regions at the national level. This makes a great deal of sense to us. We're working with this in mind.

● (0945)

Mr. Alain Tousignant (Senior Deputy Commissioner, Correctional Service of Canada): May I add something, Mr. Arseneault?

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes.

Mr. Alain Tousignant: The difficulty lies not only in the number of beds, but also in the type and location of the beds. If we consider only the number of beds in relation to the number of people in the community, we can see that there are enough beds. However, we need specialized beds. If we look at the type of beds that we need and the location of those beds, that's when things become difficult to manage and take time.

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay. This brings me to my next question.

We're told that parole officers lack information and don't supervise offenders closely enough. Some crimes are lighter, and some are more serious. Do you have a record for each offender on release showing the seriousness or lightness of the crimes? What's your approach? Do you have records that include the offender's name, health status, crimes, or criminal record?

Ms. Anne Kelly: For each offender?

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Absolutely. We have an offender management system that contains all the information on—

Mr. René Arseneault: Does the system contain information on each offender?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes. The system is individualized. It contains all the information on the inmates, including their record, their crimes, the various factors, their associates and their potential motivation to reintegrate. It contains a great deal of information.

Mr. René Arseneault: I now have a question for you, Mr. Hayes.

According to your notes, you “found that parole officers did not meet with offenders as often as they should have.” Is that in comparison with another approach that you know about? You said that the parole officers didn't meet with the offenders as often as they should have, but what's your point of comparison?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Swales.

[Translation]

Mr. Nicholas Swales: When we looked closely at the 50 cases, we were trying to determine how often each offender was expected to meet with the parole officer. As Ms. Kelly was saying, different levels of supervision are required. In each case, we were trying to determine the level of supervision for the offender. Our review covered a 12-month period, which was the first year of release. If the level of supervision changed, we took this into account in our calculations to determine whether expectations had been met.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Swales.

[English]

Now, we will go back to Mr. Kelly, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you.

This is a committee for accountability. We study reports from the Auditor General, and departments are asked to explain what has happened in their departments.

I want to draw to your attention, on page 13 of the report in English, to “Measurement of results”, where the Auditor General found that “performance measures did not include data on offences requiring incarceration in provincial or territorial facilities. CSC officials informed us that such data on convictions was excluded because it was difficult to gather.”

The Auditor General, though, made the point of mentioning that this was public information.

I'm relatively new to the committee compared to some of the others. However, I have seen over and over again, from a variety of different departments that have been before our committee, the poor collection of data, insufficient retention of data, in particular when it's from public sources. I mean, how hard can it really be?

I would like an explanation for why something that would seem as obvious as tracking offences that would have a person incarcerated back into a provincial facility is not tracked as part of the monitoring of results.

• (0950)

Ms. Anne Kelly: Again, I will turn to Mr. Motiuk, because he tracks all of our data.

However, once offenders completed their sentence, we didn't follow up in terms of... We only knew whether or not they had been in a provincial or territorial facility if they returned to custody. Otherwise, we didn't know whether they picked up a fine or had gone to the provincial institution. It's only when they return to us....

From time to time, we have done studies, but now, in working with Public Safety and Stats Canada, we are trying to find an automated solution so we can get access to that data.

Mr. Pat Kelly: That's excellent. I'm pleased that there are steps being taken—

Ms. Anne Kelly: Absolutely.

Mr. Pat Kelly: —but from an accountability point of view, this seems like a pretty obvious thing.

Why was this not done? We're well into the information age. Why are we right now talking about not having kept track of offenders

who have gone, not into federal system but into the provincial system?

The Chair: Mr. Motiuk.

Dr. Larry Motiuk: Of course, measuring recidivism is an important performance metric in any criminal justice system. When they're under our federal supervision, or under our jurisdiction, we know if they've come back and what kinds of offences they have committed out in the provinces and territories, because we systematically gather that at readmission. Also, while they're under federal supervision, if they're still under a warrant with us, we know if they have committed a new crime in the community.

When they're finished their sentence with the federal system and they go out into the community, the difficulty for us is that, without some effort on our part, we don't know when they commit another crime. We would have to actually link in to the Canadian Police Information Centre system and make that match and that linkage.

