

SUBMISSION

**Poverty Reduction
Strategy Consultations**

MARCH 30, 2020

John Howard Society of Ontario

Centre of Research & Policy

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About the John Howard Society of Ontario

The John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO) is dedicated to creating safer communities by helping to foster a truly effective criminal justice system. The John Howard Society's programs help youth and adults develop life, relationship and coping skills, to help them reach their full potential and live productive lives. We deliver these programs across Ontario, through 19 local John Howard Societies at over 110 program office sites, to foster resilient and safe communities.

We provide over 80 different programs and services that help over 100,000 individuals across Ontario annually. Services range from prevention programs for high risk youth through to housing and reintegration services for those who have been released from prison back into our communities.

Founded in 2003, the Centre of Research & Policy (the Centre) at JHSO facilitates interdisciplinary innovation in the criminal justice space by combining partnerships with front-line service providers and creative and impact-oriented researchers and analysts. As a result, JHSO is a leader in non-partisan research, evidence-based program development, policy reform, and public education in the justice sector. We specialize in translating research into action.

Introduction

Please accept this document as the submission of the John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO) to the 2020 Poverty Reduction Strategy consultations.

We know based on the academic research, as well as direct experience working with our clients, that poverty and criminal justice involvement go hand-in-hand. The criminal justice system continues to be used to catch those who fall through the gaps in our social safety net. We are confident that coordinated and concerted efforts to improve social policies, as well as making targeted investments that address the social determinants of health, can have both immediate and long-term positive effects on the outcomes and livelihood of Ontarians. We are pleased to have the opportunity to provide input into this process.

Prior to outlining our recommendations for a renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy, a bit of context: the total provincial expenditures related to criminal justice and social services are immense, and there are many opportunities for upstream investments that will achieve better outcomes for Ontarians and save on costlier downstream expenses. Our provincial correctional institutions are facing growing resource pressures and operational challenges, and our criminal courts continue to face challenges with packed dockets, delay and time-to-trial. These challenges are by no means new, and we appreciate the steps that the provincial government is taking to address them.

There is a clear way to both reduce provincial expenditures on corrections and create healthier, more equitable communities: by relying less on the reactive criminal justice system and investing in housing, community development, and employment programs that will serve to stabilize vulnerable populations, and build their skills and support their engagement in the labour market.

Homelessness and the Justice Sector

Homelessness is enormously costly to the province, as is housing people in correctional institutions. Criminal justice involvement is deeply connected to housing instability. A study by the John Howard Society of Toronto in 2010 determined that 44.6% of releasees from jails in Toronto were homeless, i.e. staying in a public shelter, a treatment centre, the residence of a friend or living on the streets.¹ There are many factors that increase the likelihood of individuals facing homelessness upon release from a correctional institution. Even small periods on remand can lead to loss of housing due to inability to pay rent or mortgage payments. Loss of income during incarceration may also impact an individual's ability to make payments upon their release. Justice-involved populations also have higher rates of mental health and addictions issues which can be additional barriers to accessing stable housing.

Individuals that enter correctional institutions often leave without stable housing. Studies have shown that individuals with no fixed address are often repeat clients in provincial correctional institutions as housing instability is often compounded with other issues and increases risk of further involvement with the justice system. Homelessness is also linked to poorer health outcomes, resulting in over-reliance on emergency care and impacting community health.

Housing is a crucial part of successful reintegration. Models that provide housing and wrap-around services facilitate re-entry into the community and address both issues of homelessness and co-occurring challenges preventing further justice system involvement and costly reliance on emergency rooms and shelters. Transitional housing supports for incarcerated populations in particular can produce a lifetime savings of \$350,000 per person.²

In addition to investing in supportive housing, opportunities should also be explored to prevent loss of housing for individuals while they are incarcerated to reduce the cases of homelessness upon release. Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rules allow for some allowances for individuals who experience part-time incarceration (for example, serving intermittent sentences on the weekends) recognizing the need to maintain housing. There are also policies introduced to make it easier for individuals to reapply for Ontario Works (OW) and ODSP upon release, however, that can be too late for some individuals who may lose their housing as a result of loss of earnings while incarcerated on remand.

