



# Research at a glance

## Summary of the 2007 National Inmate Infectious Diseases and Risk-Behaviours Survey for Women

**KEY WORDS:** *risk-behaviours, harm-reduction, health education, HIV, HCV, testing, treatment, infectious diseases, inmate survey, women, Aboriginal self-identification*

### Why we did this study

In part, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) conducted the National Inmate Infectious Diseases and Risk-Behaviours Survey to obtain information about the health risk-behaviours, use of health programs, and knowledge of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) of women to better address their health needs.

### What we did

In collaboration with inmates and the Public Health Agency of Canada, CSC developed a self-administered questionnaire. All women were invited to complete the questionnaire. Inmate participation was voluntary. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, an external private company administered and retained the anonymous questionnaires, and provided CSC with an anonymous database for analysis. In total, 351 women inmates across Canada completed the questionnaire in 2007.

### What we found

Women entering federal penitentiaries report a high rate of drug- and sex-related risk-behaviours during their last months in the community, but these behaviours decline substantially during incarceration. Compared to non-Aboriginal women, the decline in drug use is not as great among Aboriginal women.

Generally, women were aware of the harm reduction items available to them and tried to access them. The majority of women who report engaging in sex, injecting drugs, tattooing, and/or piercing in penitentiaries attempt to access and/or use harm-reduction items like condoms and bleach. Some experience access problems, such as broken or empty dispensers.

11% of women reported participating in the Methadone Maintenance Treatment Program (presently known as Opiate Substitution Therapy). Aboriginal women were more likely than non-

Aboriginal women to report trying to join the program in the past but not being on the program currently.

More than 80% of women were tested for HIV and HCV during their current sentence. Compared to non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women were less likely to report being tested while at CSC. The most common reported reason for not being tested was not being offered the test.

The self-reported rates of HIV and HCV infections among women, especially Aboriginal women are substantially greater than the Canadian population. Women who have HIV worry about discrimination in federal penitentiaries.

### What it means

The results of this survey are being used to enhance current education, prevention, testing and treatment interventions at CSC. For example, Aboriginal women were identified as a high-risk group with public health needs in terms of injection drug use and rates of HIV and HCV infection. Thus, a potential action resulting from the survey is the development of culturally appropriate, effective interventions that decrease risk-behaviours and increase harm-reducing behaviours to meet the needs of these women.

### For more information

Thompson, J., Zakaria, D. & Grant, B. (2011).

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