

Current Trends in Double-Bunking in Canadian Federal Corrections

The increase in the federal prison population has corresponded with a higher proportion of double-bunking.

Why we did this study

A previous analysis by Motiuk (2023) demonstrated a decline in the rate of double-bunking in Canadian federal corrections during the pandemic, proceeded by a return to pre-pandemic levels. The analysis projected a continued increase in the rate of double-bunking in the near future. The current analysis provides an update on trends in double-bunking in the most recent fiscal years.

What we did

Data pertaining to double-bunking within all Correctional Service of Canada institutions (CSC) for men and women was drawn from the Corporate Reporting System-Modernized (CRS-M). While there are different operational definitions of double-bunking, the measure herein relates to all individuals residing within an accommodation designed for one individual that has been retrofitted to house two individuals.¹

What we found

As predicted in the earlier study, the rate of double-bunking continued to increase following the temporary decline during the pandemic. The increase became more pronounced between fiscal year (FY) 2023 to 2024 (7.9%) and FY 2024 to 2025 (12.4%). This period was also marked by a 5.2% increase in Warrant of Committal (new sentence) admissions, and a 7.1% increase in the in-custody population. In addition, the number of community releases decreased relative to pre-pandemic levels (see Table 1 for an overview of federal prison population trends). This may be tied to changing sentence characteristics, e.g., a relative increase in individuals serving longer sentences (see Motiuk & Arnet-Zargarian, 2021).

Consistent with the previous study, double-bunking in the two most recent fiscal years was disproportionate in reception centres, which house individuals temporarily during the intake and assessment process.² Outside of reception centres, double-bunking was primarily concentrated in medium security facilities (there is no double bunking in maximum security institutions, and there was minimal double bunking in minimum security institutions).³ Double-bunking trends were also marked by regional variation, with highest prevalence in the Ontario and Quebec regions (see Table 2).

¹Single-occupancy cell accommodation is the preferred standard within CSC. Double-bunking cells typically have a stacked bunk format and are used as a temporary measure when single cell accommodation is not possible. This is distinct from shared occupancy cells, which are cells that are designed to house two inmates. Cell assignment and inmate placement criteria are reviewed before two individuals are placed in the same cell. The smallest cell size for all new and replacement accommodations is seven square metres for cells with a sink and toilet, and six and a half square metres for cells without a sink and toilet. Normally the following cells are *not* used to accommodate two or more inmates: structured intervention unit cells; special handling unit cells; cells used for individuals receiving care for mental health issues; cells smaller than five square metres; cells with no

Table 1. Federal Prison Population Trends, Fiscal Years 2018 to 2019 to 2024 to 2025

Fiscal Year	Fiscal year Warrant of Committal Admissions (Total Admissions)	Fiscal year Community Releases	Beds assigned at Fiscal Year End (Total Count)	Total Percentage Double-Bunked at Fiscal Year End
2018-19	5,004 (7,331)	7,269	13,767 (14,149)	6.6% (902)
2019-20	4,644 (7,007)	7,250	13,375 (13,720)	7.4% (984)
2020-21	3,228 (5,304)	6,723	12,015 (12,399)	4.7% (565)
2021-22	3,999 (6,315)	6,610	12,030 (12,328)	5.1% (610)
2022-23	4,715 (6,985)	6,426	12,653 (13,054)	6.5% (819)
2023-24	4,890 (7,194)	6,625	13,454 (13,855)	7.9% (1,061)
2024-25	5,144 (7,497)	6,816	14,430 (14,837)	12.4% (1,784)

Table 2. Bed Assignments and Double-bunking by Region, for Fiscal Years 2023 to 2024 and 2024 to 2025

Region	Fiscal Year End 2023 to 2024		Fiscal Year End 2024 to 2025	
	Total beds assigned	Double bunked %	Total beds assigned	Double-bunked
Atlantic	1,280	0.2%	1,300	0.2%
Quebec	2,881	9.0%	3,119	18.1%
Ontario	3,778	11.9%	4,073	18.5%
Prairie	3,820	9.1%	4,096	11.3%
Pacific	1,695	0.1%	1,842	0.0%
Total	13,454	7.9%	14,430	12.4%

What it means

Single occupancy accommodation continues to be the mainstream approach in federal corrections; however, as projected in an earlier study, double-bunking has increased alongside the growth in the federal prison population. Double-bunking is primarily concentrated in reception centres followed by medium security institutions, with pressures greatest in the Ontario and Quebec regions.

For more information

Please email the [Research Branch](#). You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

Prepared by: Laura McKendy

References

Motiuk, L. (2023). *Double-bunking in Canadian Federal Corrections*, RIB-23-24. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

Motiuk, L. & Arnet-Zargarian, A. (2021). *Changing population of men in federal custody: 2015 to 2020*, RIB-21-12. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

direct or indirect natural light; accessible cells, except in shared accommodation observation cells; and any cell designed as a dry cell. See: [Commissioner's Directive 550](#).

² For example, the rate of double-bunking (in FY 2024 to 2025) was 83.3% at the Regional Reception Centre – Quebec and 55.1% at the Joyceville Assessment Unit.

³ For example, the rate of double-bunking (in FY 2024 to 2025) was 20.9% at Archambault Institution Medium, 22.4% at Bath Institution, 29.4% at Warkworth Institution, 33.2% at Bowden Institution Medium and 48.2% at Grande Cache Institution.