The previous Poverty Reduction Strategy (2016) prioritized access to affordable, transitional and supportive housing and we urge the government to continue those goals with a focus on justice-involved populations. JHSO has the following suggestions to address issues with housing instability, promote successful reintegration and reduce the burden on emergency services and corrections connected to homelessness:

¹ John Howard Society of Ontario (2016) Reintegration in Ontario. Retrieved from: <https://johnhoward.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Reintegration-in-Ontario-Final.pdf>

² Stapleton, J., Pooran, B., Doucet, R. (2011) Making Toronto Safer A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Transitional Housing Supports for Men Leaving Incarceration. Toronto: John Howard Society of Toronto at page 2

1. Policies related to suspension of benefits for OW and ODSP recipients should allow for benefits to continue for a reasonable time while the individual is incarcerated to prevent loss of housing upon release. For individuals receiving rent-geared-to-income housing, subsidies are discontinued for residents serving a sentence of 90 days or more. Without the subsidy, the individual is effectively evicted, as the market rate is often not affordable for these residents, even before their incarceration. This policy should be reviewed with a view to lengthen the maximum allowable period of time members of a household can be absent from a unit while continuing to receive a rent-geared-to-income subsidy in order to prevent evictions. There should also be a review of other existing policies in Ontario to support a loss of eviction strategy for people who are incarcerated for short periods of time.
2. In order to address high rates of homelessness, the government should invest in affordable, transitional, rent-geared-to-income and long-term housing. Investing in a number of different housing options for low-income, vulnerable populations saves costs later incurred through homelessness, justice-involvement and reliance on emergency shelters.

We urge the government to use the Housing First model as an approach to providing stable housing for vulnerable, chronically homeless people with complex needs and justice-involved populations. The Housing First model is an evidence-based approach that has proven effective for high needs individuals with mental health issues and/or substance use issues. The Housing First approach connects individuals and families with stable housing and then provides wrap around services to help them keep their housing and avoid returning to homelessness. This approach would be beneficial for individuals who are released from prison, in order to facilitate their successful reintegration and provide services in response to co-occurring issues. JHSO would be pleased to discuss housing options using this approach and can share learnings from JHS Local Offices who run residential facilities operating under this model.

3. We note that the provincial government has made the intention to invest in supportive housing as part of a broader mental health strategy and we applaud this decision. JHSO suggests ensuring justice-involved populations are specifically included in a supportive housing strategy. The overall lack of supportive and affordable housing compounded with the difficulties faced by individuals with mental health and addictions issues and justice-involvement warrant a targeted response. As more supportive housing units are created, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Solicitor General should target a portion of all new supportive housing rent supplements to the population of individuals with mental health and addictions problems who are justice-involved.
4. We also encourage provincial government investments, through the Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG), in a bail bed expansion into more communities across the province. Individuals who lack a fixed address or cannot return to their residence as a result of court orders may spend additional time in detention, costing the province money and potentially creating barriers for their reintegration. Providing supervised housing that is supportive – not shelters – helps stabilize populations who have more complex needs and enhances community safety. JHS currently operates MAG-funded bail beds in Thunder Bay and Ottawa, both of which are often

at capacity and demonstrate cost savings through housing long term residents who would otherwise be incarcerated. Bail beds are less costly than prison stays and connect residents to critical supports, supporting their reintegration upon release. JHSO would be pleased to discuss opportunities to scale up current bail bed services or explore expansions to benefit communities across Ontario.

