

CAC Annual Report 2020-21

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The Citizen Advisory Committees (CAC) are independent and impartial advisory committee that work in collaboration with and contribute to the mandate Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). The opinions and content expressed in this report are those of the CAC. The report is published on CSC's website for information purposes.

Overview

One of the principles articulated in the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* is for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to involve the public in its operations. Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs), amongst other advisory committees, contribute to CSC meeting its legislated mandate.

Initiated in the early 1960s by citizens to be a bridge between prisons and the communities where they are located, CACs help CSC build stronger links between offenders and the public. They are the eyes and ears of the public in an environment closed off to most of society.

CAC members are citizens appointed to serve on committees in a voluntary capacity. They believe in public safety, the right of all citizens to be involved in the correctional process, and the ability of offenders to become law-abiding citizens.

CACs have three main roles:

- **Observe:** CACs are impartial observers of CSC's day-to-day operations. They help assess if offenders are getting adequate care, supervision, and services. They also ensure that CSC is operating under the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.
- **Liaise:** CACs listen to public concerns and offer CSC a community point of view on the impact of its policies, programs and services. They also help raise awareness on federal corrections and promote the important work that CSC undertakes to encourage citizens to get involved.
- **Advise:** CACs give independent advice to CSC on its policies, programs and services, and on how it runs correctional facilities. Members visit facilities regularly to meet with offenders, CSC officials and staff.

The Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations provide CAC members with access to institutions, all parole offices, staff and offenders. In terms of investment of time and energy, CAC members spend approximately 80% of their time observing where they interact with offenders, staff, managers as well as the general public. About 15% of the time is spent being a two-way communication link with between CSC and the community including other stakeholders in the system. Concerns are shared, misconceptions are addressed and involvement of the community is encouraged. The

final 5% of time and energy is used to share observations with CSC and, in some cases, offer formal advice.

Summary of membership

During the 2019-20 year, committees report 87 committees with 331 members acting as impartial observers and advisors, in institutions, community correctional centres and parole offices. This year, CSC reported 67 committees (a difference of 20) and 300 members (a difference of 31). This likely points to different ways of reporting committees, where committees may represent more than one institution, Community Correctional Centre and/or parole office, for example, and highlights the need for better tracking of committees and membership.

CAC operates at the same three levels that CSC operates: there is a CAC at the local site level (institution and parole offices), and there are also 5 regional committees and one national committee. The members of the regional committees, as well as the National Executive Committee, are drawn from the local committees.

The heart and soul of CACs are in the local committees, and they are supported by dedicated CSC staff and officials without whom the committees would not be able to meet their mandate. A big thank you to them.

At a national level, the committees were represented and supported by the following individuals in 2020-21:

- **National Chair:** Peggy Joiner
- **Atlantic Region:** Donna Gardiner (CAC) and Sherry Jackson-Smith (CSC)
- **Quebec Region:** Ingrid Schmidt, National Executive Committee Vice Chair (CAC) and Marjorie Bernard (CSC)
- **Ontario Region:** Mark Jowett (CAC) and Debra Masters (CSC)
- **Prairie Region:** Michael Swait (CAC) and Nell Hales (CSC)
- **Pacific Region:** Tatiyanna Kolesnichenko (CAC) and Reeta Shandil (CSC)
- **CSC Co-Chair:** Katherine Cole

Thank you to Commissioner Anne Kelly for her continued dedication to Citizen Advisory Committees. CAC members commend her for the introduction of weekly letters to the offender population, which have supported the mandate of CSC throughout the pandemic. In addition, we have been well supported by the Communications and Engagement sector at National Headquarters, including Kirstan Gagnon, Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Engagement, Katherine Cole, Director of Citizen Engagement and the entire Community and Stakeholder Relations Unit, notably Suzanne Leclerc, Donat Bilomba and Lise Jolicoeur.

The New Normal

The 2020/21 fiscal year was a very different one for both CAC and CSC. COVID-19 created a “new normal” for all of us. CSC implemented an Integrated Risk Management Framework that created limitations on face-to-face visits by CAC members based upon the risk threshold using the health data for the area.

CACs had to find new ways of carrying out their mandate and I am happy to report that committees all over the country met this challenge with creativity and enthusiasm. There were teleconferences with staff and with offenders. Some committees used ZOOM while others used MS Teams. When the risk was manageable some committees were able to resume the best practice of observing in person.

A variety of effective communication practices have emerged this year that we hope to adopt in the future. For example, some regions held their annual meetings in separate sessions to accommodate for the virtual platform. The use of virtual meetings may allow for more accurate representation of the community on our committees. Some members also appreciated that virtual meetings were more frequent, which meant more timely responses to questions.

