



Canadian Psychiatric Association
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The Canadian Academy
of Psychiatry and the Law
L'Académie canadienne
de psychiatrie et droit

February 4, 2014

The Honourable Steven Blaney, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Public Safety
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

On December 19 the jury of the Ontario coroner's inquest declared the death of Ashley Smith a homicide and put forward 104 recommendations to improve the treatment of inmates with mental illness.

The Canadian Psychiatric Association (CPA), the national voice for Canada's 4,500 psychiatrists, agrees with the general theme of the jury recommendations that the treatment of federal inmates with mental illness must change to prevent further tragedies like that of Ashley Smith. As the Minister of Public Safety, responsible for Correctional Services Canada, we urge you to act swiftly.

The problem of mental illness in Canada's jails and correctional facilities has become worse in the years since Ashley Smith's death. The number of offenders with serious mental health problems is growing. According to the Correctional Investigator's 2011-2012 Annual Report, 62 per cent of offenders entering a federal penitentiary were "flagged" as requiring a follow-up mental health assessment or service. The same report noted that in the last five years the number of self-injury incidents in federal correctional facilities almost tripled, disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and women offenders. The suicide rate for incarcerated people is six times that in the community and the homicide rate is almost 14 times greater.

The quality of treatment for people with mental illness in Canada's jails has long been of concern to the CPA. In its 2011 position statement, *The Treatment of Mental Illness in Correctional Settings*, the Association made a series of recommendations to improve treatment. Among these we suggested creating a special mobile team within CSC to deal with complex treatment-refractory inmates who engage in repeated self-injurious behaviours. We also proposed the establishment of a joint task force involving the CPA, Canadian Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (CAPL), provincial and federal correctional services to develop a mental health strategy for inmates with mental illness.

In the coming months the Canadian Psychiatric Association, in partnership with CAPL, will examine the jury's recommendations in detail. Both CPA and CAPL would welcome a meeting with you to explore how we may contribute to the efforts of Correctional Services Canada (CSC) and the federal government to develop effective, evidence-based management and treatment strategies for federal inmates.

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In light of the recommendations arising from the inquest into the tragic death of Ashley Smith, and the earlier findings in the Correctional Investigator's reports, it is essential that CSC take measures now to better address the mental health needs of vulnerable inmates like Ashley Smith.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Teehan', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Michael Teehan
President, Canadian Psychiatric Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Fedoroff', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Paul Fedoroff
Board Member, Canadian Psychiatric Association
President, Canadian Academy of Psychiatry and the Law