5. Conditional release options such as temporary absence passes (TAs) and parole are important ways for Ontario to reduce correctional populations while intensively supervising reintegrating individuals in the community. These forms of release have been shown to be more effective than holding prisoners until statutory release or warrant expiry in numerous studies. In short, providing prisoners supports and supervision to assist them with a gradual re-entry is much more effective at reducing reoffending and other negative outcomes (i.e. homelessness) than simply releasing prisoners at the end of their sentence. JHSO applauds the Solicitor General's announcement in March 2020 that in response to COVID-19 pressures, it is expanding the Superintendents' powers to grant temporary absence passes, and will allow for remote parole hearings. These actions will help keep our communities safe while also easing pressures within correctional institutions. Before their closure in 1995, many people released on TAs or parole who required stable housing or other support services would reside in provincial halfway houses. The average daily count in halfway houses was approximately 400 just prior to closure (JHSO 1998). The importance of more halfway houses, in addition to transitional housing, is clear: in addition to demonstrating better re-entry outcomes, the province could save significant amounts of money in the long-term by investing in community corrections in the short-term. In summary, we recommend that the provincial government invest in the re-establishment of provincial halfway houses and community residential facilities for prisoners on conditional release or parole and/or persons whose custodial sentence can be safely served in the community.

The provincial government should also consider funding community criminal justice organizations to operate Reporting Centres for individuals who are on TAs or provincial parole, but not residing in halfway houses. These highly structured non-residential Reporting Centres—like those that currently operate for federally sentenced individuals—could provide monitoring, substance abuse testing and programming, and a full menu of supports that address education and employment, mental health and addictions, and longer-term housing needs of high-risk clients. Federally, the Reporting Centres are not viewed as a replacement for halfway houses or community residential facilities, but instead they provide a less intensive supervision option for those transitioning back to the community who need it. Even if provincial halfway houses are not reinstated, Reporting Centres could relieve much of the overcrowding pressures in provincial correctional institutions while offering a safer supervised transition and re-entry mechanism.

Ensuring that the Employment Ontario Transformation Works for Ontario's Most Vulnerable

JHS offices are key partners in the provision of employment services in Ontario. Six of the local John Howard Societies are contracted to deliver Employment Ontario (EO) resource centres and employment services, and an additional 4 are funded to deliver pre-apprenticeship, literacy and basic skills and or/

Labour Market Partnerships programming. While JHS offices provide general employment services as part of their EO contracts, our organization really excels at working with clients with complex needs who are facing multiple barriers to employment, including those with police records and recent justice-involvement.

JHS has an in-depth understanding of the multitude of needs and challenges facing our clients, many of whom are social assistance recipients. The incidence of mental health concerns and addictions, developmental disabilities and delays, post-traumatic stress disorder, and acquired brain injuries among those involved in the criminal justice system is significant. People with these complex issues who come into conflict with the law often walk through the doors of community criminal justice organizations like JHS first. These tend to be some of the most challenging clients in the employment services context, since a police record in and of itself closes many employment doors, and when you add the co-occurring barriers these clients face, these cases end up consuming more staff time and resources. However, they are also the more costly population to the overall social service system – they are more heavily reliant on multiple stabilization services, OW, ODSP and other benefits – and therefore are a critical population to target for labour market training and inclusion. However, they need to be *appropriately* targeted and served.

Criminal records are much more common than one may think: 114 out of every 100,000 Canadians have a criminal record of conviction (Public Safety Canada 2019). That statistic does not capture all of those individuals who were charged but not convicted of criminal offences, but still face the fallout from jail time or public allegations. Research clearly demonstrates that people with police records face distinctly difficult odds securing stable employment and are perhaps the single most excluded identifiable population from the labour market. There is significant literature that suggests that a criminal record can reduce the chances of employment by 50%.³ Opportunities for individuals with a history of criminal justice involvement remain quite limited, thereby contributing to their ongoing status as an underserved, vulnerable, and high-need population in the context of employment.

