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# Research at a glance

## Self-Reported Physical Health Status of Incoming Federally-Sentenced Women Offenders

**KEY WORDS:** *physical health conditions, offender health status, women offenders*

### What it means

Relative to men, health services for the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) incarcerated women may require a greater focus on promoting awareness of and treating some health conditions such as those that are related to blood borne viruses such as hepatitis C.

Overall, results can be used as a benchmark to examine health trends among CSC women offenders over time.

### What we found

- The most common physical health conditions cited by newly-admitted women offenders were back pain (26%), head injury (23%), Hepatitis C virus (HCV) (19%), and asthma (16%).
- Rates were generally similar to those of men. Exceptions to this similarity were head injury, which was higher for men than women (34% vs. 23%), and HCV, which was higher for women than men (19% vs. 9%).
- Women offenders reported considerably higher rates of HCV than women in the general Canadian population (19% vs. 1%). Women also had slightly higher rates of asthma, back pain, and obesity. Other conditions compared were not higher among women offenders than Canadian women.
- A greater proportion of older women offenders reported a health condition affecting their cardiovascular system than younger women offenders (47% vs. 15%). They also had higher rates of being overweight or obese (60% vs. 52%) than younger women offenders.
- A greater proportion of Aboriginal women reported blood-borne viruses (HIV/AIDS and HCV) than non-Aboriginal women (27% vs. 17%). Notably, 27% of Aboriginal women reported having HCV, compared to 16% of non-Aboriginal women.

### Why we did this study

The correctional health literature suggests that offenders report poorer health relative to the general population. As part of a larger research project to

provide information on the prevalence of physical health conditions among newly-admitted offenders, the purpose of the present study was to assess the physical health status of incoming women offenders.

### What we did

All incoming CSC offenders are approached to consent to a health assessment that collects information on self-reported health conditions. From April 2012 to May 2013, data from 280 newly-admitted women offenders were recorded. Rates of health conditions were examined and compared to those of incoming men collected in an earlier study<sup>1</sup> and to rates in the general female Canadian population (primarily based on data extracted from the Chronic Disease Infobase Data Cubes<sup>2</sup>). Results were also disaggregated by Aboriginal ancestry and age (younger and older than 50 years).

### For more information

Nolan, A., & Stewart, L. (2014). *Self-reported physical health status of incoming federally-sentenced women offenders* (Research Report, R-332). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the website for a full list of research publications.

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, L.A., Sapers, J., Nolan, A., & Power, J. (2014). *Self-Reported Physical Health Status of Newly Admitted Federally-Sentenced Men Offenders* (Research report, R-314). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada (2013). Available at <http://66.240.150.17/cubes/data-cubes-eng.html>.