We know there are some technical, logical issues in this, but we are going to try to find ways of doing it, of making a better automated linkage on a routine basis. This is information we've seen in the past in studies. They've been very expensive, because we have had to hand-code them. It takes a couple of years. Nevertheless, as you pointed out, in this era of automation, we're looking for technology that will assist us in doing this.

Mr. Pat Kelly: What did they say when you pointed this out? Were you the first person to suggest that this was important information to keep track of?

The Chair: Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Yes, we feel that it is important information. Without the information from territorial and provincial convictions, it's difficult to know for sure whether the rate of reconviction is indeed declining. The commissioner has provided statistics on the rate of federal reconvictions, but we don't know overall without the information from the provinces and territories.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelly.

We'll now move to Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you for coming.

This is in regard to the first recommendation: identifying offender population profile characteristics that are critical to release planning. The selection of accommodation options was to be completed last November 30. Was that completed, and what was the outcome?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Sorry?

Ms. Jean Yip: It's under the management response and action plan. It says that the assistant commissioner, correctional operations and programs, is responsible.

The Chair: Ms. Yip, are you quoting from the action plan or from the Auditor General's report?

Ms. Jean Yip: This is from the Correctional Services action plan to address the recommendations of the OAG. It's from Correctional Services.

Ms. Anne Kelly: If I look at it correctly, I have an update for that.

Is this what was to be completed by November 30, 2018?

Ms. Jean Yip: Yes.

Ms. Anne Kelly: This was to identify offender population profile characteristics that are critical to release planning. My understanding is that this has been completed. The initial list of characteristics critical to release planning has been established and will be used in conjunction with projected releases data. Additional characteristics may be added following consultation and depending on data availability. So that first part has been done.

• (0955)

Ms. Jean Yip: What is being done to be proactive instead of reactive, to take a long-term approach to address the housing shortage? I found in your documents that the greatest anticipated demand for housing in Ontario is at 32%.

Ms. Anne Kelly: We're working on a national long-term accommodation plan, but in the meantime, we've had many discussions with the regional deputy commissioners of each region to talk about this. I can tell you that, for 2017-18, to November 30, there were 61 beds added. By the end of this fiscal year, there are going to be another 77 beds added, and there are already 120 beds planned for 2019-20 as well as other potential bed availability.

At this point, we're going to ensure that we collect all of the information from the regions, and, as I said, have a comprehensive solution. As Mr. Tousignant pointed out, it's not just the number of beds. If you look at the number of beds we have available and the number of offenders who require residency, we have enough beds. Now the thing is whether they are the right beds in the right place at the right time, because we have offenders who require specialized types of beds. We have indigenous offenders who may follow traditional paths and are looking for specific beds. We have offenders with mental health issues who have to go to a treatment centre, so this is what we want a line of sight on at the national level, and ensuring, as I said, that we have the right beds.

In terms of bed availability, it's not an issue everywhere. For example, in the Atlantic region, it's not an issue. There are enough beds for the number of offenders who are in the community.

In some pockets, though, for example in Ontario and especially in Toronto, that's more of an issue, and there's lots of work being done to look at increasing the bed capacity, potentially even looking at establishing another community correctional centre in that area.

Mr. Alain Tousignant: If I may add, beyond what's been done at the regional level, nationally we've reached out to a working group. We now have a working group that is comprised of CBRF owners and representatives from each region across the country. We met in Ottawa a few months ago, and we've had discussions with them to try to be proactive and talk about the needs we have now and also in the future years. That outreach is really helping us out and trying to reach the right beds.

Ms. Anne Kelly: I have to say, it was a first meeting in several years with the CBRF's representatives. They're very supportive of the work that we're doing in terms of ensuring that we know the offenders' preferred location, where they're going and where the beds are in terms of bed inventory.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Mr. Christopherson, please.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

The first thing I want to say is that—and I meant to say this in the first round—you mentioned that you have a background as a parole officer, and you mentioned a number of times the work they do. I just want to say probation and parole officers are like the secret sauce that makes this work. They're amazing people who are so dedicated and so smart, and they get very little thanks. They get mostly aggravation. It's a tough job, but it makes such a big difference.

