

Developmental Disabilities in Ontario's Provincial Correctional Facilities: Using Data to Tell the Story

What is the research about?

This project is one of four projects that used administrative data to describe the criminal justice system involvement and health care status of people with developmental disabilities. In this project, we specifically focus on people in provincial correctional facilities, which hold people who are admitted to prison before sentencing or who are sentenced to custody for less than two years.

Canadian research on developmental disabilities in provincial correctional settings is sparse. Specifically, we lack Ontario data on the experiences of people with developmental disabilities and their outcomes in provincial correctional facilities.

What did the researchers do?

We used linked administrative data from the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General on people who were released from provincial correctional facilities in Ontario in 2010. We linked those data with Ontario's health administrative data at ICES. We identified people with developmental disabilities using codes in health and social services data.

The goal of this project was to estimate the percentage of people with developmental disabilities in provincial correctional facilities. In addition, the health characteristics and health care use for people with developmental disabilities were also described and compared to people with and without developmental disabilities in correctional facilities and the community.

What did the researchers find?

The prevalence of developmental disabilities in people in provincial correctional facilities was 2.2%, compared to 0.8% in the community. Overall, people with developmental disabilities in provincial correctional facilities tended to be younger (Mdn = 27 (22 – 38) vs. Mdn = 32 (24 – 43)) and were more likely to live in a neighbourhood characterized by low-income (63.3% vs. 56.6%) than people in provincial correctional facilities without a developmental disability and people in the

What you need to know

The percentage of people with developmental disabilities in the provincial correctional population is nearly three times higher than the percentage in the rest of the community. Compared to people with no developmental disability, incarcerated people with developmental disabilities are more likely to have physical and mental health conditions and have greater health care needs in the year following release from prison.

general population with and without developmental disabilities (50.6% and 38.6% respectively).

People with developmental disabilities in provincial correctional facilities were also more likely than people without developmental disabilities to have chronic health conditions such as asthma (26.5% vs. 15.7%) and mental disorders such as psychotic illness (34.2% vs. 6.6%).

In addition, people with developmental disabilities were more likely to experience a longer period of time in custody compared with people without developmental disabilities in provincial prison (Mdn = 37 vs. Mdn = 10 days), and they were more likely to be released from custody at the courthouse (41.1% vs. 36.3%).

People with developmental disabilities were more likely than those without developmental disabilities to access the emergency department for high acuity issues (9.0% vs. 4.7%) or to be hospitalized (7.2% vs. 1.5%) in the year following release from custody, which may reflect the need for better transitional planning between services in the provincial correctional facility and in the community.

How can you use this research?

Many justice-involved people with developmental disabilities have complex needs and require holistic solutions to ensure their needs are being met. Ideally, when a person with a developmental disability encounters the criminal justice system, efforts should be made to divert them to appropriate community resources earlier in the process to prevent them from entering provincial correctional facilities. This includes referrals to appropriate community agencies or specialized courts such as mental health courts.

In circumstances in which diversion is not an option, it is important to ensure that appropriate supports and services are made available to support people with developmental disabilities while they are incarcerated and as they are released back to the community. This is particularly important since many people with developmental disabilities are released from the courthouse rather than custody. An effective mechanism for communication is needed between the criminal justice system and community agencies and health care services to ensure people with developmental disabilities are being connected to the right services at the right time. These services should include case management, service planning, and coordination between care professionals across multiple sectors including social work, psychiatry, primary health care, and specialized developmental services.

- Click [here](#) to see the Community Networks of Specialized Care's *Developmental Disabilities Justice Toolkit*.
- Click [here](#) to see the Human Services & Justice Coordinating Committee resource library on dual diagnosis.
- Click [here](#) to learn about the role of Dual Diagnosis Justice Case Manager (DDJCM). If you require assistance of a DDJCM, contact your local DSO for a referral.

About the team:

This project was led by researchers at McMaster University, Brock University, ICES, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and the MAP Centre Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael's Hospital.

Team members include: Fiona Kouyoumdjian, Lisa Whittingham, Anna Durbin, Elizabeth Lin, Flora Matheson, Tiziana Volpe, Parisa Dastoori, Andrew Calzavara, and Yona Lunsky.

About H-CARDD

Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) is a research program that aims to enhance the overall health and well-being of people with developmental disabilities through improved health care policy and services. H-CARDD research is conducted by dedicated teams of scientists, policymakers, health care providers, people with disabilities and families working collaboratively. For more information: www.hcardd.ca.

This study was funded by the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services under a Developmental Services Research Grant Fund. The opinions, results and conclusions in this summary are those of the authors. No endorsement by the funders or collaborators is intended or should be inferred.

Do you want to know more?

This snapshot is based on the article "[The prevalence and health status of people with developmental disabilities in provincial prisons in Ontario, Canada: A retrospective cohort study](#)", *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*. DOI: [10.1111/jar.12757](https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12757)



Health Care Access Research
and Developmental Disabilities