

# High rates of Indigenous people in jail is a health crisis

May 6 2019

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The overincarceration of Indigenous people in Canada is a health crisis, causing more years of life to be lost than premature death from heart disease, injuries and cancer, argues a commentary in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

Indigenous people make up a large part of the jail population in Canada.

"The overincarceration of Indigenous people in Canada needs to be recognized as both fundamentally unfair and a health crisis," says Dr. Davinder Singh. "Indigenous people should not be 4 to 26 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous people, as it results in more years of life lost directly to incarceration than to common health conditions, like [heart disease](#) and cancer."

Negative health effects continue after people are released, with a higher risk of death than the average risk of death in the community. This risk is especially high in the first 2 weeks after discharge, with many deaths occurring through overdose or suicide.

"If we consider the health and social consequences, from acute to [chronic illness](#), and individual to family to community effects, the cost is crushing, both at a financial level and a human level," says Dr. Singh. "The good news is that the issue has been studied numerous times over decades; we just need to act on the recommendations from those reports."

The authors call upon government to address this public health crisis by addressing well-documented racism in the Canadian justice system.

**More information:** *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2019).  
[www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.181437](http://www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.181437)

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

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