I could never say enough about the work that the probation and parole officers do provincially and federally. They really are amazing people who could do so many other things, because they have so many skills, yet they dedicate themselves to an area that can be heartbreaking. Just making a determination whether your client is mad, sad or bad is a tough call, and then dealing with all of that. I just want to emphasize how blessed we are in Canada with professionals who dedicate themselves to probation and parole officers and the work that they do. It's amazing.

• (1000)

Ms. Anne Kelly: Thank you for that.

Mr. David Christopherson: It's well deserved.

On a lighter note, I want to share something. My Liberal colleagues from Ontario may know Steve Mahoney. Steve Mahoney was a Liberal MPP in Ontario who went on to become the president and CEO or chair of the WSIB. He was one of the funniest parliamentarians I've ever served with. He and Chris Stockwell had me in stitches.

The day I walked into the House after I'd been appointed to cabinet, one of the pages brought me a note. I opened it up. It was from Steve Mahoney and said, "Congratulations on your ascension to cabinet. You are now the landlord to a significant part of my family." I always thought that was cute.

Now on a very different note, I want to talk about health cards.

In my now 15 years on this committee, nothing makes me crazier than seeing the previous recommendations made to departments or agencies and entities to do things and their not doing them. Then there's another audit, with the same recommendation and the same promises, and still they don't act.

On page 11 we have a similar problem. There was an internal audit regarding the problems around health cards in 2012 that identified this. Your own CSC found the same issue, as did the Correctional Investigator of Canada in 2014, which is now five years ago.

Please help me understand how you can have at least two, if not three, major audits that point out a problem that has to do with the health care of people returning to the community and Corrections failing to do anything about it on both counts, and here it is again in front of us.

Please explain to me how we got here and what's going to be different this time.

The Chair: Ms. Kelly.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Thank you again for all the things you said about probation and parole officers. It's much appreciated.

ID in general is an issue we've been tackling for a long time. The first thing that happens, once offenders are admitted to federal custody, is that a parole officer sits down with the offenders and ascertains what kind of cards they have, and if there are cards missing, assists them in getting the cards they require.

We've reached out to the provinces and territories to ensure that a process is in place at remand centres to retain, track, store and transfer the ID with the offender when they come into federal custody. Follow-up letters have even been written by the assistant commissioner to provincial counterparts to request ongoing assistance.

As I said, once an offender is admitted to federal custody, a parole officer sits down with the offender and figures out what cards the person is missing.

Ms. Wheatley will be able to speak more to the health card, but regional management is working with various stakeholders, including provincial health officials and Service Ontario, to reduce the barriers to accessing provincial cards. As you know, in many provinces you can't apply for a health card until you are released.

The other thing I'm very excited about, and this is building on the success of the Prairie region, is that we have a new partnership—it's going to be in the form of an MOU that we're poised to sign with Indigenous Services Canada—through which Indigenous Services Canada staff will visit various sites and assist indigenous offenders to apply for their status cards.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm sorry to interrupt. It's very good stuff. I hear you. I see you reading your talking points. You still didn't explain to me, though, how your organization failed to respond in 2012 and in 2014 to exactly the same recommendation, and I have no doubt that somewhere in there you were giving the same talking points.

The fact is, it didn't get done. I understand about the cards that are issued and those that can't be issued until they're out. That's in here; anybody can read it. You didn't tell me anything I didn't already know, Commissioner. I'm not impressed with that answer.

Chair, I only have two more questions.

On the action plan—

• (1005)

The Chair: Please hurry. You're a minute and a half over.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'll wait till the end if you wish, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, that might be best, and then we'll keep on track here.

We'll now go to Monsieur Arseneault again, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: I want to remind you again that I haven't been involved in this committee's work for some time. This is my first meeting in a long time.

[*English*]

Mr. Swales or Mr. Hayes, on the reason for that study five years back.... It was from 2012-13 to 2017-18, right? Am I correct?

[*Translation*]

Is this the period covered by your study?

Mr. Nicholas Swales: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: From 2013-14 to 2017-18, the number of offenders released into the community increased by 17%.

