

Fact Sheet

#9

*in a series of fact sheets
that examine questions
frequently asked about
the criminal justice
system.*

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Reconsidering Community Corrections in Ontario

While we expect that a person who commits a crime is held accountable for his/her behaviour, we should also expect, because it is in our best interest in the long-term, that punishment does not preclude rehabilitation.

How effective is the Ontario provincial corrections system in changing criminal behaviour? Are there people in Ontario jails who should be in the community? Are the costs of keeping these people in jail, as opposed to community-based alternatives, justified? This Fact Sheet examines whether Ontario is making the best use of community corrections by presenting information on the nature, history and value of community corrections, assessing reforms implemented or

proposed by the provincial government and exploring trends in incarceration and conditional release in Ontario.

What is Community Corrections?

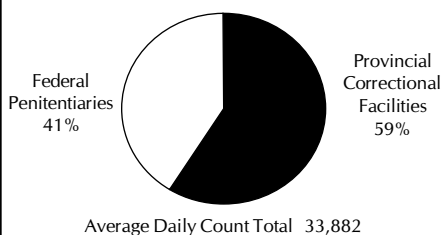
Community corrections allow the offender to serve all or part of his/her sentence in the community under supervision. The term applies to those activities aimed at:

- 1) diverting the person from incarceration (probation),
- 2) providing temporary relief from incarceration (temporary absence), and
- 3) shortening the length of incarceration (parole).

Canada enacted legislation in the late 1800's allowing for probation and parole. Probation services in Ontario were established through legislation in 1921 but a province-wide probation service was not operational until the 1950's. To allow for greater provincial control over parole for prisoners under its jurisdiction, Ontario established its own Board of Parole in 1978.

The rationale for developing community corrections programs was founded on the growing recognition of the dehumanizing and debilitating effects of imprisonment and that *community corrections programs were at least as effective and much less costly than incarceration.* Notable initiatives in Ontario included alternative

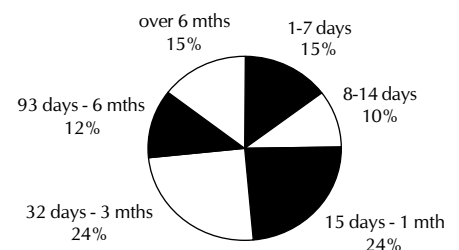
**Adults Held in Custody by Jurisdiction
Canada 1994/95**



Source: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Adult Correctional Services in Canada 1994-95.*

The provincial government is responsible for community sanctions (probation, fines, restitution, Community Services Orders) and for the imprisonment of offenders sentenced to less than 2 years. Many of those in provincial prison are serving very short sentences (25% are for 14 days or less). Relatively few are serving sentences of more than 6 months.

**Sentence Length of Admissions
Ontario Provincial Correctional Facilities
1994/95**



sentencing options such as community service order and victim/offender reconciliation programs, bail supervision programs, a network of halfway houses, and special programs for offenders in the community such as employment programs and drug and alcohol programs.

What does it cost and does it work?

The daily cost of incarcerating an offender in an Ontario provincial prison is \$125. A person is supervised in the community for about 20% of the cost of incarceration. Even the more costly measure of maintaining an offender in a halfway house saves us about \$50 a day compared to the cost of imprisonment.

We reduce the costs of corrections and make communities safer through activities which reduce re-offending. The research evidence shows that community corrections strategies can be very effective at reducing re-offending. Important studies conducted in Canada and internationally by researchers such as Gendreau, Ross, Andrews, Bonta and others show that:

- i) criminal sanctions without correctional treatment (punishment alone) slightly increase the rate of re-offending,
 - ii) community-based treatment services yield more positive effects than treatment services within correctional facilities, and
 - iii) the impact of appropriate treatment on reducing recidivism is greater for higher-risk offenders than for lower-risk offenders.
- (Tables 1 & 2)

Given the substantially better results that can be achieved through community corrections, it makes good sense to use these methods wherever appropriate.