A mid-year check in by an on-line survey with all committees resulted in over 30 different groups submitting comments. Also, they signalled that while they were using virtual methods, it could not replace in-person work. Recruitment and retention were major issues with some committees reporting fewer members willing to continue volunteering due to the pandemic.

A number of committees used the time to develop and/or continue professional development (PD) opportunities. Nation-wide sessions in both English and French on Structured Intervention Units were well attended (approximately 60 and 25 respectively). The Metro Vancouver West Community Corrections CAC held a webinar that focused on elderly offenders, which was open to CAC members across the country and was well attended, including some international participants. The information presented was valuable and timely. Some regions held PD sessions for their members to keep them engaged in and many favorable comments were received. The Quebec region continued to publish their Newsletter.

Based upon the feedback this year many, if not most of our committees, found innovative ways to meet the mandate of observe, liaise and advise. CSC helped by launching the [CSC Stakeholder Collaborative Hub](#) in December 2020, an on-line platform where stakeholders and volunteers can share information. CAC began using the Collab Hub for policy consultations (Commissioner's Directives). Any CAC member can join the space and participate in the process.

Highlights

It is important to note that given the COVID-19 situation, CACs were not able to fully engage in their usual variety of activities to carry out their mandate. Nevertheless, the work continued through out the year and highlights are presented below.

Atlantic

- A professional development session on Restorative Justice was held.
- The Dorchester CAC was invited to a press conference on a new health facility.

- One committee was able to meet with the offenders at their site who wanted to learn about CAC.
- Formal advice from this region led to a review of mail restrictions during the pandemic at the national level.
- The importance of advising CAC of significant incidents was emphasized.
- Virtual meetings were held with Office of the Correctional Investigator.

Quebec

- Due to the pandemic, a virtual annual meeting was held divided into four parts that took place during November 2020.
- In an effort to hear the voices of staff, the regional council invited regional representatives from all three unions as guest speakers at regional meetings including UCCO-SACC-CSN Union of Canadian Correctional Officers/Syndicat des Agents correctionnels du Canada Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN); the Union of Safety and Justice Employees; and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada.
- Formal advice was offered to the region regarding the protocols for staff safety in the initial months of the pandemic.
- CAC and CSC both continued the process of recruiting new members from a variety of ethnocultural backgrounds.
- The Quebec regional CAC president had weekly meetings with the Regional Deputy Commissioner (RDC) in the first few months of the pandemic. This contact allowed the regional chair to better inform the regional committee and to meet with others at CSC to discuss issues of concern for Quebec members such as the inmate purchasing system, chaplain services, the needs of the aging population, and the recruitment of more members who represent the inmate population, particularly Indigenous people.
- Three newsletters regarding the activities of the CAC in the Quebec region were published during the year.

Ontario

- The Ontario Region adapted to the use of virtual meetings in the early stages of then pandemic and both regional and local sites continued with virtual meetings throughout the year.
- Professional development sessions were hosted for all CAC members, including Lunch and Learns hosted by local sites.
- CACs at institutions carried out their activities by connecting with inmate committees and staff virtually, and attended weekly virtual updates on the status of COVID in the institutions.
- Parole Offices and Community Correctional Centres maintained regular contact with staff and CAC members were kept up-to-date on the health status at the offices.
- Recruitment activities continued and the level of CAC interest and commitment remained constant.

- CACs offered sessions on community resources and some sites educated themselves on the various programs and positions within their sites so that they could better answer community questions.
- Ontario embraced the new CSC Stakeholder Collaboration Hub and used it for a variety of things including professional development and sharing information within and between committees.
- Committees were encouraged to use social media as a tool with the Ottawa CAC creating a Twitter account.

Prairies

- CAC attended Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) meetings at some sites.
- Virtual meetings were held with the Office of the Correctional Investigator.
- CAC parole members engaged with the offenders under the supervision of their site.
- CAC members at several sites participated in interviews for an Independent Chair person.
- One committee worked with its site and published information (“Did You Know” facts) about the site on the local community Facebook page, which provides insight into the workings of the institution. This endeavor was initiated to increase public awareness and trust in the site and CSC.
- The CAC was included in working with the municipal government and the RCMP to improve and enhance public notifications of significant events.

Pacific

- The Metro Vancouver West Community Corrections CAC organized a successful webinar on aging offenders, which was mentioned by the other regions as a highlight for many committees across the country. The webinar featured five speakers who discussed the challenges faced by aging offenders in the community as well as different approaches to helping meet their complex needs. This is a link to the session to view it https://youtu.be/UswQx_xsYfl.
- Committees used social media to help in the recruitment process.
- Committee members educated themselves on how corrections operates, from correctional program delivery, Indigenous initiatives, Elder involvement, as well as Structured Intervention Units (SIU).

