

Incarceration

Overview

A desired outcome common to many charitable programs is the reduction, or entire prevention, of time spent in provincial or federal custody. In any given day in 2018/19, there were, on average, 37,854 adults in custody, of which most – 63 percent – were in provincial or territorial versus federal custody¹. In the same fiscal year, total provincial and territorial operating expenditures on adult correctional services were \$2.7 billion while total federal operating expenditures were \$2.4 billion². On a per inmate basis, the annual cost in most provinces and territories is upwards of \$100,000, and generally is even greater in the context of federal custody³. There is potential then for considerable cost savings to the government, and by extension tax payers, by reducing even modestly the number of days an individual spends incarcerated. In this paper we explore the costs of provincial or territorial and federal custody for male and female adults and youth.

The Public Cost of Incarceration

We use data from the Government of Canada's Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to estimate per person, per day incarceration costs⁴. Included, among other things, in its 2016/17 report are the costs per day of federal custody for males in minimum, medium and maximum security, females in all levels of security, and youth inmates; the cost per day, generally, of inmates in federal custody; and the costs per day of inmates in provincial or territorial custody, in each province or territory.

The cost, in 2022 CAD, per inmate per day in federal custody in 2016/17 was \$331. We estimate the cost per adult male in federal custody by weighting per day costs in minimum, medium, and maximum security by the percentage of inmates who are in custody in each type of facility – 22, 63, and 15 percent. Thus do we get a cost, in 2022 CAD, of \$225 per day per adult male in federal custody. Simply inflating to 2022 CAD the costs given generally for adult female and youth inmates, we get \$264 and \$231 respectively. Each of these costs – for adult males, adult females, and youth in federal custody – are significantly lower than the overall, average cost for all inmates in federal custody – \$331. We do not know why this should be other than that the overall figure might be inflated due to the considerably higher costs associated with solitary confinement (\$1,454 per day in 2022 CAD). If the larger costs of solitary confinement are built into the overall figure, we would like to take account of this in our specific estimates for adult males, adult females, and youth inmates. To do so, we first average the costs for each type of inmate (i.e., the average of \$225, \$264, and \$231 – \$240), and then based on the ratio of each inmate cost to the average, we adjust up or down the overall figure for the cost per inmate per day in federal custody. Thus, for example, our new estimate, adjusted upwards, for the cost per day per adult male federal inmate is $\$331 * (\$225 / \$240) = \310 . Similarly do we calculate costs per day per adult female and youth inmate – \$363 and \$319.

We adopt a comparable strategy to calculate province-specific costs per day per adult male, adult female, and youth in provincial or territorial custody. In this case, we use each province's or territory's overall cost per day per inmate in provincial or territorial custody as our bases, rather than the cost per day per

¹ Malakieh, J. (2020, December 21). *Adult and youth correctional statistics in Canada, 2018/2019*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00016-eng.htm>

² *Operating expenditures for adult correctional services*. (2022, April 20). Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510001301>

³ *Update on costs of incarceration*. (2018). Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

⁴ Ibid.

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inmate in federal custody. At this point, we have estimates of the cost per day per adult male, adult female, and youth inmate in federal custody, and in provincial or territorial custody in each of the provinces and territories. In cases where we do not know what jurisdiction of custody – federal or provincial/territorial – a charity client otherwise would have fallen under, we will want to know average costs of incarceration for custody in general. In 2016/17, 3.3 percent of sentences for men and 2.1 percent of sentences for women were 2 years or longer, which would designate those individuals as under federal custody. We weight the federal and provincial or territorial costs per day per adult male, adult female, and youth inmates by the percentage of inmates who fall under federal versus provincial or territorial jurisdiction. Thus do we weight adult male federal versus provincial or territorial costs by 3.3 and 96.7 percent, and adult female federal versus provincial or territorial costs by 2.1 and 97.9 percent; we average these for youth inmates – 2.7 and 97.3 percent. Finally, we calculate Canadian average costs per day per adult male, adult female, and youth inmate in provincial or territorial custody, and in federal or provincial or territorial custody, by weighting, in either case, province-specific results by the population sizes of provinces and territories. We present in Table I our estimates of the costs per day per adult male, adult female, and youth inmates in federal versus provincial or territorial custody, as well as the costs per day when the jurisdiction or type of custody is unknown.

Table I – Costs per Day of Incarceration (\$)

	federal custody			provincial or territorial custody			all custodies		
	adult male	adult female	youth	male adult	female adult	youth	male adult	female adult	youth
Canada	310	363	319	224	263	231	227	265	233
Alberta				156	182	160	161	186	164
British Columbia				221	259	228	224	261	230
Manitoba				224	262	230	227	264	232
New Brunswick				214	250	220	217	253	222
Newfoundland				269	314	276	270	315	277
Northwest Territories				425	498	437	422	495	434
Nova Scotia				280	327	287	281	328	288
Nunavut				612	716	629	602	709	621
Ontario				236	276	242	238	278	244
Prince Edward Island				300	352	309	301	352	309
Quebec				235	275	241	237	276	243
Saskatchewan				182	213	187	186	216	191
Yukon				348	407	357	346	406	356