Table 1

Type of Intervention	Effect on Recidivism
Increase in the severity of penalty	+ 7%
Appropriate treatment in custody	-15% to -20%
Appropriate treatment in the community	-40%

Source: D.A. Andrews, "Elements of what works", presentation at JHSO Conference '94

Table 2

Offender risk-level group	Impact of appropriate treatment on recidivism
Lower-risk offenders	-11%
Higher-risk offenders	-26%

Source: D.A. Andrews, "Criminal recidivism is predictable and can be influenced: An update", *Forum on Correctional Research*, 8(3), September 1996.

Ontario: Less community corrections, more incarceration

Despite the tremendous cost of both incarceration and re-offending that comes with an over-reliance on incarceration, Ontario continues to incarcerate low-risk offenders in provincial prisons in increasing numbers and to minimize the use of community corrections. Recent "reforms" implemented or proposed by the present government include:

- 1) the closure of virtually all halfway houses for provincial prisoners,
- 2) the introduction of electronic monitoring,
- 3) the reduction or elimination of funding for community-based programs and services for offenders,
- 4) the building of six "superjails" to accommodate as many as 1700 inmates each to replace smaller local jails and older prisons, and

5) the reduction of releases on Ontario parole.

The province of Ontario has developed no strategies to reduce the prison populations. No plan for community corrections has been announced. Clearly this government is investing heavily in prison-based punishment.

Quebec and New Brunswick: More community corrections, less incarceration

In contrast with Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick are in the process of closing some of their provincial prisons. Both provinces recognized the ineffectiveness of incarceration and the value of community-based solutions. New Brunswick plans to reinvest a substantial portion of money saved from the closure of institutions into enhanced community corrections.

Trends in Ontario Provincial Prison Populations

From 1978/79 to 1994/95, the average daily count in Ontario provincial prisons increased by 39%. The factors contributing to this growth include:

1) More people are remanded to custody

Remand to custody refers to imprisonment while awaiting trial. Since 1978/79 the average daily count of people on remand has increased by 128% and the number of admissions has increased 99% (Figures 1 and 2). Not only are more people being admitted on remand but they are spending more time in prison before they are released on bail or sentenced. Most of the growth in the remand population has occurred within the last 5 years.

A number of factors may account for these recent dramatic increases, including more people with limited financial and personal resources due to the effects of the economic recession, cutbacks to Legal Aid, and court delays. What is *not* the cause is changes to the crime rate. Over the last 5 years, the rate of crime in Ontario has been declining.

2) Longer sentences

The average daily count of Ontario sentenced prisoners increased by 12% even though virtually the same number of people were admitted to provincial prisons under sentence in 1978/79 as in 1994/95 (Figures 1 & 2). The proportion of short sentences has decreased. The median sentence (the point at which 50% of the sentences are longer) increased from 26 days to 33 days. What appear to be relatively minor changes in sentencing patterns of a few days or weeks have had a major impact on provincial prison populations.

dramatic decreases occurred between 1994/95 and 1995/96 when the Ontario Board of Parole was the target of intense media attention and political pressure.

