

Context

- A significant proportion of federally incarcerated offenders are Indigenous (30.4%) or Black (9.8%).
- Of the offender population on conditional release in the community: 58.6% are Caucasian; 21.1% are Indigenous; and 8.7% are Black.
- Five-year average day parole grant rates for Indigenous (72%) and Black offenders (73%) are largely consistent with those for Caucasian offenders (78%).
- Over the same period, grant rates for full parole are significantly lower for Indigenous offenders (26%) compared to Black (40%) and Caucasian (39%) offenders.

Current Initiatives

Board Member Representation

- The Parole Board of Canada (PBC) is a “community board”. *The Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA)* requires that Board members be **sufficiently diverse in their backgrounds** to represent community values and views.
- Over the past several years, the PBC has increased the diversity of its Board members to better reflect the diversity of the Canadian population. Of the 81 current Board members, 54% are women, 14% are Indigenous and 12% are Visible Minority.
- The PBC has recently made significant efforts to recruit Board member candidates from diverse communities, resulting in 19.7% of applications from Visible Minorities; 8.9% from Indigenous peoples; 6% from the LGBTQ2+ community, and 50.8% from women.
- The PBC’s public servants are 79.8 % are women, 4.9% are Indigenous, 4% are Persons with Disabilities and 14.4% are Visible Minority.

Training

- The PBC continually reviews and updates Board member training to ensure the appropriate level of focus on cultural competency. The PBC is committed to **bias-free** and **evidence-based** decision-making. Board members receive training on conscious, unconscious and perceived bias.
- The PBC has also added a course on overcoming unconscious bias to its mandatory Learning Roadmap for all employees.
- At its Annual Training on Risk Assessment, sessions were presented to Board members and hearing officers on “**Offender Race and Bias**” and “**Offenders of African Descent**”.
- Training provided to Regional Communication Officers included sessions on “**Workplace Inclusion for Gender and Sexual Diversity**” and “**Active Anti-Oppressive Anti-Racist Grounding Principles for Culturally Appropriate Engagement with Victims**”.

- The PBC also provides **Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training** to its Board members and staff.

Policy

- The CCRA requires that policies adopted relating to conditional release reviews must **respect** gender, ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences and be **responsive** to the specific needs of women and Indigenous offenders, as well as to the needs of other groups with specific requirements.
- In addition to providing guidance on the consideration of **systemic and background factors** in conditional release decision-making, there are references to groups of offenders with specific requirements throughout the Decision-Making Policy Manual for Board Members, for example, when considering whether to impose release conditions or authorize leave privileges.
- The PBC offers **alternate models of hearings**, namely in-person Elder-Assisted Hearings and Community-Assisted Hearings. The objectives of these hearings are to provide a **culturally responsive process**, while adhering to the criteria for conditional release decision-making. Culturally adapted virtual hearings are also available when in-person hearings are not possible.

Decision-Making

- In reviewing cases for conditional release, Board members use a **structured risk-assessment framework** to meet the diverse and complex needs of the offender population while ensuring the highest standard of public safety. The framework considers factors such as: the offender’s criminal, social and conditional release history, as well as case specific factors.
- Board members consider **systemic and background factors** that have played a part in bringing the offender into interaction with the criminal justice system.
- Systemic and background factors may include, but are not limited to: systemic discrimination, racism, family or community breakdown, unemployment, poverty, or lack of education and employment opportunities.
- Systemic and background factors must be considered in cases involving Indigenous offenders, but also apply to other groups of diverse offenders.
- Board members make decisions that are free of bias or prejudice based on race, age, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, or other personal abilities, characteristics or beliefs.

Outreach / In-reach

- **Outreach** is a corporate priority and significant progress has been made towards bolstering engagement with new and existing partners and stakeholders. The PBC has also expanded its community partnerships and advisory functions.

- The PBC conducts **in-reach with offenders** within institutions across Canada to explain the PBC’s mandate to offenders, to raise awareness of parole, and to prepare offenders for upcoming reviews. Targeted in-reach includes vulnerable populations such as Indigenous offenders, women offenders, and other racialized offenders.

Gender Based Analysis Plus

- The PBC has a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Framework, ensuring that GBA+ is applied in all areas of the PBC’s policies, programs and initiatives. The framework guides the PBC in considering not only biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences, but also other factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability.

Opportunities

- The PBC is supportive of broad or targeted legislative reforms, with the objective of **addressing the over-representation** of Black and Indigenous offenders in the criminal justice system and **improving accessibility to pardons**, while ensuring public safety and rehabilitation.
- A review of PBC decision-making policies is currently underway, to conclude in 2022. It will include consideration of **additional guidance** related to groups of offenders with specific requirements.
- The PBC convened a **Working Group on Women Offenders** in 2018 to review recent research, consult with stakeholders and partners, and identify opportunities to strengthen gender-responsive approaches. The resulting Women Offender Action Plan aims to improve the parole process for women.
- The PBC formed a committee on **Diversity and Systemic Racism** with the Correctional Service of Canada, to jointly review and address diversity issues. The committee identified common themes for action based on an extensive review of existing reports and recommendations. The PBC’s internal Working Group on Diversity and Systemic Racism is working to validate and build on these themes to develop an internal action plan to address systematic inequalities within the conditional release system.
- The PBC is participating in a government-wide **LGBTQ2+ Action Plan** in the area of safety and justice.
- The PBC participates in many **internal and external working groups and committees**, such as the Chairperson’s Indigenous Circle, in order to remain informed and sensitive to the issues facing Indigenous offenders, and continues to explore new partnerships with groups representing various **vulnerable offender populations**.