

Characteristics of Individuals Serving Life and Indeterminate Sentences within Federal Institutions for Women

Research highlights: *The total number of individuals serving life and indeterminate sentences within women’s institutions has increased alongside growth in the women’s federal correctional population, with Indigenous persons accounting for 42% of this group.*

Why we are doing this study

While women account for a relatively small portion of the federal correctional population, prior research noted growth in the federally-incarcerated population of women serving life and indeterminate sentences¹ between fiscal years (FYs) 2015–2016 and 2019–2020 (Motiuk & Hayden, 2021). The current analysis provides updated trends regarding the size and characteristics of the life and indeterminate-sentenced population within federal institutions for women.

What we did

Information pertaining to all individuals in federal custody on October 26th, 2025, was drawn from CSC’s Corporate Reporting System – Modernized (CRS–M). Comparison information was also extracted from fiscal year end snapshots for the previous four years. Analysis was undertaken to explore the life and indeterminately-sentenced population in women’s federal institutions, including trends over time and profile considerations. For a description of assessment measures, see: [Commissioner’s Directive 705-6](#).

What we found

On October 26th, 2025, individuals serving life and indeterminate sentences accounted for 17% of the population in federal institutions for women. Over the past five fiscal years, representation decreased from 21% to 17%, though, in raw numbers, the population slightly increased (i.e., from 125 to 142). During this same time, there was growth within the women’s in-custody population overall (i.e., from 584 to 825) following a previous decline (Motiuk & Keown, 2022).

Table 1. Life and Indeterminately-Sentenced Persons in Women’s Federal Institutions, FY 2021–2022 to 2025–2026 (Year to Date*).

Fiscal Year	% (N) of Life and Indeterminately-Sentenced
	Persons
FY 2021 to 2022	21% (125)
FY 2022 to 2023	20% (128)
FY 2023 to 2024	19% (142)
FY 2024 to 2025	18% (143)
FY 2025 to 2026 Year to Date*	17% (142)

*As of October 26th, 2025.

The relative size of the life and indeterminately-sentenced population at institutions for women varied by region, representing:

- 13% of the population in the Atlantic region (N = 15, accounting for 11% of the national total)
- 19% of the population in the Quebec region (N = 27, accounting for 19% of the national total)
- 22% of the population in the Ontario region (N = 47, accounting for 33% of the national total)
- 7% of the population in the Prairie region (N = 18, accounting for 13% of the national total)
- 35% of the population in the Pacific region (N = 35, accounting for 25% of the national total)

¹ This group includes individuals who have received a life sentence for murder and as well as those serving an indeterminate sentence tied to a Dangerous Offender (DO) designation.

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Profile Characteristics

Among individuals serving life and indeterminate sentences at women’s institutions in October of 2025, 39% were identified as White, 42% as Indigenous, 8% as Black, and the remaining as other racial identity. Over half (54%) were classified as medium security, with 13% classified as maximum security, and 29% classified as minimum security (the remaining had an undetermined security level). Relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts, Indigenous life and indeterminately-sentenced persons at women’s institutions tended to be younger and were more likely to be within the first five years of their sentence (i.e., 40% versus 29%). They were more likely to be rated high in Dynamic Need (64% versus 49%) and low in Reintegration Potential (54% versus 35%), while they were considerably less likely to have a Murder I (first degree murder) flag (17% versus 42%) and somewhat less likely to be classified as maximum security (10% versus 15%).

Table 1. Characteristics of the Life and Indeterminately-Sentenced Population at Women’s Federal Institutions (October 26th, 2025), by Racial Identity.

Characteristic or Measure	Indigenous Identity		Overall (N = 142)
	Non-Indigenous (N = 82)	Indigenous (N = 60)	
Average (median) age	47 (46)	42 (40)	45 (43)
Average (median) Years Served	9 (9)	10 (7)	9 (8)
Murder I (first degree murder) flag	42%	17%	31%
Security Threat Group (STG) affiliation	4%	10%	6%
Offender Security Level (OSL)			
Maximum	15%	10%	13%
Medium	48%	63%	54%
Minimum	33%	23%	29%
Undetermined	5%	3%	4%
High Dynamic Need	49%	64%	56%
High Static Risk	71%	76%	73%
Low Reintegration Potential	35%	54%	44%
Low Motivation	10%	2%	7%

Note: Percentages might not sum exactly to 100 due to rounding.

What it means

The number of individuals serving life and indeterminate sentences within federal institutions for women has increased alongside growth in the federal correctional population. Indigenous persons account for the largest subgroup of this population (42%) and are somewhat younger, and more often in the earlier stages of their life sentences, relative to non-Indigenous persons. While life and indeterminately-sentenced persons account for less than 20% of the population at women’s institutions, such cases are marked by unique sentence management needs corresponding with distinct stages of long-term sentences (see: [Commissioner’s Directive 705-6](#)).

References

Motiuk, L. & Keown, L.A. (2022). *Pandemic era impacts on the federal custody population profile: Women*, RIB-22-09. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

For more information

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Prepared by: Molly Stewart & Laura McKendy