

# Improve prison health care in Canada, CMAJ editorial says

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Canada needs to reform its patchwork system of prison health care that does not adequately care for prisoners' complex health care needs, argues an editorial in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

"What is desperately needed is a well-organized and coordinated system of health care, one that follows the offender from the start of his or her incarceration to release and successful return to the community," writes Dr. Ken Flegel, senior associate editor, CMAJ with Dr. Françoise Bouchard, former director general of health services, Correctional Services of Canada.

The health of many people in prisons is worse than in the general population, with a higher incidence of communicable diseases, [mental health issues](#) and [chronic illnesses](#). However, health care is delivered in an ad hoc way and managed by prison executives.

"This level of care is too patchy for the real health needs of prisoners and puts unwarranted strain on all of the staff."

Most prisoners are eventually released back into the community; providing better health care will also benefit the families and the larger community that will need to care for them.

Several countries in Europe have improved prison health care in recent decades by employing their [public health care](#) system to provide care.

"Ultimately, prison health care reform should include all jurisdictions involved in correctional services (federal, provincial and territorial) to bring a seamless approach and adequate health care to this population," conclude the authors.

**More information:** [www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.130149](http://www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.130149)

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