

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

## Health and Well-being of Older Offenders on Conditional Release in the Community

*Many offenders over the age of 50 have multiple health care needs that require support on release to the community.*

**Why we did this study**

Older offenders<sup>1</sup> face unique needs in readjusting to living in the community, and represent a growing proportion of offenders on release – 39% in 2020 (Public Safety Canada, 2022). The physical and mental health needs and social supports required by this cohort often require multiple resources in the community. The goal of this study was to examine the health care needs and re-entry experiences of older federal offenders to understand their experiences and reintegration into the community.

**What we did**

Interviews were conducted with 65 Canadian federal offender volunteers age 50 years or older. Participants included Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women. The interviews included the interRAI Emergency Department Contact Assessment health care screening instrument and a set of questions on re-entry experiences, needs for health care, and community services.

**What we found**

Older offender study participants aged 50 or older rate some aspects of their health less positively than the general population of Canadians aged 65 or older. While they reported more depression, anxiety, alcohol use problems, dyspnea, recurring pain, and histories of traumatic injury, they also reported fewer problems with cognitive functioning and activities of daily living. Other measures of health were similar between offender participants and the population.

Many participants reported that they have various health care providers – family doctor, dentist, mental health professional. They also report that their health care needs are generally being met in the community. Older offenders released from their first federal sentences and from shorter sentences connected with health care providers, secure housing, and employment through family and friends. Establishing these connections was easier than for offenders on longer sentences or those having multiple prior sentences.

Older women offenders reported fewer financial resources, more barriers to employment due to their criminal records, inability to work due to disability, fewer social supports, and greater risk of institutionalized care compared to men.

Indigenous participants saw Indigenous-specific community resources as important sources of support for their successful release.

Participants' comments acknowledged that many offenders age more rapidly in prison, and are coping with – and receiving treatment for – chronic conditions limiting their activity. Many participants commented on struggling with the costs of unfunded health care services and medications, as well as living costs in general.

**What it means**

Older offenders – particularly those serving long sentences – may require multiple supports when released. This highlights the importance of ensuring that they are connected to the appropriate health care, mental health care, and substance use services in the community. More support in transitioning to the community, such as accessing transportation and technology, may be of assistance. Many older Indigenous offenders rely on culturally-based services as sources of support in the community. Nevertheless, the older offender community sample participants in this study almost without exception rate their quality of life, including their access to varied health care services, as superior to what they experienced while incarcerated.

**For more information**

Brown, G. P., Greco, C., Barker, J., McMillan, K., Tiersma, G., Wardrop, K., & Wilton, G. (2023). *Health and Well-Being of Older Offenders on Conditional Release in the Community* (Research Report R-453). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail the [Research Branch](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to those over 50 years of age as criminal lifestyle factors and incarceration have been found to prematurely age those in prison by as much as 5 to 15 years compared to the general, non-offender population.