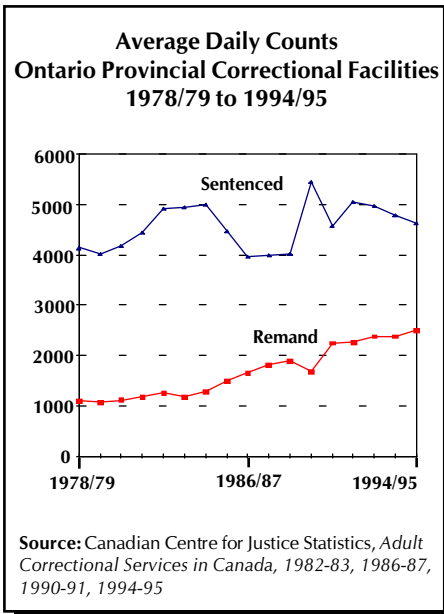


Figure 1

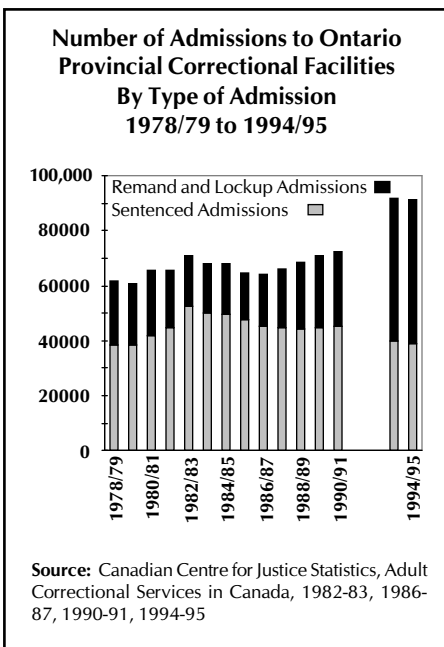


Figure 2

Trends in Conditional Release from Ontario Provincial Prisons

Temporary Absences and Ontario Parole are important ways for the correctional system to control the size of prison populations. Data for Ontario Parole and Temporary Absences show the following trends:

1) Fewer Temporary Absences

The number of Temporary Absences (T.A.) declined by 21% over the past five years. The largest decreases occurred in the last two years but the full impact of the closure of provincially funded halfway houses is not yet reflected in the statistics. The number of T.A.s to permit people to go to school or to work declined by 45% in the last two years (Figure 3). An increasing number of people, typically serving short sentences for minor offences, are remaining in jail.

2) Fewer Ontario Paroles

Over the past ten years, the number of applications for parole decreased by 39% and the grant rate dropped from 50% to 42% (Figure 4). These changes resulted in 1,931 fewer releases in 1995/96 than in 1985/86. The most

Temporary Absences Activated for Academic/Vocational/Industrial or for Employment Ontario Provincial Corrections 1990/91 to 1995/96

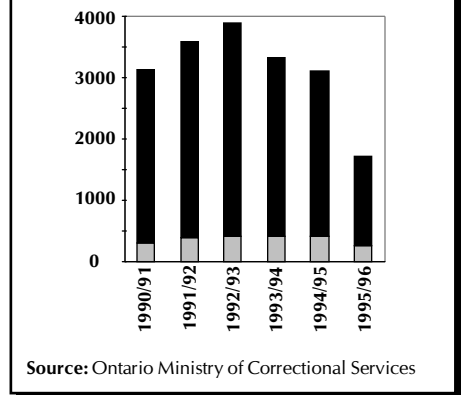


Figure 3

Success rates are high, fluctuating between 80% and 86%. The majority of the failures on parole are not for new crimes but for failure to abide by the rules of parole. Only 21% of the 284 revocations in 1995/96 were for new crimes.

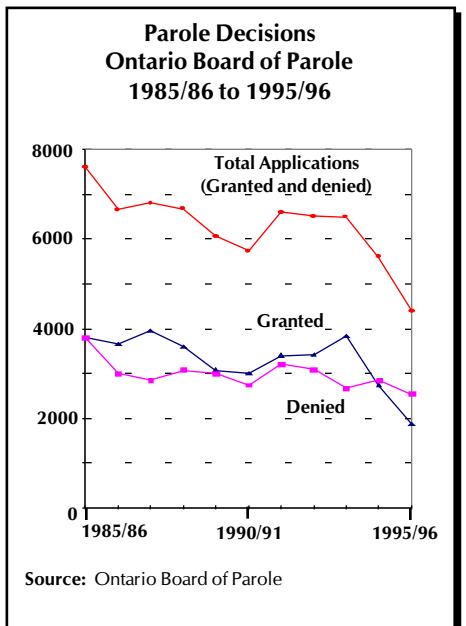


Figure 4

What has it cost?