In your comments, I can see that your case study is limited because you looked only at the offenders who returned to correctional institutions. Is that correct?

Mr. Nicholas Swales: No. The cases included in our study sample are the cases of individuals who were released during this period. This has nothing to do with whether the individuals returned to a correctional facility.

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay. I misunderstood.

In your presentation, you stated the following. "Finally, we found that Correctional Service Canada did not properly measure its success in meeting its mandate to reintegrate offenders into society as law-abiding citizens. The agency measured only convictions that resulted in the return of federal offenders to federal custody." Okay. I understand. It's the agency.

In addition, some information is missing, including all the data concerning the provincial and territorial institutions.

Does the Office of the Auditor General have an objective view of what's happening in the provinces and territories?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: No. We aren't aware of the recidivism rates in the provinces and territories.

Mr. Nicholas Swales: That said, in paragraph 6.75 of our report, we refer to a study conducted by Public Safety Canada in 2003. This was quite a long time ago. However, the study, which included incarcerations in provincial and territorial institutions, showed a recidivism rate of about 25%. We don't know the current figures, and that's what we're pointing out. Our report refers to the most recent figures that we were able to find in the studies conducted on this topic.

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay. In 2002-03, 17 years ago, the total recidivism rate was 25%, a percentage that includes federal, provincial and territorial offenders. Is that correct?

Mr. Nicholas Swales: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Ms. Kelly, I asked you a question earlier and I may have misspoke. How long has Correctional Service Canada been preparing to respond to the expected increase in the number of offenders released into the community? When did you realize that this would happen and that you needed to be prepared? I may have misunderstood your response.

Ms. Anne Kelly: The number of offenders under community supervision has been increasing since 2012-13. Back then, they amounted to 33% of the offender population, and they now amount to 40%.

In 2017, we conducted a more detailed internal study to establish projections and determine what needed to be done, both in correctional institutions and the community. At that time, we were able to see the cases or regions where there would be issues as a result of the inadequate number of beds. We worked hard at the local and regional level. Even the Auditor General acknowledged that we added many beds.

We're currently collecting information from each region to have a better idea of where these beds are located across the country and the type of beds needed in the community based on the offender profiles.

• (1010)

Mr. René Arseneault: With the responses you provided earlier, it's—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault, but we're over time already.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm sorry.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Commissioner Kelly, I want you to expand on some of the answers you have given already on the number and availability of beds. I heard what you said. You said there is not an aggregate shortage, but there may at any given time be shortages for specific needs or in specific regions.

Yet, on page 6, 6.32 states:

...Correctional Service Canada (CSC) did not maintain data on how many offenders were not placed in their requested communities. CSC did not record the reasons offenders were not placed in their requested communities...did not maintain data on the types of specialized housing that offenders needed in the community-based residential facilities.

Why?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Because we didn't have the information at that time. We've since added structure. We can request the information from the regions, but that's not good enough. We need to have structured fields, and that's what we've done in our offender management system, so we can have both the preferred location and where the offender is actually going.

We're also going to be tracking wait-lists and why offenders are not released once—

Mr. Pat Kelly: I did ask why you didn't keep track of that. That isn't an answer to that question, but if there is no answer, then I will move on.

You talked about, and Mr. Christopherson talked about, the already identified issue around health cards and the recommendations made in the past. To what extent is the health of an offender who is placed in community supervision monitored? Are these folks

in good health when they are released? Is that something that is monitored or tracked? Are the health needs of offenders known at the time they are released from a custodial facility?

I'm sure mental health, of course, is long connected with offenders. We talked about substance addiction problems, but is the health of an offender well-known and documented?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Ms. Wheatley can expand, but yes, relevant health information is shared with the parole officers. As the Auditor General found, the information should be shared in a GIST, and it's not always the case. That's on us. We need to fix that. In many cases, when we reviewed the information, it was shared through the community strategy. Yes, in answer to your question, the health of the offender is known to the community.

The Chair: Ms. Wheatley.

Ms. Jennifer Wheatley: We provide essential health care to incarcerated individuals just like provincial health care plans are provided to the rest of Canada. On release, we prepare discharge planning that's relative to the health needs of the patients, because on release to the community, they become included in the Canada Health Act and the provinces become primarily responsible for their health care.

