



Supporting Reintegration in Corrections by Addressing Problematic Substance Use

Problematic substance use (PSU)¹ is a risk factor contributing to reoffending (Harrison & Gfroerer, 1992). Addressing PSU and other risk factors can lead to a reduction in crime, successful reintegration of those involved with the criminal justice system upon their release and a cost savings for corrections (Correctional Service Canada [CSC], 2009; Visher & Mallik-Kane, 2007; Wooditch, Tang & Taxman, 2014). As approximately 75% of individuals arrive at Canadian federal institutions with a serious substance use problem (CSC, 2010), the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) conducted an environmental scan of evaluations of criminal justice interventions that aimed to reduce substance use, recidivism or both. The results of the scan focus on services and initiatives that can be implemented or expanded in Canada.

Key Messages

- Addressing PSU and other risk factors can lead to a reduction in criminality, successful reintegration and a cost savings for corrections.
- Correctional programs will be more effective if tailored to an individual's culture and gender, and account for any history of trauma.
- Risk/needs assessments should be conducted early and throughout contact with the criminal justice system to inform supports required by an individual.
- Case management and release planning will ensure continuity of supports.
- Consistent services and treatment are needed while an individual is incarcerated and after release.
- Consideration of options for diverting non-violent offenders from incarceration can begin at the arrest period, but requires the availability of appropriate community supports.
- Evidence-informed treatment approaches for correctional populations include access to withdrawal management services, pharmacotherapies, peer support programs and psycho-social interventions.

¹ For the purposes of this report, PSU refers to the use of alcohol and other drugs in a way that can have negative consequences and impacts across a broad range of health, mental health, social, interpersonal, employment, educational and financial areas. In the present context, PSU also refers to substance use that is related to criminal behaviour and that can be a barrier to successful reintegration after incarceration. PSU manifests on a continuum from low frequency use to chronic, heavy use. It also varies according to personal characteristics such as age and gender, and the type of drug consumed, as well as the complexity of the health and social context; for example, if accompanied by concurrent mental health conditions, poverty or violence.



Purpose of the Environmental Scan

The purpose of this environmental scan was:

- To summarize best practices in assessing and addressing problematic substance use among those involved in the criminal justice system, with a focus on supporting the transition from the institution to the community; and
- To develop a comprehensive picture of specialized initiatives or programs that have already been implemented in Canada.

Results

The results of the environmental scan summarize best and promising practices for successful reintegration into the community for those with a history of PSU. The results are divided into three sections:

- Program Considerations provides information on perspectives that can be applied when treating those with PSU;
- System Components addresses the core components of the criminal justice system; and
- Treatment Approaches addresses evidence for treatment.

Key Findings

Programming Considerations

Implementing a correctional program or treatment approach requires the consideration of the unique circumstances of the target population. Research shows tailored programs that consider gender, culture and history of trauma are more effective than programs that do not. It is recommended that tailored programming:

- Include supports to address circumstances unique to females (e.g., adequate child-care services and supportive housing);
- Reflect the culture of participants; and
- Include risk assessments that capture an individual's history of trauma to ensure it is acknowledged in treatment and release planning.

System Components

The environmental scan identified the following components of the criminal justice system as key to effective management and reintegration:

- Risk/needs assessments that are used immediately and repeatedly to identify and track PSU. These assessments should be used in tandem with other measures to develop a well-informed treatment or release plan that includes treatment for PSU;
- Case management that aims to provide an individual with the needed resources to address PSU and includes release planning and supervision. It was found that working with a case management team can help ensure that needs are met;



- Supervision under probation and parole that includes assessment and case management; and
- Options that divert individuals away from more punitive approaches and towards rehabilitation, including:
 - Screening, brief intervention and referral at the time of arrest;
 - Pre-adjudication diversion;
 - Treatment in lieu of incarceration; and
 - Drug treatment courts.

Transition and post-release reintegration is a pivotal intervention period. It is recommended that access to needed and integrated services and the development of a positive support network be prioritized during reintegration. To maintain progress, aftercare must be informed by the care provided in the correctional institution.

Treatment Approaches

Six evidence-informed PSU treatment approaches are suggested for use in combination and to be provided throughout the continuum of care, including during brief intervention, diversion, incarceration, probation and parole, and reintegration. The approaches summarized below might not be tailored for or available to Indigenous populations.

Withdrawal management services involve withdrawing an individual from substances use in a supervised and controlled manner. These services should be available throughout the criminal justice system and should include assessment at intake and appropriate supervision from a trained healthcare practitioner.

Cognitive behavioural therapy is a form of psychotherapy to be used throughout the criminal justice system (e.g., prison, parole and probation) and in relapse prevention to assist with coping.

Motivational interviewing is used in combination with other interventions to motivate behaviour change by resolving ambivalence about change. It is recommended that staff be trained in this approach and provided the opportunity to practice these skills and ensure there is time allotted for supervised training in the field.

Contingency management involves the use of rewards and punishments to instill behaviour change. It can be considered for use with participants in drug courts who are not familiar with criminal justice penalties and for those who voluntarily participate in outpatient treatment.

Peer-based interventions involve individuals who were incarcerated and have integrated back into the community providing support to currently incarcerated individuals. It is recommended that peer-based interventions be included as additional supports for those involved in the criminal justice system.

Pharmacotherapies that treat alcohol or other drug dependence with the goal of detoxification, relapse prevention or opioid substitution are recommended for use throughout the criminal justice system. It is important that:

- Pharmacotherapies be used in conjunction with other treatment approaches;
- Continuity of care is maintained; and
- There is ready access to pharmacotherapies in rural and remote areas.



Implications

PSU affects individuals, their families and communities. As a result, addressing PSU can reduce reoffending, support public safety, improve communities and invest in future generations. The results of the environmental scan identify evidence-informed practices to guide jurisdictions in building service capacity and in selecting programming that effectively addresses PSU among those involved in the criminal justice system. These results are meant to inform government policy, funding allocations and future research. Because these results are based mainly on research from outside Canada, implementing the recommendations in Canada will require monitoring and evaluation.

How To Learn More

- Find the full report, as well as other CCSA reports, on our [Treatment and Supports](#) page.
- Use the [Information Request](#) page to ask to be added to our distribution list.
- Join the conversation online to help create a healthier society, free of the harms of substance use, by following @CCSACanada.

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