



No more victims. No one is disposable.

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Written Submission for the Pre-Budget

Consultations in Advance of the 2022 Federal Budget

By: CoSA Canada and Mennonite Central Committee Canada

Recommendation 1: The Government of Canada commit 2.5 million dollars per year to fund Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) Canada to support reduced sexual recidivism and increased public safety across Canada.

Recommendation 2: Within the framework of Bill C-228, the Government of Canada commit to a multi-disciplinary, intersectoral grants and contributions program to provide funding to the community-based sector to develop a continuum of rehabilitative and restorative justice programs to reduce recidivism.

Introduction

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a community-based response for individuals who have been incarcerated for committing sexual offences, are being released into the community, and voluntarily seek out assistance in living a successful and crime-free life. Those individuals are referred to as '**core members.**' Specifically, the CoSA Mission is to *substantially reduce the risk of future sexual victimization by assisting and supporting released individuals in their task of integrating with the community and leading a responsible, productive, and accountable life.*

In 2015, CoSA Canada was incorporated as the national office for CoSA sites across the country. Under a five-year Public Safety Canada-funded project that launched in 2017, CoSA Canada has provided assistance to CoSA sites in 15 locations to reduce recidivism and assist people who have committed sexual offences to reintegrate safely into their communities. Since 2017, CoSA Canada has also contributed to research through academic partnerships and participated in federal and non-profit learning initiatives. It has raised public awareness of CoSA programming and engaged in a multi-year process to identify and articulate good practices and relevant materials for CoSA staff and volunteer training, including outlining a national operational framework.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has a lengthy history in rehabilitation of ex-offenders, crime prevention, and restorative justice. MCC is a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, sharing God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC Canada currently supports programs in over 45 countries through the efforts of over 1,000 workers, 14,000 volunteers, and 122,000 members of supporting churches. For several decades, MCC has engaged in restorative justice initiatives that seek to address root causes of crime, support victims of crime, and ensure public safety is a key part of the offender reintegration process, including implementation of CoSA programming and Faith Community Reintegration Projects (FCRP) programming funded by the Government of Canada.

Grounded in restorative justice principles, **Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)** aims to reduce sexual victimization by assisting people who have committed sexual offences to lead responsible, constructive, and accountable lives in their communities. Circles assist core members in the reintegration process. Circle members include core members, trained volunteers, and CoSA staff. Circles help to facilitate a positive transition by supporting core members to meet practical needs, develop skills, and build a healthy personal narrative.

MCC was the first funded CoSA project by Correctional Services Canada in 1996-1997. Since that time CoSA has continued to be operated by MCC and other community-based organizations. Research has demonstrated that CoSA as a program is a valuable investment in crime prevention and reduction of recidivism. As a result, CoSA has since spread to other countries around the world as a model in community safety.

CoSA Canada and MCC stand with other partners also working on restorative justice measures and community reintegration. The John Howard Society of Canada (JHSC) fully supports the successful restorative justice approaches used with a set of former prisoners with specific challenges. It believes that a larger percentage of correctional funding should be invested in community corrections in programs that the evidence shows reduces recidivism. This investment with non-government organizations is not only less costly but will reduce recidivism, facilitate contributions to society, and result in fiscal savings. JHSC is grateful for the government's current investments in recidivism reduction, such as CMHC's funding of solution labs to address prisoners being released into homelessness and looks forward to participating in Bill C-228's collaborative national framework to reduce recidivism. JHSC urges government investment in the non-government sector's contribution to the reduction of recidivism.

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) also supports the focus of this pre-budget consultation submission on community-based supports for criminalized people. CAEFS advocates for investment in community-based alternatives to incarceration which are based on a feminist approach to programs and services. Reducing the numbers of people in prison must be accompanied by a substantial investment in community programs that centre healing and rehabilitation with a focus on the humanity of the program participants. Truly safe communities are ones that are well resourced to meet the needs of everyone. Bill-C228's collaborative national framework is a welcome step in the strategy to reduce the conditions which currently lead to people being incarcerated. CAEFS is eager to see investment in the NGO sector recognizing the vital role that it plays in this important work.

Recommendation 1: The Government of Canada commit 2.5 million dollars per year to fund Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) Canada to support reduced sexual recidivism and increased public safety across Canada.

CoSA was designed using restorative justice principles, with a focus on repairing the harm experienced by individuals and communities. Imprisoning people who commit a crime may have a temporary effect on public safety, but interventions are needed that support healing, reintegration, and accountability when those people return to their communities. A successful reintegration is best achieved through inclusive engagement rather than alienation. CoSA balances support and accountability that gives core members a welcoming space where they are treated with care and dignity as they establish an understanding of their past actions that reduces the probability of reoffending and learn how to constructively contribute to the community.