Any risk-related or management information that needs to be shared with the parole officers to manage and supervise the offender safely in the community is then shared prior to release, from health to operations. As the commissioner mentioned, we're reviewing that process, because we know information sharing is happening, but it's sometimes happening outside of the process, so we're reviewing the process to make sure the documentation is appropriate.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip: Going back to the housing pressures, especially in the large urban areas, how can CSC expect to accommodate these offenders, who are trying to reintegrate into society, when the regular population has such a problem with housing? Is that part of the community capacity analysis of the 2017 internal strategic review?

Ms. Anne Kelly: You're quite right. In terms of the availability of housing, it's not everywhere. It's mostly in metropolitan centres.

For example, we have two community correctional centres in Ontario: one in Toronto and one in Kingston. They can accommodate 40 offenders each. Many offenders want to go to Toronto. Sometimes, when it is full, they will have to go to the facility in Kingston until a bed becomes available. I got an update that there are discussions under way right now in Toronto with different partners and with the city to look at increasing the bed availability.

Ms. Jean Yip: Are there any future plans to build more, in terms of longer-range anticipation of the growth that you mentioned in your report?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Sometimes it's a mix. Sometimes it's adding to facilities we already have, such as adding some beds. In certain cases, potentially, it could be building. Then it's a fairly long process because there are many considerations to take into account. Obviously, the community also has to be consulted.

Ms. Jean Yip: Given that, shouldn't there be more long-range planning?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Absolutely. Again, for CSC, a bed is not just a bed. Sometimes we require specialized beds for some offenders. We need to have the right mix in the right places.

Ms. Jean Yip: I make that comment because there seems to be a shortage and then they're waiting. Also, the low-risk offenders are waiting longer than the statutory release offenders. That's why I think it's really important that there be a longer proactive plan.

Ms. Anne Kelly: You're absolutely correct. That's what we're working on. Offenders being released on stat release have to be released by law. If there's a residency condition imposed on their stat release, we need to find them a place to reside. They would be released before offenders who have been granted day parole if we don't have enough beds. That's why, for us, it's imperative that we have a long-term, multi-year community accommodation plan.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yip.

On that point, before I go to Mr. Christopherson, I recall you mentioned earlier in your testimony that you didn't really have the major problem of housing in the Atlantic region. Is the cost of the housing market...? You referenced Toronto. We all know about the cost of housing in areas like that. Are those predictably or predominantly the areas where there is a big shortage?

You have so many dollars for budget. Obviously providing housing in Toronto is much more expensive than in Truro, Nova Scotia.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes, that's one factor that comes into play.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson.

• (1020)

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks, Chair.

I have one thing on the housing and then two follow-up questions.

You made the statement that that there was sufficient housing in the aggregate. If you look at this report and the fact that some people have to wait two years and you have all kinds of facilities elsewhere, but nowhere for the person who's waiting two years beyond what they... There's a mandatory requirement, but they have to go somewhere. You're keeping them in there, which does not benefit them, does not benefit society and costs taxpayers more money than it should.

You knew ahead of time this was going to happen. I just have a real problem with you saying we have all kinds of housing and it's just a little problem over here. That little problem over here is the equivalent of not having enough. If there isn't one for the instant case, then what good are all the other numbers?

The sugar-coating that sometimes goes on is frustrating. It's frustrating when it flies in the face of the report that's right in front of us.

I'm looking at recommendation 4 of your action plan. It says, "Amend Commissioner's Directive". People do these dates different ways. I see "2019-12-01". I'd like to think that was January 12, but I suspect it's December 1.

Ms. Anne Kelly: It's December 1.

Mr. David Christopherson: So it is to amend the commissioner's directive to add a responsibility to the institutional parole officer.

The next one is to amend the commissioner's directive to add a responsibility to the institutional parole officer to confirm, etc.

The next one is to amend the commissioner's directive to add a responsibility to the community parole officer, to confirm with the offender, and then on and on.

Each one of those is by December 1, 2019. Help me understand why it takes a year to amend directives.

Ms. Anne Kelly: That's a very good question.

