



Opioid replacement therapy within provincial correctional facility the focus of OmbudsPEI's first public report

(CHARLOTTETOWN) Steps are being taken to provide inmates at Prince Edward Island's Provincial Correctional Centre (PCC) with improved treatment for opioid abuse following a 10-month investigation by the province's office of the Ombudsperson.

In *Committing to Care: Improving the Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) in the Provincial Correctional System*, OmbudsPEI examines how inmates at PCC were being treated for OUD compared to other Islanders, inmates at other correctional facilities across the country, and the current standard of medical care for treating the disorder.

In June 2022, OmbudsPEI received complaints from inmates serving time at PCC about access to opioid replacement therapy (ORT), a treatment used for OUD which is recommended by medical colleges and associations across the country and widely available to Islanders who were not in jail.

Through this investigation, OmbudsPEI learned that inmates who were receiving ORT at the time of admission would continue ORT in jail. However, inmates who were not actively receiving ORT at the time they were admitted had to wait until a few weeks before their release to be offered it.

This policy meant that inmates not already receiving ORT on admission were offered opioid withdrawal management only.

Through consultations with treatment providers, correctional staff, inmates, local stakeholders and correctional institutions across Canada, OmbudsPEI learned that ORT is the current standard of medical care for treating OUD. OmbudsPEI also learned that opioid withdrawal management is not medically recommended, nor is it a suitable alternative to ORT. OmbudsPEI became concerned that inmates on PEI were not being provided with the same access to medical care available to other Islanders and to inmates in other correctional facilities across Canada.

OmbudsPEI shared the information gathered from its investigation with P.E.I.'s Community and Correctional Services, together with the office's concerns that the current practices could be seen to be unfair to inmates. As a result of this process, CCS has committed to ensuring that all inmates eligible for ORT will be offered it without delay. By doing so, inmates with OUD will be provided the best chance for long-term, stabilizing treatment to the same level of care provided to Islanders who are not in custody.

By improving the treatment of OUD in the correctional system, CCS is not only assisting inmates with improving their lives, but also helping to mitigate the risks of continued criminal activity and its impact on the communities across Prince Edward Island.

OmbudsPEI looks forward to making a difference in the lives of more Islanders as it continues to work towards its Vision - *A public service that is fair, transparent and accountable in the design and delivery of its programs and services.*

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About OmbudsPEI

As an independent office of the Legislature, OmbudsPEI investigates complaints about government agencies and provides general oversight of government's administrative processes under the *Ombudsperson Act*. The Ombudsperson has a broad mandate to investigate complaints about unfair treatment, process or decisions by public sector agencies such as government ministries, agencies boards and commissions, municipalities and Health PEI.

OmbudsPEI promotes fairness, transparency and accountability in the public sector to enhance good governance and public confidence in government. Our work improves public services for all Islanders.

If any islander believes they have experienced an unfairness in their interactions with a provincial agency, they can contact OmbudsPEI to explore options for making a complaint. Our services are free and confidential.

In the spirit of Reconciliation, we acknowledge that the land upon which our organization stands is unceded Mi'kmaq territory. Epekwitk (PEI), Mi'kma'ki, is covered by the historic Treaties of Peace and Friendship. We pay our respects to the Indigenous Mi'kmaq People who have occupied this Island for over 12,000 years; past, present and future.

For more information about OmbudsPEI, visit www.ombudspei.ca