

Minister of Public Safety



Ottawa, Canada K1A 0P8

Ministre de la Sécurité publique

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Mr. Morel Cassie
President
Canadian Association of Social Workers
Suite 402
383 Parkdale Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1Y 4R4

Dear Mr. Cassie:

The Office of the Prime Minister has forwarded to me your correspondence dated January 29, 2013, regarding the treatment of offenders who suffer from mental illness. I apologize for the delay in responding.

Let me assure you that mental health care services are regarded as an important aspect at all levels of the criminal justice system. I acknowledge your endeavors and I do appreciate the work that you have undertaken to improve the services provided for the health and well-being of Canadians.

As you are aware, mental health services in Canada fall under provincial jurisdiction. However, the federal government recognizes the prevalence of addictions and mental illness amongst federal offenders. The impact of both are significant factors in offending and rehabilitation and are priority issues.

While I will always advocate for public safety over the interests of offenders, our government's policies continue to emphasize rehabilitation, education and mental health treatment for offenders. Since taking office, our Government has bolstered resources and programs to support these policies. Indeed, Canada recently won an international award for its mental health programs in federal prisons.

Within the criminal justice system, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is responsible for federal offenders who have received court-imposed sentences of two years or more. Provincial and territorial governments have exclusive responsibility for young offenders and offenders serving sentences of less than two years, as well as offenders sentenced to probation.

At the federal level, let me assure you that CSC is familiar with the work of the Mental Health Commission of Canada and has been involved, through various consultation processes, in the development of its national strategy,

Canada

Changing Directions, Changing Lives. CSC is legislatively mandated to provide essential health care, including mental health care, and reasonable access to non-essential mental health care services to incarcerated federal offenders, in accordance with the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA)*.

More recently, the amendments to the CCRA specifically require that correctional policies, programs and practices be responsive to the special needs of persons requiring mental health care. Improving the capacity to address the mental health needs of offenders is a corporate priority for CSC.

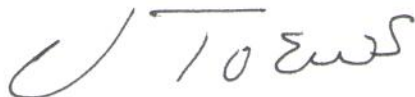
Recognizing that more work needed to be done, in 2008, CSC began working with its provincial and territorial colleagues in corrections to develop the *Mental Health Strategy for Corrections in Canada*. This 2011 Strategy was developed in consultation with the Mental Health Commission of Canada and was based upon the experience, knowledge and advice of staff, stakeholders and offenders across the country, including your organization. The Strategy aims to improve individual health outcomes along the continuum of care in the correctional system and to ultimately contribute to safe communities.

For example, CSC has developed a two-day session on the Fundamentals of Mental Health Training. It is designed to provide front-line staff with an understanding of mental health issues of offenders, provide information regarding specific mental disorders, and enhance strategies for working with and supporting offenders with mental disorders through an interdisciplinary approach. The training comprises a series of modules that incorporate both core knowledge and skills enhancement exercises. From December 2007 to March 2012, approximately 8,000 CSC staff members working in both the institutions and in the community received this training, as well as an additional 480 non-CSC staff members and community partners.

CSC's Mental Health Strategy is also supported by various management practices, such as training and professional development, research and performance measurement, and tools to support front-line staff. For additional information, you may wish to view CSC's Mental Health Strategy -- *Towards a Continuum of Care* on CSC's website at: <http://www.csc-ccc.gc.ca/002/006/002006-2000-eng.shtml>.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vic Toews". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "V" and "T".

Vic Toews, P.C., Q.C., M.P.