Mr. David Christopherson: I thought so.

Ms. Anne Kelly: You'll be happy to know that, actually, the policy has been revised. It's making its way to being promulgated. We are ahead of December 1.

Mr. David Christopherson: Is that for all three?

Ms. Anne Kelly: That's for all three.

Mr. David Christopherson: So why did you put December in the first place? Was your planning that scattered, or what?

Ms. Anne Kelly: No, it's just because sometimes it takes a long time. This one is important. We need to do it. We need to add the responsibility. We've already discussed it with the district directors, so the policy has been amended.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, I have to tell you, you're doing it backwards. You have to work with your communications people. Normally, people come in here and promise deadlines that are unreasonable, and then we have to suss out what's real. In this case, you did the opposite and caused yourself a headache you didn't need.

For my last question, Chair, I'm looking at recommendation 1, which again speaks to the housing. I've read this. I won't say that I fully understand every detail, but two things stand out. One is that the dates are awfully faded. Is it disappearing ink? Is it meant to go away after a while? I'm just curious as to why it's so faint—unless you've been talking to the defence ministry staff, who say to you, "Watch it, they do follow up on what you do and say."

I've read all of that, and here's the question I have. When do you actually start building or acquiring facilities? I see all kinds of planning. I see lots of smoke, but where's the fire? Where is the facility purchase? I'm missing that piece. It might be that I am just missing it. I accept that.

Ms. Anne Kelly: In some cases there is not necessarily a facility purchase; it's that in certain CBRFs they're going to be adding beds. For example, what I can say is that between—

Mr. David Christopherson: Where will they add the beds? Could you just show me? That was the part. I was looking for the straight-up part that said, "There will be more beds as of...boom." I just never saw that. I saw lots of planning, lots of stuff, but I never really saw where the beds would actually arrive. That's all.

Ms. Anne Kelly: This is just an example. In one of the regions, there's a proposed expansion with the John Howard Society. What they're looking at in the next six months is having a number of additional beds online. This is where I said that in terms of the number of beds, for example, from 2017-18, to November 30, 61 have been added in different places. By the end of this fiscal year, there are going to be another 77 beds added, in different regions, for a total of 138. There are already 120 planned beds. There are also several potential beds that different regions are exploring adding as well.

• (1025)

Mr. David Christopherson: No, that's fine. I'll accept that here, but just know that we will be following up to make sure that these things are happening.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes.

Mr. David Christopherson: There are a lot of promises here, and in some cases promises have been made before to Parliament that you're going to fix things. We're going to take you at your word right now, but understand that we're going to go back and we're going to make sure that the commitments you're making to us are kept.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. David Christopherson: Very good. Thank you.

The Chair: The last question goes to Mrs. Mendès.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Thank you all for being here, and thank you for bringing us some answers, since I agree with my colleagues that we don't have the full answers.

I am very curious about the question of the identity cards, as Mr. Christopherson brought up. It seems to me that it's one of the most essential parts of our identity, to have those cards, as citizens, to know who we are and what rights we have. I also understand that a health card is suspended once somebody is incarcerated, because health becomes a federal responsibility.

When they are liberated into the community, and it becomes, again, a provincial responsibility, do they also go through the three-month waiting period similar to, for example, new immigrants or those who make an interprovincial move?

Ms. Anne Kelly: I'll let Jennifer answer.

Ms. Jennifer Wheatley: Like a lot of things in Canada, it depends on the province.

Some provinces will reinstate health care immediately upon release if you were in that province prior to being incarcerated.

If you are released to a province you weren't residing in before, some provinces will do the three-month coverage and other provinces won't.

It's province by province. We're tracking the barriers to accessing both the health card and the services on a province by province level.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: If some provinces give that three-month delayed admission period, would the federal government cover that three-month wait period on health services?

Ms. Jennifer Wheatley: We do provide limited health services in the community, recognizing gaps in care.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: I'm more preoccupied with the mental health services, because for those who have issues I think that's probably the most urgent thing they need once they're released.

Ms. Jennifer Wheatley: We spend approximately \$16 million a year on health services in the community.

That's above and beyond what provinces are providing.

