Parole Board of Canada

Diversity Initiatives

June 2022

Context

- Indigenous and Black people are over-represented in the federally incarcerated population.
- Indigenous and Black people are less likely to be granted conditional release, particularly for full parole.

Current Initiatives

Board Member Representation

- The Parole Board of Canada (PBC) is a "community board". The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (CCRA) requires that Board members be **sufficiently diverse in their backgrounds** to represent community values and views.
- Over the past several years, the PBC has made significant efforts to recruit Board member candidates from diverse communities and has increased the diversity of its Board members to better reflect the Canadian population.

Training

- The PBC continually reviews and updates Board member training to ensure the appropriate level of focus on cultural competency. The PBC is committed to **bias-free** and **evidence-based** decision-making.
- The PBC regularly provides **Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Training** to its Board members and staff, and incorporates sessions on culturally responsive decision-making at its **Annual Training on Risk Assessment**.
- Regional Communication Officers regularly receive training on trauma-informed and culturally-responsive communication with victims of crime.

Policy

- The CCRA requires that policies adopted relating to conditional release reviews must **respect** gender, ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences and be **responsive** to the specific needs of women and Indigenous peoples, as well as to the needs of other groups with specific requirements.
- In addition to providing guidance on the consideration of **systemic and background factors** in conditional release decision-making, there are references to groups of people with specific requirements throughout the *Decision-Making Policy Manual for Board Members*, for example, when considering whether to impose release conditions or authorize leave privileges.
- The PBC offers **alternate models of hearings** to provide a **culturally responsive process**, while adhering to the criteria for conditional release decision-making.

Decision-Making

- In reviewing cases for conditional release, Board members use a **structured decision-making framework** to meet the diverse and complex needs of the incarcerated population while ensuring the highest standard of public safety. The framework considers factors such as: criminal, social and conditional release history, as well as case specific factors.
- Board members consider **systemic and background factors** that have played a part in bringing the individual into interaction with the criminal justice system.
- Systemic and background factors may include, but are not limited to: systemic discrimination, racism, family or community breakdown, unemployment, poverty, or lack of education and employment opportunities.
- Systemic and background factors must be considered in cases involving Indigenous peoples, but also apply to other groups of diverse groups.
- The PBC has implemented five overarching guiding principles to serve as a foundation for working with women in the conditional release process: **gender-responsive, culturally aware, trauma-informed, holistic, and partnership-based**.
- Board members make decisions that are free of bias or prejudice based on race, age, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, or other personal abilities, characteristics or beliefs.

Outreach / In-reach

- **Outreach** is a corporate priority and significant progress has been made towards bolstering engagement with new and existing partners and stakeholders. The PBC has also expanded its community partnerships and advisory functions.
- The PBC conducts **in-reach** with incarcerated persons across Canada to explain the PBC's mandate, to raise awareness of parole and decision-making process, and to prepare individuals for upcoming reviews. Targeted in-reach includes **vulnerable populations** such as Indigenous peoples, women, and other racialized people.

Gender Based Analysis Plus

- The PBC has a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Framework, ensuring that GBA+ is applied in all areas of the PBC's policies, programs and initiatives. The framework guides the PBC in considering not only biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences, but also other factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability.

Opportunities

- The PBC is supportive of broad or targeted legislative reforms, with the objective of **addressing the over-representation** of Black and Indigenous people in the criminal justice system and **improving accessibility to pardons**, while ensuring public safety and rehabilitation.
- A review of PBC decision-making policies is currently underway, to conclude in 2022. It will include consideration of **additional guidance** related to groups with specific requirements.
- The PBC's **Working Group on Diversity and Systemic Racism** completed its report entitled *Moving Towards Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*, which outlines common themes for action identified further to an extensive review of existing reports and broad consultation with internal and external partners. Based on this report, the PBC has developed an internal action plan to advance diversity, equity and inclusion and track progress going forward.
- The PBC is participating in a government-wide **2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan** in the area of safety and justice.
- The PBC participates in many **internal and external working groups and committees**, such as the Chairperson's Indigenous Circle, in order to remain informed and sensitive to the issues facing Indigenous peoples, and continues to explore new partnerships with groups representing various **vulnerable populations**.