Incarcerated Women in Canada and the Over-Representation of Indigenous Women

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Who was Elizabeth Fry?



Indigenous

Women represent 50% of the women's prison population.
In the Prairie Provinces the rates are closer to 90%.
Indeginous women are the fastest growing prison population in Canada

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Women

Are the fastest growing prison population worldwide.

Office of the Correctional Investigator

- **Disproportionate Impact:** Correctional Investigator Dr. Ivan Zinger has described the prison system as "disturbingly and unconscionably Indigenized," noting that Indigenous individuals face harsher conditions, higher security classifications, and longer sentences.
- **Safety and Custody Disparities:** Indigenous prisoners are overrepresented in maximum-security placements, use-of-force incidents, and Structured Intervention Units (SIUs), while experiencing higher rates of self-harm and suicide attempts.
- Underutilized Culturally Specific Resources: Community-run Section 81 healing lodges receive significantly less funding per resident compared to state-run facilities, and specialized programs like Pathways reach less than 8% of the in-custody Indigenous population.
- Core Recommendations: The OCI has repeatedly called for a national Indigenous decarceration strategy, the transfer of correctional authority and resources to Indigenous communities, funding parity for healing lodges, and better integration of Elders and culturally based mental health care.

Truth And Reconciliation Calls to Action

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Commitment to Elimination (Call to Action 30):
The TRC explicitly called upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in custody over the next decade.

Alternatives to Incarceration (Call to Action 31):
A call to provide sufficient, stable funding for community - based sentencing alternatives, diversion programs, and restorative justice options to keep individuals out of correctional facilities.

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Thunder Woman Healing Lodge



Advocacy

- Visits Federal Prisons for Women.
- Writes advocacy reports on conditions of confinement
- Brings forward Charter Challenges
- Advocates for change domestically and internationally

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CAEFS

Canadian Association Of Elizabeth Fry Societies

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Missed Targets: Over **55% of prisoners** in SIUs do not get their mandatory 4 hours out of cell, and roughly **50% miss out** on the required 2 hours of meaningful human interaction.

Prolonged Stays: While the Mandela Rules state that isolation past 15 days constitutes torture, **over half (56.5%) of SIU stays exceed 15 days**, with some prisoners remaining isolated for over 60 days.

Perfunctory Contact: Advocacy[H] groups like the Canadian Bar Association point out that much of the interaction still occurs through food slots in cell doors, mimicking historical solitary confinement.

Systemic Disparities: Indigenous and Black prisoners, alongside individuals suffering from severe mental health issues, are heavily overrepresented in SIUs and endure disproportionately longer stays.

The Geneva Convention

And

The Mandela Rules

CAEFS

- Challenging SIU:
  Strengthen its efforts to prevent suicide and self-harm in custody and ensure that all deaths in custody are promptly, effectively.
- Indepently investigated in accordance with the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Deaths;
- Make efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate all forms of sexual violence.
- Ensure that all persons in all places of detention have access to adequate healthcare, including mental health;
- Consider establishing an independent oversight mechanism for the administration of penitentiary and protective detention facilities, including regular inspections and public reporting;
- Consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and establishing a national preventive mechanism to monitor conditions in all places of detention.

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United Nations

Canada is running for a non-permanent seat on the 47-member for 2028–2030


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