



## CANADA'S PRISON SYSTEM CONTRIBUTES TO THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

### BACKGROUND & METHOD

- Two studies by BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS researchers show the effects of incarceration on HIV/AIDS risk behaviour.
- **Study 1:** The first study took place over six years and involved more than 1,200 local injection drug users (IDU).
- **Study 2:** The second study followed more than 900 IDU recruited from Insite, North America's first supervised injection facility, for a period of two years.

### QUICK FACT

*TWO STUDIES FOUND THAT IDU WHO WERE INCARCERATED WERE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT SHARING SYRINGES.*

### FINDINGS

- **Study 1:**
  - Over the course of the study, half of the participants went to jail.
  - Of those who injected while incarcerated, 61% reported injecting with a used syringe.
  - IDU who reported being incarcerated were more likely to report borrowing and lending used syringes, and were less likely to use condoms during casual sex, as compared to IDU who did not report incarceration.
- **Study 2:**
  - Although the second study involved a different group of IDU from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, it also found that IDU who were incarcerated were more likely to report sharing syringes.
  - Again, incarceration was a common experience, with about one-third reporting spending some time behind bars.
  - IDU who reported being incarcerated were more likely than those not incarcerated to be infected with HIV and hepatitis C.

### IMPLICATIONS

- These findings highlight the urgent need for an expansion of appropriate measures to reduce drug-related harms in Canada's correctional institutions.
- Despite official recognition of the crucial role of prisons in HIV transmission by the US Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization and Health Canada, little is being done to reduce HIV risks in Canadian prisons.
- Over the last 15 years, many doctors, public health professionals and advocates for prisoners have called on Correctional Services Canada (CSC), the government agency that runs federal prisons, to establish a pilot prison-based needle exchange program.
- CSC officials have consistently refused, despite positive evidence from several countries, including Germany, Great Britain and Switzerland, that have implemented prison-based needle exchanges.

Werb D, Kerr T, Small W, Li K, Montaner J, Wood E. **HIV risks associated with incarceration among injection drug users: Implications for prison-based public health strategies.** *Journal of Public Health (Oxford)*, 2008; 30(2): 126-132.

Milloy MJ, Wood E, Small W, Tyndall M, Lai C, Montaner J, Kerr T. **Incarceration experiences in a cohort of active injection drug users.** *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 2008; 27(6): 693-699.