Despite the clear evidence of the impact of a criminal record on employment, previous justice involvement is not factored into an individual's suitability or streaming for the existing EO programs and services. We hear from frontline service providers in employment services that people with past justice involvement present added case management complexity, and these added challenges and barriers are not being captured or tracked by current EO metrics. We see the current EO transformation as an opportunity to remedy this. In summary, the justice-involved clients are often the most barriered when it comes to employment, the most difficult to secure long-term, gainful employment for, but if successfully served, will yield the biggest cost savings for government. These clients are more likely "Stream C" based on their myriad barriers, but are not uniformly receiving any specialized focus on their distinct challenges as jobseekers.

In support of the provincial government's transformation of Employment Ontario (EO) services, and as part of the considerations when developing the new Poverty Reduction Strategy, JHSO has the following suggestions as the coordination of EO services is transitioned to the new Service System Managers

³ Emsellem, Maurice & Natividad Rodriguez, Michelle. (2015). Advancing a Federal Fair Chance Hiring Agenda: Background Check Reforms in Over 100 Cities, Countries, & States Pave the Way for Presidential Action. National Employment Law Project.


(SSMs) in the prototype areas, and we would welcome further discussions on how they could be operationalized:

1. The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development's (MLTSD) "Key Performance Indicators – Addendum" released on October 21, 2019 provides an overview of how SSMs – and service providers – will be rated on employment service performance. This document, which supplements the Performance Management Framework (PMF) outlined in the Call for Proposals, suggests that: "Throughout the prototype phase, the ministry will work collaboratively with SSMs to evolve the PMF, developing more precise measures and targets based on evidence and continuous improvement principles." These documents, along with the historical EO reporting/tracking, do not segment, track or target populations based on previous justice-involvement. Yet, as previously noted, these can be among the most barriered of clients who require more intensive case management, longer service engagement and touchpoints, and wrap-around supports. We strongly urge the provincial government to ensure that SSMs are measured against their service to the justice-involved population, in addition to identified groups such as Indigenous populations and populations with disabilities, and build these metrics into the SSM's accountability framework. Enhancing referrals to, and expansion of, specialized employment services equipped to deal with justice-involved populations, who frequently present with a wide variety of issues in addition to a criminal record, would improve labour market engagement and ensure that services targeting this complex population are tailored to their needs.
2. When it comes to setting parameters for how the SSMs coordinate and allocate funds in their catchment areas, especially for the most complex/Stream C clients, we would recommend that a higher value be assigned to EO-funded agencies that are multi-service agencies. One of the significant value-add benefits of JHS offices, for example, is that employment services clients who have intersecting support needs can readily access additional services within the same organization. For example, a job seeking client who is also facing eviction can access housing supports all at the same organization. These ancillary benefits can improve an individual's chance at successfully maintaining long-term employment. If an individual can get these additional wrap-around services under one organizational roof, at no added cost to the provincial government, we submit that this feature should be scored more favourably.
3. We also note that the provincial government recently announced the Workforce Development and Training Review, and JHSO looks forward to participating in those consultations. At this point, we would just emphasize for the purposes of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the EO transformation, that the provincial government strongly consider enhancing financial incentives and/or subsidies for employers who are willing to hire and train justice-involved clients, with an emphasis on providing livable, decent wages and work. These types of models have proven very successful in jurisdictions such as the U.S., where employers who would otherwise not have considered hiring people with criminal records actually changed their practices, to the benefit of the companies, the jobseekers and ultimately, the economy.
4. We strongly recommend formally evaluating the success of the three prototype areas in the EO transformation before scaling the model provincewide, to ensure that the EO transformation

goals are on track and that in particular, the social assistance and Stream C clients are being appropriately served and that any necessary changes to the approach and model can be identified and remedied. As part of this, it could be worthwhile to establish a provincial advisory group comprised of key stakeholders across the EO/social assistance service landscape.

Thank you for reviewing our submission to the Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation process. We welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the above in greater detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paula Osmok". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paula Osmok
Executive Director