



SUBMISSION
**2023 Pre-Budget
Submissions**



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About the John Howard Society of Ontario

For more than 90 years, we've worked to keep the humanity in justice.

Today we continue to build a safer Ontario by supporting the people and communities affected by the criminal justice system. Our 19 local offices deliver more than 80 evidence-based programs and services focused on prevention, intervention and re-integration across the province. These range from helping youth develop the life skills that will let them achieve their full potential, to helping families navigate issues of criminal justice, to providing job training for those leaving incarceration so they can contribute to their community in a meaningful way. We promote practical, equitable policies while raising awareness of the root causes of crime and calling on Ontarians to share responsibility for addressing them. Within the system itself, we advocate for the fair treatment of every individual. Each year, our work impacts the lives of more than 100,000 Ontarians.

Please accept this document as the submissions of the John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO) for the 2023 pre-budget consultations. Thank you for considering our submissions.

As we move forward from the pandemic, the need for community services has never been so pronounced. Yet community service providers struggle to fund programming, retain staff and build sustainability into program models. Investments in community-based programming are a cost efficient, effective way to strengthen the criminal justice and social service system and help communities thrive.

The following submissions outline three key recommendations where investments into community services could increase efficiencies, address challenges and promote community safety:

- Investment in bail supervision programs
- Support community organizations providing community reintegration services
- Investment in supportive housing with a special focus on justice involved populations

Bail Supervision Programs

In Ontario, remanded individuals account for an average of 77% of the daily population of people in provincial institutions.¹ About two thirds of cases result in a guilty finding and 40% of those cases result in a custodial sentence.² This means that a significant portion of the population inside provincial institutions will spend weeks or months incarcerated never to be found guilty. For those who are found guilty, the only experience of incarceration they may have is pre-trial detention.

Incarceration has significant impacts on individuals, their families, and communities as whole. Pre-trial detention can result in loss of employment, housing, custody of children and can impact physical and mental health. Any time spent in correctional institutions is destabilizing and can lead to, rather than prevent, further justice system involvement. There are also significant financial implications, as it costs upwards of \$300 a day to house an individual in a correctional institution.

Community-based programming is more effective and cost efficient. Bail supervision programs are a low cost, community alternative to remand. Bail verification and supervision programs (BVSP) ensure that individuals deemed lower risk are not held in pre-trial detention, thereby reducing the burden on courts and correctional institutions. They have a proven track record of ensuring individuals return to court and comply with the conditions of their release.

¹ Ministry of the Solicitor General. (2019) Adult Correctional Institutions.

https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/1-14AdultCorrections_en21.pdf

² Miladinovic, Z. (2019) Adult criminal and youth court statistics in Canada, 2016/2017. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00002-eng.htm>

In addition to community supervision, BVSP connects people to critical supports in the community to address need and risk factors. Across the province, JHS-operated BVSP provides customized case management for each individual and connects clients with appropriate services both in-house and with other local service providers. Enhanced bail workers are specialized in mental health and addictions and provide extra support and case management to clients with compounding needs and challenges.

Despite the important role they play, bail supervision programs are currently under-resourced in Ontario and many service providers are operating the program at a deficit. Investment into these programs is a tangible way to support individuals and contribute to community safety. Investments to expand enhanced BVSP staff across the province would ensure more clients are given appropriate support and referrals to address needs and risk factors and prevent recidivism.

Key recommendation: Invest in bail supervision programs that have a proven track record and provide a lower cost alternative to remand.

Community Reintegration Programs

We commend the government for their focus on reintegration and recognize the advancements made by implementing the new community reintegration strategy. As a result of the new strategy, and notably, the recent progress of the Community Reintegration Planning Tables, more individuals will be connected with the appropriate referrals to community agencies providing reintegration support.

Community agencies have long been supporting individuals as they transition from corrections into community. Yet agencies are under-resourced and face growing barriers to providing sustainable programming. Investments into community organizations will ensure that efforts to strengthen reintegration supports inside corrections are successfully carried out in the community. Additional resources are required to ensure community infrastructure is equipped to support the increased demand that will result from continued progress on the community reintegration strategy and the growing need for community programming. Each Ontario region should have the appropriate community services to meet the needs of Black and Indigenous populations, individuals experiencing mental health issues, addictions and other specialized supports. Ensuring everyone has access to the essential services and programming they require after leaving correctional institutions will prevent future justice system involvement and benefit community safety long-term.

Key recommendation: Invest in community-based organizations that provide crucial programs to individuals that are being released from provincial correctional institutions.

Housing for Justice-Involved Populations

A key challenge for many Ontarians, but particularly for justice involved individuals, is access to housing. Before an individual is able to follow through on any other referrals or community support post release, they need housing. For individuals out on bail or probation, conditions may limit available options and people with criminal records often face barriers to accessing housing.

Investments towards a range of supportive housing options targeted at individuals recently released from provincial institutions would help address this critical gap. Supportive housing options should be inclusive of mental health and addictions needs, as well as the specific needs of Black and Indigenous populations who are overrepresented in corrections and often face compounding issues upon release in the community. Programs should operate under the Housing First model which prioritizes housing and ensures individuals with compounding issues are not barred from access.

Transitional housing for individuals recently released from correctional institutions would help with stabilization and fill a critical need. Transitional housing programs should provide shelter and access to supports to help promote a successful reintegration. “Bail beds” are another example of supportive housing that meets the needs of individuals involved in the justice system. Currently operated by JHS in Thunder Bay and Ottawa, this program provides supervision and supports to individuals on bail – particularly those who do not have a fixed address and might otherwise be held in detention. This saves the province money on individuals that might otherwise have long stays in detention facilities.

Current residential programs could be scaled across the province, relatively quickly. With the appropriate resources, housing programs can meet the needs of individuals with complex needs or those deemed higher risk. These programs stabilize individuals, address need and risk factors and directly contribute to community safety.

Key recommendation: Invest in supportive housing services targeted at individuals with justice system involvement.

Community programming is essential to a functioning criminal justice system and society. Targeted investments would allow service providers to continue providing critical supports and to be able to expand to meet the growing needs and challenges experienced by Ontarians. In order to retain qualified staff and provide consistent programming, longer-term funding would have immense benefit. We look forward to working together to build a safer Ontario. Thank you for considering our submissions.