

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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Trends in Offender Grievances and Complaints, Fiscal Year 2019 to 2020 to Fiscal Year 2023 to 2024

Counts of offender complaints and grievances have largely stabilized following a previous decline. Across offender subgroups, the most common subject of concern relates to staff interaction.

Why we are doing this study

As per the [Corrections and Conditional Release Act \(CCRA\)](#), offenders under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) have access to an offender grievance process. The procedures and timelines for resolving offender grievances are laid out in [Commissioner's Directive \(CD\) 081](#) and [Guidelines 081-1](#).

What we did

Grievances received in fiscal year 2019 to 2020 to fiscal year 2023 to 2024 were extracted from CSC's Corporate Reporting System-Modernized (CRS-M). Analysis was undertaken for the three levels of the offender redress process (written complaints, initial grievances and final grievances) to explore thematic and procedural trends.

What we found

Over the last five fiscal years, the number of offender complaints and grievances remained lower and relatively stable compared to previous years (see: [Motiuk & Arnet-Zargarian, 2019](#)). The vast majority of cases (98%) were filed in relation to a federal correctional institution.¹ Alongside fluctuations in the average federal in-custody population, there was minimal variation in the average number of grievances per federal offender (see Table 1). Counts of offender complaints and grievances were consistently highest in the Quebec region (see Table 2). Median days to decision remained relatively consistent across the five year period (ranging from 37 to 41 days).

The 101,693 complaints and grievances between fiscal year 2019 to 2020 and fiscal year 2023 to 2024 corresponded with 14,375 unique offenders. A subset of offenders had a disproportionately high count of grievances (i.e., 51 offenders accounted for 20% of all cases; when such cases were removed, there was a total of 81,275 grievances associated with 14,324 unique offenders).

The two most common categories of complaints and grievances included "interaction" (e.g., staff performance, discrimination, harassment by staff), and "conditions/routine" (e.g., personal effects, food and diet, institutional amenities), which together accounted for over half of all cases. These two categories remained the most common areas even when repetitious cases were excluded. There was considerable thematic overlap in the top categories and subjects in cases across men's and women's institutions and for different racial/ethnic groups. The subject of "staff performance" was consistently the most common subject area of concern (19% overall; 17% when repetitious cases were removed).

¹ Complaints and grievances can also be filed against community facilities and offices (e.g., parole offices, community correctional centres).

Table 1. Offender Complaints and Grievances, Fiscal Year 2019 to 2020 to Fiscal Year 2023 to 2024.

Measure	Fiscal Year				
	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023	2023 to 2024
Avg. Offender Count	14,009	12,832	12,389	12,673	13,830
Count of Complaints and Grievances*	20,926 (17,159)	20,481 (17,021)	19,442 (15,737)	20,086 (15,387)	20,758 (15,971)
Avg. Per Offender	1.5 (1.2)	1.6 (1.3)	1.6 (1.3)	1.6 (1.2)	1.5 (1.2)

*Bracketed numbers exclude repetitious cases, defined as cases where the number of complaints was greater than three standard deviations above the mean (i.e., 140+; N = 51).

Table 2. Regional Distribution of Offender Complaints and Grievances, Fiscal Year 2019 to 2020 to Fiscal Year 2023 to 2024.

Region	Avg. Pop	Avg. Grievances*
Atlantic	1,177; 9%	6,342; 6% (5,955; 7%)
Quebec	2,679; 21%	33,265; 33% (22,742; 28%)
Ontario	3,603; 28%	20,767; 20% (17,064; 21%)
Prairie	3,831; 29%	19,672; 19% (17,742; 22%)
Pacific	1,774; 14%	21,267; 21% (17,469; 22%)
Total/ National	13,062; 100%	380; <1% (303; <1%)

*Bracketed numbers exclude repetitious cases, defined as cases where the number of complaints was greater than three standard deviations above the mean (i.e., 140+; N = 51).

What it means

Following a previous decline in offender complaints and grievances, counts have largely stabilized. Trends are influenced by repetitious cases as well regional differences. Cases tied to the subject of "staff performance" (a subcategory of "interaction") are most common across institutions and offender subgroups.

References

Motiuk, L. & Arnet-Zargarian, A. (2019). *Offender Complaints and Grievances in Canadian Federal Corrections*. Research in Brief, 19-14. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

For more information

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