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John Howard Society of Ontario releases [infographic](#) and [brief](#) highlighting deaths in Ontario's correctional institutions.

Toronto: On Prisoner's Justice Day 2017, John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO) has released a new infographic highlighting the tragic number of individuals who die behind bars in Ontario, and the problematic patterns and responses underlying these deaths.

Prisoner's Justice Day brings critical attention to the fundamental rights and dignity of some of the most marginalized individuals. While it is a day to remember, it is also a day to help give a voice to a segment of the population who are generally rendered voiceless: incarcerated individuals themselves. The day is a somber reminder of the deaths of Edward Nalon on August 10, 1974 and Robert Landers in 1976 – both men who died while in a segregation unit at Millhaven Maximum Security Prison.

"Despite happening over 40 years ago, these two events involve issues – segregation and deaths in custody – that remain significant areas of concern today," says Michelle Keast, Director of the Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development at the John Howard Society of Ontario. "We see the odd news report here and there responding to individual deaths in correctional institutions. What we wanted to do was to give a more systemic snapshot."

Ontario's correctional institutions concentrate some of the most marginalized and vulnerable people in society. Research has generally shown that people in jails die much younger than the general population. "Deaths are tragic and painful for the families," says Keast. "When we see the same types of deaths, year after year, we start to ask questions about prevention."

"Not every death may be preventable," says Graham Brown, Policy Analyst at JHSO. "However, we are concerned when we see a suicide rate 4-6 times that of the general population. We are concerned when we see the average age of death of provincially incarcerated people at around 40 years of age, compared to nearly 70 years on average for all Canadians. And we are concerned when we see that around 40% of all deaths have some history of mental illness. Jails should not be places where people go to die."

A recent [news study](#) showed that most deaths in Ontario's provincial correctional institutions – roughly 63% over a 5-year period - are actually part of the remand population: those awaiting trial or a bail decision. "In other words, the majority of people who are dying in Ontario's correctional institutions are legally innocent. There is something especially unconscionable about this," says Brown.

Looking at deaths in custody raises deeper questions, including examining the inquest system in more detail and mechanisms for oversight. "There is no mechanism in place to consistently follow-up or publicly report the status of individual recommendations in individual cases. There is no publicly available 'tracking system' for those recommendations," says Brown. "This seems to be a gap."

The infographic and brief aim to raise a discussion about fairness, rights, and dignity, on Prisoner's Justice Day and is part of a larger examination into deaths in custody underway in Ontario by the Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development at JHSO.

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