In addition to its goal of 'no more victims', there is strong data to suggest that CoSA's operating model is both effective and also financially sound. For example, the Minnesota Department of Corrections implemented the CoSA sex offender re-entry program in 2008. Using a randomized controlled trial, researcher Dr. Grant Duwe compared recidivism rates and cost-benefit outcomes among sex offenders in the program to a control group of non-participants. The results of this 2018 study showed that participating in the **CoSA program significantly reduced sexual recidivism, lowering the risk for a new sex offence by 88%**. These results build on the

positive evidence base found in Canadian research studies conducted in 2005 and 2009. These studies found a 70-83% reduction in recidivism respectively for individuals who participate in CoSA (Wilson, Cortoni and McWhinnie, 2009). These findings have been replicated internationally. Research has also demonstrated that CoSA programs adds value to Canadian society in terms of reducing real pain and suffering of sexual victimization in addition to a reduction in economic costs of sexual victimization. (Chouinard and Riddick, 2015).

Given the important work being done by CoSA in keeping communities safe we ask the government to provide stable funding for CoSA in order to ensure this critical social service continues. Currently CoSA sites are partially funded through CoSA Canada, which holds a contribution agreement with the Department of Public Safety of Canada through the National Crime Prevention Strategy set to end in March 2022.

CoSA Canada is a national voluntary organization that promotes the safe and healthy integration of individuals who have a history of sexual offending through collaborative partnering with local sites and championing best practices nationally.

We believe that CoSA initiatives across the country need long-term sustainable funding. CoSA aligns with the Government of Canada's priorities of advancing measures to keep communities safe. As well, supporting ongoing funding for CoSA illustrates evidence based decision-making given the ongoing research that continues to document the success of CoSA. However, the five-year funding for CoSA Canada funded sites, provided under the Public Safety National Crime Prevention Strategy contribution agreement, will end March 31, 2022. **This is concerning as we will not have sufficient resources to sustain our CoSA sites** without Government of Canada funding. Without CoSA, high risk individuals will return to communities with little support, resulting in reduced public safety and further offences.

Recommendation 2:

Within the framework of Bill C-228, the Government of Canada commit to a multi-disciplinary, intersectoral grants and contributions program to provide funding to the community-based sector to develop a continuum of rehabilitative and restorative justice programs to reduce recidivism.

Sustainable funding through Grants and Contributions Programs

Similarly to Circles of Support and Accountability, other programs and services offered by the community-based sector require ongoing financial investments from the Government of Canada to be sustainable. A continuum of programs are needed that can work in collaboration with one another to best address the challenges of successful reintegration. Based on our collective experiences in the areas of rehabilitation and restorative justice, we encourage the Government of Canada to reallocate resources from the Public Safety Canada and the Correctional Service Canada budgets to invest in long term programs that will reduce costs in the criminal justice system. Fully funding the framework to reduce recidivism (C-228) by

supporting community based organizations is an important means by which we can collectively work towards reducing crime and making our communities safer.

In “Catalyst for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable Sector (June 2019)”, a Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector recommends that,

“Throughout the hearings, the committee has been inspired and informed by lawyers, professors, local activists, social entrepreneurs and others who have argued that the charitable and non-profit sector must better reflect the communities they serve, must have a sustainable funding base to ground their efforts and must create room for improvement through innovation.”

We encourage the Government of Canada as part of the required framework of C-228 to invest in the creation of a special secretariat with a mandate to strengthen the capacities of communities working to reduce recidivism in Canada. The secretariat would have the mandate to reinforce intersectoral collaboration, along with ensuring that rehabilitative correctional programs work cooperatively and in collaboration within government institutions and with rehabilitative and restorative justice organizations. This secretariat should also identify funding opportunities along the entire continuum, from the point of charging to warrant expiry. What follows are examples of possible avenues.

Data shows that there is an increase in individuals leaving correctional facilities and being supervised in communities. According to Public Safety Canada, 40% of individuals in federal custody in 2020 are being supervised under conditional release. This represents an 18.5% increase in the past six years. This increase in residency conditions contributes to a demand for supportive and holistic community-based services including an investment in Community Based Residential Facilities (Public Safety Canada, Correctional Service Canada, and John Howard Society).

We also believe that investments in rehabilitative and restorative justice training for Correctional Service Canada institutional leaders and staff within institutions, prisoners, and community will lead to better outcomes and decrease recidivism.

Emerging data within Canada also demonstrates that more time and resources are required support the sector to continue developing program evaluation. We understand the complexity in measuring human service programs given the differences in individuals, criminal histories, and how to apply the practices and principles in a way that brings consistent results. The aim should be research that both meets the needs of the community and meets academic rigour as both are integrally important to building successful programs. Investments in research and evaluation of restorative justice in the criminal justice system will strengthen efforts to reduce recidivism and intersectoral work to address and ensure the safety and dignity of all Canadians.