National Highlights

The CAC National Executive Committee had a busy year and were actively engaged in a variety of activities that included meeting with stakeholders (such as the Community Residential Facilities representatives) as well as facilitating national meetings with the Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. The NEC also met with CSC national staff on a variety of issues including Chaplaincy and SIU's. The Chaplaincy meeting was due to local committee concerns regarding chaplaincy related to the pandemic. Many regional chairs were receiving updates regarding COVID-19 and its impact in the regions. The

National Chair briefed the Commissioner on what CACs were observing in the early days of the pandemic.

CAC has a seat on CSC's Advisory Committee, part of CSC's Shaping the New Normal governance structure and Integrated Risk Management Framework for the management of COVID-19. These structures were created in 2020 with different working groups, an advisory group and a steering committee to make recommendations on phasing back in activities. The governance structure includes significant input and collaboration with labour partners and includes representatives from the National Indigenous Advisory Committee, National Associations Active in Criminal Justice and our Citizen Advisory Committees, represented by the CAC national chair.

NEC launched a five-year Strategic Plan in December 2020, for 2020-2025, after nation-wide consultation in early 2020. All of the background documentation was shared, along with summaries of the survey results for each region. Members had an opportunity to ask questions through presentations that were provided on the plan in every region, along with a survey that was created to provide feedback. The plan was distributed widely by email and posted on CSC's website.

The NEC has continued its work on the implementation of many strategic priorities in the plan, including producing initial ideas for three strategies on Professional Development & Training, Recruitment & Retention, and Results & Reporting. The strategies will be finalized by working groups consisting of a variety of CAC members from across the country in the next fiscal year.

In addition, the CAC Resource Manual was refreshed and distributed to all members in January 2021. A new product called "CAC Bulletins" were launched and distributed to all members, including one on applications and recruitment during the pandemic, as well as guidance on the use of videoconferencing platforms.

In May 2020, t This self-paced course is

2020 James A. Murphy Award: Raynald Martel

The NEC was pleased to award Mr. Raynald Martel with the 2020 James A. Murphy Award. Raynald has been a member of the Donnacona CAC for over 33 years and is known among most Quebec members as the person who trained many members on the best practices of CACs.

CACs in the public domain

CACs were mentioned in media in 2020-2021:

- [Too few video visitation terminals available at prison, inmate's partner says](#)
- [Second video terminal installed for virtual visitation at Millhaven Institution](#)

- [Grande Cache Institution is open for visitors](#)
- [CSC to resume visits at area institutions on Monday](#)
- [Prisoners' Justice Day Is Every Day for Those of Us Who Have Lived Inside](#)
- [Loneliness Among Aging Offenders - Causes, Impacts and Responses](#)

CACs acknowledged in reports in 2020-21:

- [Prison Needle Exchange Program](#). Correctional Service of Canada (September 2020).

CACs were mentioned on CSC's social media channels in 2020-2021:

- [We want to give a shout out to our Citizen Advisory Committee members across the country who continue to work with us *remotely* during this pandemic.](#)
- [Citizen Advisory Committees are independent #volunteers who bring a public perspective to federal corrections.](#)
- [Interested in #PublicSafety? Looking to #volunteer in a meaningful way?](#)
- [During the pandemic, CAC continue their important role to observe, liaise and advise us, bringing a community perspective to federal corrections.](#)
- [Dynamic volunteers wanted! Citizen Advisory Committees are currently recruiting in...](#)
- [It's Citizen Advisory Committees \(CAC\) Awareness Week! This year's theme is CAC: Embracing the Future – #COVID19.](#)
- [Congratulations to the 2020 winner of the James A. Murphy CAC Award – Raynald Martel, a committee member from Donnacona Institution in Quebec](#)
- 2021 CAC Awareness Week : [Joyce Seidel](#), [Micheal Swait](#), [Mark Jowett](#), [Ingrid Schmidt](#), [Donna W Gardiner](#)
- [Take a look at the 5-year Strategic Plan for Citizen Advisory Committees #CACWeek: <http://ow.ly/6FoE50DfHBv>](#)
- [#ICYMI We want to give a huge #ThankYou to all Citizen Advisory Committee members...](#)

Conclusion

CAC members are grateful for the support from CSC at the regional and national level and, most importantly, at the local sites, which allows us to carry out this important mandate and contribute to public safety.

CSC has expressed its appreciation that the CAC members have kept their mandate going, as the committees are particularly important during a time of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the words of one member, "I'm told very, very often how much the inmates appreciate our presence".