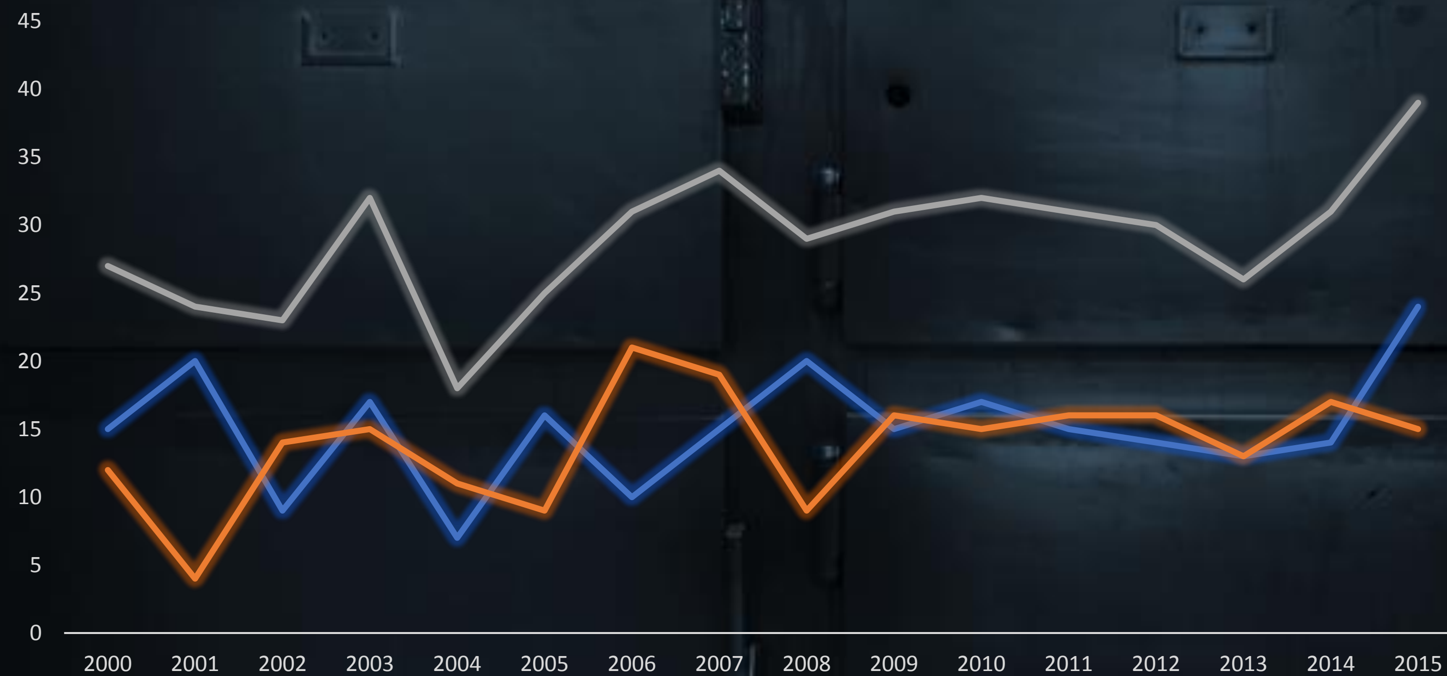
DEATHS IN CUSTODY

DEATHS IN ONTARIO'S PROVINCIAL & FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS



BASED ON ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM 2000 – 2015 OBTAINED FROM ONTARIO'S OFFICE OF CHIEF CORONER (JANUARY 16, 2017).

TOTAL

TOTAL DEATHS IN ALL OF ONTARIO'S CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS FROM 2000-2015

463

FEDERAL

TOTAL DEATHS IN ONTARIO'S FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS FROM 2000-2015

241

PROVINCIAL

TOTAL DEATHS IN ONTARIO'S PROVINCIAL INSTITUTIONS FROM 2000-2015

222

Canadian prisons and correctional institutions concentrate some of the most ill people in society. On average, people in prisons and correctional institutions die much younger than the general population.

Causes of deaths in jails are associated with underlying health concerns. A substantial number of deaths in provincial correctional institutions had a history of mental illness or substance abuse.[1]

INQUESTS

Inquests are mandatory in Ontario for all deaths in provincial correctional institutions, except for those deaths which are deemed "**natural causes.**" In Ontario's correctional institutions approximately half of all deaths, from 2000 to 2015, were as a result of "natural causes."[2] For the large number of incarcerated individuals who die in Ontario's correctional institutions due to heart disease, cancer, or respiratory issues, the inquest is not mandatory. This is a significant gap. The reality is that Ontario's correctional institutions are full of sick people, and every year multiple people die due to their ill health. Yet there is no mandatory mechanism, or formal public examination to investigate and prevent those types deaths.

The purpose of the inquest is to try and prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future. Following an inquest, jurors make recommendations to government agencies on how to prevent future deaths from occurring. Yet there is no publicly available tracking mechanism for implementation of jury these recommendations. There is no mechanism to ensure that recommendations are ultimately implemented.

Several Ontario studies[3] have concluded that many deaths in custody could be preventable. The consistently high number of deaths by suicide and natural causes suggests a need for a new discussion on mortality risk in correctional institutions.

UNLOCKING CHANGE: DECRIMINALIZING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN ONTARIO

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1. Vaughan, A, Denise M Zabkiewicz, and Simon N Verdun-Jones. (2017). "In custody deaths of men related to mental illness and substance use." Journal of Forensic Legal Medicine, 48. A cross-sectional analysis of administrative records in Ontario, Canada
2. Based on analysis of data from 2000-2015 obtained from Ontario's Office of Chief Coroner (January 16.2017)
3. See: Wobeser WL, Datema J, Bechard B, Ford P. (2002) Causes of death among people in custody in Ontario, 1990-1999. Canadian Medical Association Journal; Antonowicz, Daniel and John Winterdyk. (2014). A review of deaths in custody in three Canadian provinces, Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 56(1).