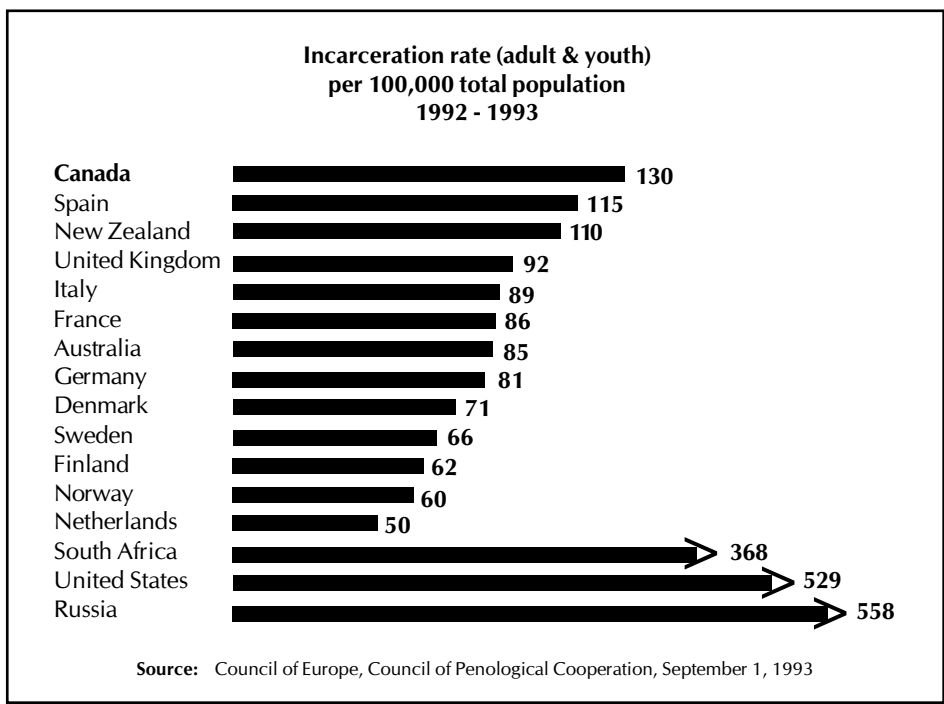
Using the current average daily cost of \$125 to incarcerate an offender in an Ontario prison, we spend:

- \$64 million annually to incarcerate the **increased** numbers of prisoners on remand,
- \$22 million annually to imprison the **additional** numbers of sentenced prisoners due to slightly longer sentences, and
- \$18 million to keep **additional** offenders in prison because of the decline in parole.

In total, the increased use of incarceration costs approximately \$104 million per year. In addition, the government has announced planned expenditures of \$250 million to build new "superjails". At the same time, cheaper community alternatives such as halfway houses (for which the government assumed no capital costs) were cut.

At a time when we are cutting back on health care and education, it is troubling that the province of Ontario continues to spend such colossal sums of money on imprisonment while reducing less costly and more effective community-based alternatives.

We can reduce the prison populations and correctional costs through reasonable and simple changes to parole decision-making and temporary absence programs using effective community-based correctional programs.



A paper outlining the proposed alternative strategies is available from the Society.

We can reallocate correctional resources and make a difference

Presently, the Ontario government spends approximately 85% of its corrections budget (\$345 million) on institutions. Redirecting some of these prisoners and resources to community-based services will give residents of Ontario a more effective, just and humane correctional system. It will also cost less.

How Much is Enough?: Basic Facts about Incarceration

- Canada's incarceration rate is higher than most other democracies in the world. (Figure 5) The adult incarceration rate was 153 per 100,000 adult population in 1994/95 compared to 124 in 1980/81 - an average annual increase of 1.5%.
- Provincial prisoners account for 59% of adults held in custody and 96% of admissions to custody. Offenders under federal jurisdiction (serving 2 years or more) account for the remainder.
- The provincial adult incarceration rate in Quebec, the closest equivalent to Ontario in terms of size and urban make-up, is 27% lower.

Effective, just and humane responses to crime and its causes.

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