

Victims play an important role in the conditional release process, and registered victims have the right to participate in the PBC parole hearing of the offender who harmed them.

The following is intended to provide information to victims on Culturally Responsive Hearings (CRH).

## What is a Culturally Responsive Hearing?

The Parole Board of Canada (PBC) understands the important role that culture, community and history play in the successful reintegration of offenders into the community.

A CRH is a type of hearing that is available to Indigenous offenders (or those who have demonstrated a meaningful commitment to an Indigenous way of life) and Black offenders.

During a CRH, a PBC Elder or Cultural Advisor from an Indigenous or Black community attends the hearing to give support and information to Board members.

## What is the role of an Elder or Cultural Advisor?

A PBC Elder or Cultural Advisor is not involved in the decision-making process.

Their role is to provide Board members with general information about Indigenous or Black cultures and about an offender's specific culture and traditions. They can also answer questions Board members might have during the hearing about cultural and spiritual practices.

## Can victims attend a Culturally Responsive Hearing?

**Yes.** The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (CCRA) allows registered victims and other observers to attend PBC hearings, including Culturally Responsive Hearings.

To attend a hearing, a registered victim must complete a [Request to Observe a Parole Board of Canada Hearing – Application Form](#) and submit it to the PBC office in the region where the hearing will be held.

Applications should be submitted to the PBC as far in advance of the hearing date as possible (ideally at least one month before the hearing).

## Can a victim present a statement at a Culturally Responsive Hearing?

**Yes.** As with all PBC hearings, registered victims can present a victim statement to the Board at a CRH.

In accordance with the CCRA, a copy of the victim statement is shared with the offender in advance of the hearing.

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Victims who do not want, or who are not able, to attend a PBC hearing can also choose to submit a written statement, or a video or audio recording of their statement, which will be presented to Board members during the hearing.

For guidelines on what a victim statement should include, victims should consult the [Victims - Presenting a Statement](#) and [Victims - A Statement Checklist fact sheets](#).

## What happens at a Culturally Responsive Hearing?

A CRH follows the same decision-making criteria as a normal hearing, but the format can be different depending on the offender.

For example, the hearing can be held in a circle format, or the Elder/Cultural Advisor may include a specific cultural protocol, such as a ceremony or a prayer. Victim participation in ceremonial aspects of a hearing is voluntary.

Victims can request to meet with the Elder or Cultural Advisor before the hearing, who can explain their role and the process.

If the hearing is in person, victims are escorted to the hearing room by the Regional Communications Officer (RCO).

After the ceremony, the hearing begins with PBC staff reading the procedural safeguards, which are the rules that every hearing must follow.

Victims have the choice to present a statement

at either the start or end of the hearing.

Board members then discuss the offender's case file with their Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Parole Officer and those involved in their release planning.

If the offender has an assistant, the assistant can make a statement to Board members during the hearing.

Board members then question the offender to assess the risk that the offender could present to the community if granted conditional release.

Once complete, participants and observers are escorted from the room so that Board members can deliberate and make a decision.

During deliberations, the RCO and victim(s) wait in a separate area. For Community Assisted Hearings, the Board members may leave the room to deliberate in a different space.

When Board members are ready, participants and observers are escorted back into the room, where Board members summarize their decision for the offender.

At the end of the hearing, the Elder or Cultural Advisor may incorporate other cultural protocols.

The RCO and victim(s) then return to the waiting area to discuss the decision and answer questions.

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