Of that \$16 million, \$13 million goes directly to mental health services.

The vast majority is focused on the mental health needs of the offenders.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Is this being tracked in a manner that it's easy to access?

Ms. Jennifer Wheatley: The expenditures? Yes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: To see province by province?

Ms. Jennifer Wheatley: For sure we could do it region by region for the five regions. I'm not sure if we could do it province by province.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Okay, but five regions is already quite good.

Would it be possible to send it to us?

Ms. Jennifer Wheatley: Yes, absolutely.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: I'd appreciate it.

Thank you.

The Chair: I have a couple of questions.

As you all know, after every study we write a report. Some of these questions come from our analysts, giving them full credit for good questions.

But recommendation 6.77 in the report:

Correctional Service Canada should broaden its measures of the successful reintegration of federal offenders as law-abiding citizens after they complete their sentences to better reflect its mandate.

In your action plan, however, you've provided a response and the next steps but you have not provided a date of completion. I'm wondering if you could please explain why, on recommendation 6.77. The action plan talks about what you're going to do, but unlike the other recommendations there is no definite expectation of completion.

• (1030)

Ms. Anne Kelly: That's because we're working both with Public Safety and Statistics Canada. In speaking with our partners, we could see if we could get a timeline for this one.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

I am pleased with this meeting in that I think all our members will recognize the amount of time we have taken to talk about data again. I counted five specific issues where data wasn't gathered, maintained, managed, or wasn't available; it didn't include the data on the convictions. Some of those came out in today's meeting, I'm pleased about that.

I have a final question to CSC. Why, between 2014-15, and 2017-18, did the number of offenders under community supervision increase by 17%? Was there an increase in the prison population preceding those years or were more offenders than normal released early? Was it based on a lack of room in some of our institutions or was it just a goal to increase community service?

What happened there to create that extra 17%?

Ms. Anne Kelly: It's a combination of things. Certainly, there are more offenders being released earlier on day parole. We've really pushed staff to ensure that offenders have eligibility dates, and as much as possible, they should be enrolled in programs and have completed the programs by the time they are eligible. Their case should be prepared so they can see the Parole Board. We've really pushed on that. That's one thing.

The other thing that I appeared before this committee earlier to talk about is our new initiative with indigenous offenders, where we've created aboriginal intervention centres, especially for those who are medium security, who are serving shorter sentences. We really want them to get into programs in a timely fashion. Once they have successfully completed the program, we reassess them and we want their cases presented to the Parole Board. Just by the increase, which I think is 36% for indigenous offenders, we can see that it is working.

The other reason is that we have fewer revocations. Fewer offenders are returning to federal custody, which again is a testament to the good work being done by parole officers, program officers and mental health professionals in the community.

The Chair: I've chaired the public safety and national security committees before, and I think sometimes we get the feeling that we want to push people through the system as quickly as we can. I can tell you that while they are incarcerated they have resources available to them that many of them don't follow through with once they're out in the community.

Is there ever a time when people in prison have not completed some of their programming, yet they are moved into community service?

There is good programming for addiction or to provide people with a career when they get out, or at least the potential for a job when they get out. Are we seeing that, regardless of whether the program is completed or not, they are sometimes moved into community supervision?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes, it does happen sometimes that they don't get the chance to complete, for example, their education. They may not have time to complete the full program. That's why we offer maintenance programs in the community, so they can follow up once they get back into the community.

●(1035)

The Chair: The words there are "they can" or "they could". Do you have the statistics on those people whose programming while incarcerated is not completed? How many of them continue and finish that programming when they are out, and how many just walk away from it?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes, we have that data and we will be pleased to provide it.

The Chair: Thank you.

I thank both our Auditor General's office and our Correctional Service of Canada for appearing before us here today.

As you leave here, you might think "Well, I missed that one question", or maybe, "I was rudely cut off by the chair and didn't get an opportunity to finish my answer". As well, there are others who have been asked to provide information to our committee. Could I encourage you to do that? If you have some things that you have committed to, could you forward that to our clerk so it will be here in time for us to write a report on this meeting?

Thank you very much. I would ask the committee to stick around. We have a few minutes of committee business.

The meeting is suspended.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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