

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

Research highlights: The total number of individuals serving life and indeterminate sentences within men’s institutions has slightly increased over the past five years. There are profile differences across racial identity groups with respect to age, time served, security classification, and assessment ratings.

Why we are doing this study

Within the federal correctional context, individuals serving life and indeterminate sentences have unique case and sentence management needs (Young et al., 2010).¹ Previous analysis highlighted relative growth in this population in both the in-custody and community supervision settings (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 men.

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 federal institutions for men, including trends over time as well as profile variation. For a description of assessment measures, see: [Commissioner’s Directive 705-6](#).

What we found

Overall Trends

On October 26th, 2025, individuals serving life and indeterminate sentences accounted for 25% of the population in federal institutions for men. Over the past five years, representation decreased from 29% to 25%, though, in raw numbers, the population slightly increased (i.e., from 3,449 to 3,580). During this same time, there was growth within the larger in-custody population following a previous decline (Motiuk & Keown, 2022).

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

Fiscal Year	% (N) of Life and Indeterminately-Sentenced Persons
2021–2022	29% (3,449)
2022–2023	28% (3,466)
2023–2024	26% (3,468)
2024–2025	25% (3,543)
2025–2026 Year to Date*	25% (3,580)

*As of October 26th, 2025.

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

- 23% of the population in the Atlantic region (N = 284, accounting for 8% of the national total)
- 24% of the population in the Quebec region (N = 783, accounting for 22% of the national total)
- 26% of the population in the Ontario region (N = 1,047, accounting for 29% of the national total)
- 17% of the population in the Prairie region (N = 676, accounting for 19% of the national total)
- 41% of the population in the Pacific region (N = 790, accounting for 22% 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 men's institutions in October of 2025, 46% ($N = 1,660$) were identified as White, 31% ($N = 1,111$) as Indigenous, 13% ($N = 447$) as Black, and 10% ($N = 362$) as other racial identity. There were considerable profile differences across racial identity groups, including with respect to age, time served, security classification, and assessment ratings.

- Age and time served: Relative to White individuals, Indigenous and Black individuals, as well as those identified as other racial identity, averaged younger in age, and had shorter average periods of time served.
- Murder I flag: Black individuals, as well as those identified as other racial identity, were more likely to have a Murder I (first degree murder) flag.
- Security Threat Group (STG): Indigenous and Black individuals were more likely to have an STG affiliation.
- Security classification: A majority of individuals across all racial identity groups were classified as medium security. However, White individuals were somewhat more likely to be classified as minimum security, and less likely to be classified as maximum security.
- Risk and need profiles: Relative to White individuals, Indigenous and Black individuals, as well as those identified as other racial identity, were more likely to be rated as high in Dynamic Need, high in Static Risk and low in Reintegration Potential. Black individuals were also more likely to be rated as low in Motivation.

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

Characteristic or Measure	Racial Identity				Overall ($N = 3,580$)
	White ($N = 1,660$)	Indigenous ($N = 1,111$)	Black ($N = 447$)	Other ($N = 362$)	
Average (median) age	54 (55)	46 (45)	41 (40)	43 (42)	49 (48)
Average (median) Years Served	18 (16)	14 (12)	11 (9)	9 (8)	15 (12)
Murder I (first degree murder) flag	28%	19%	38%	36%	27%
Security Threat Group (STG) affiliation	4%	21%	24%	12%	13%
Offender Security Level (OSL)					
Maximum	14%	22%	28%	25%	19%
Medium	63%	60%	57%	55%	60%
Minimum	21%	17%	13%	17%	18%
Undetermined	2%	1%	2%	3%	2%
High Dynamic Need	67%	79%	77%	76%	73%
High Static Risk	86%	91%	94%	88%	89%
Low Reintegration Potential	62%	73%	76%	67%	68%
Low Motivation	21%	18%	26%	21%	21%

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 men has slightly increased alongside growth in the federal correctional population, albeit accounting for a smaller percentage of the men's in-custody population. Representation varies across regions. Profile analysis demonstrates that the life and indeterminately-sentenced population is a diverse group, in turn reflecting distinct case and sentence management needs. Variation in profile factors highlights the need for culturally-responsive programming and interventions that align with the various stages of a life sentence (see: [Commissioner's Directive 705-6](#)).



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References

Motiuk, L. & Hayden, M. (2021). *Federal offenders serving life sentences: 2015/16 to 2019/20*, RIB-21-08. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

Motiuk, L. & Keown, L.A. (2022). *Pandemic Era Impacts on the Federal Custody Population Profile: Men*, RIB-22-08. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

Young, M., Broom, I., Ruddell, R. (2010). *Offenders Serving Life and Indeterminate Sentences: Snapshot (2009) and Changing Profile (1998 to 2008)*, R-231. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

For more information

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