



People with Lived Experience

What We Learned Report:
Summary
Wave 2 Justice Canada-Led
Engagement

March 2024



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada

Canada



Executive Summary

This document is a summary of the People with Lived Experience: What We Learned (Wave 2 Justice Canada-led Engagement) Report. [Read the full report.](#)

It summarizes key topics identified by approximately 230 Indigenous people with lived experience in the criminal justice system who took part in engagement on the Indigenous Justice Strategy (IJS).

It also highlights the input shared in discussions that took place in 14 locations, which included both federal institutions under the supervision of Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and community-run Section 81 Healing Lodges.

Engagement Methodology

As part of the second wave of engagement to develop an IJS, Justice Canada met with Indigenous frontline workers and Indigenous people who are currently incarcerated in all levels of security (minimum, medium and maximum) .


Justice Canada worked collaboratively with CSC, the Native Counselling Services of Alberta, and Waseskun Healing Centre to deliver engagement sessions to those who wished to participate.

Discussions covered the themes of pre/first contact with the justice system, incarceration, and post-incarceration. Conversations were guided by participants highlighting what they thought was most important.

Key Takeaways by Topic

Youth

- **Indigenous youth need to be the focus of efforts** when it comes to addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system.

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- **Navigational support is key** for youth to have a better understanding of the justice system and options available to them.
 - **Cultural supports and spaces must be accessible** to urban and rural Indigenous youth.
 - Broken family structures and engagement with Child and Family Services increase the likelihood of a youth's involvement in the justice system, therefore it is very important for youth to have positive adult role models and to teach youth about healthy relationships and violence prevention at a young age.
 - Juvenile detention centres **require significant reform** to address the lack of cultural support and resources available to Indigenous youth.

Court Process

- **Holistic representation and cultural training** are needed within the courts.
- **Consideration of alternative approaches** during the current court process such as such as diversion to Healing Lodges or the use of restorative justice practices, **is needed for first-time offenders, especially young people**, and for the use of lengthy sentences for first offences.
- **Earlier access and knowledge of available resources and supports** at first contact with the justice system.

Indigenous Courtworker (ICW)

- **Earlier and more fulsome contact with Indigenous Courtworkers** to assist with navigation of the court process.

Gladue

- **Standardized application of Gladue** reports and use within the courts.
- **Indigenous-led Gladue** writing process with proper aftercare.
- **Removal of barriers** like financial cost and wait times associated with reports.



Elders

- **Elders need to be better supported** to reduce burnout and to protect those who speak out or advocate against mistreatment of inmates.
- More innovative solutions need to be explored to **fill the gap of Elder access**.
- Not everyone who is contracted by CSC as an Elder is appropriate or safe to work with.

Cultural Support

- **Consistent access to ceremony** opportunities and traditional foods available outside of Pathways¹ units.
- **Expansion** of current Pathways programs.
- **Creation of supports for traditional language** preservation and learning.
- **Review of self-identification** and non-Indigenous individuals accessing the already limited number of Indigenous-specific supports.

Programming and Training

- **Programming and training must be accessible** in all levels of security.
- **People serving life sentences need programming** that is specific to their circumstances.
- More training focused on **gaining employment skills**.
- **Family mediation and reunification** programming needs to be increased at both male and female institutions.

¹ Pathways program is an Elder-driven intensive healing initiative. In some institutions Pathways is available as a day program while in others there is an entire Pathways unit.



Mental Health and Health Services

- Connection between mental and physical health and involvement with the justice system.
- **Counselling needs are immediate and urgent** for incarcerated residential school survivors.
- **Barriers for individuals with physical and mental disabilities** need to be addressed.

Discrimination and Racism

- **Ongoing cultural training** for staff led by Indigenous offenders and staff.
- **Review of the use of Indigenous Social History** and **Gladue reports** in the **Security Reclassification System**, specifically during security reviews.
- **Prioritizing** of ceremony and Indigenous-based programming.

Gang Involvement and Resources

- **Creation of a gang-exit strategy** supported and facilitated by an independent organization.
- **Improved access to supports and resources** for the purpose of removing a Security Threat Group (STG) flag.
- Comprehensive **de-escalation training** on gangs for staff.

Addiction Treatment

- **Addiction treatment should be the primary focus** within institutions to address the direct link between addiction and crime.
- Indigenous treatment centres must be increased and receive stable and reliable funding.



Intersectionality

- **Domestic violence prevention** and education on healthy relationship models at a young age. Further supports for those exiting unhealthy or abusive relationships.
- **Implementation of Indigenous women-specific** programming and training as well as supports for release.
- **Increase in Section 81 Healing Lodge facilities** available to women.

Life After Release and the Continuum of Care

- More resources and supports are needed for individuals to help prepare a **successful plan for release**.
- **Maintaining cultural support in community** can be a challenge and requires navigational support.
- Sober Indigenous halfway houses are **desperately needed**.

