

March 14<sup>th</sup> 2020

Re: COVID-19 & Incarcerated Peoples

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We are currently in the midst of a global outbreak of COVID-19.

As an organization dedicated to advocating for federally incarcerated women, **CAEFS is concerned about the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) preparedness to manage this outbreak and reduce the harm to people inside.**

While Public Health has indicated that risk is low for the general public, they have identified several groups who are at increased risk of more severe outcomes; these include those who:

- are aged 65 and over
- have compromised immune systems
- have underlying medical conditions

These same groups are also prevalent within our federal prisons. In their most recent report, the Office of the Federal Investigator (OCI) noted that on 2017-18, **25.2% of the federally incarcerated population was 50 years of age and over.** Previous OCI reports also remind us that it is “universally established that **correctional facilities house a number of health-compromised and vulnerable individuals**”.

Furthermore, Public Health has identified the risk of COVID-19 may be **increased for certain settings including, “large gatherings in enclosed spaces”.** Canadian provincial prisons are chronically overcrowded and both federal and provincial prisons are places where people cannot practice social isolation in the same ways that people outside of prisons can, it is nearly impossible. That all incarcerated people are at increased risk for infection is especially concerning given the reports we have received from women inside indicating **ongoing challenges with accessing adequate health care and preventative health measures inside,** including even the most basic of necessities such as soap.

CAEFS advocates that:

- Any person with complex or chronic medical conditions be immediately released to community for treatment;
- People aged 65+ who are at the highest risk of serious illness and death should be released into the community on conditional release;
- Section 81 and 84 should be utilized to transfer Indigenous women into community, and that adequate supports be provided to these communities to respond;
- The use of Community Residential Facilities, Community Based Residential Facilities, Transitional Housing, and ‘Parole to Other’ should be utilized to release incarcerated people as quickly as possible.

- The immediate release of incarcerated mothers and their children in the mother-child program;
- The immediate release of any incarcerated person who is currently at their parole eligibility day, who have completed their correctional programming, OR who could access programming to meet their correctional plan in community.

Section 121(1.b) of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act states that “parole may be granted at any time to an offender [...] whose physical or mental health is likely to suffer serious damage if the offender continues to be held in confinement”. We urge correctional authorities to release as many prisoners as they can using the tools that are at their disposal in order to alleviate the potentially severe negative mental and physical health impacts that come from being incarcerated at a time of national and global health emergency.

It is the responsibility of the government of Canada to protect the people for whom incarceration heightens the urgency of the danger that they face from a global pandemic.