

# Executive Summary



- The current qualitative, interview-based study was completed with correctional officers (COs) at Her [His] Majesty's Penitentiary (HMP) in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in late 2022; in total, interview data were analyzed for 28 participants.
- The study sought to understand how COs at HMP interpret prison design, what they consider essential considerations for the construction of the new penitentiary intended to replace HMP, as well as other considerations to improve work life, training, institutional security, relationships with colleagues and prisoners, and prisoner programming and other needs.
- Officers highlighted issues related to low staffing levels, including safety and security concerns, lack of experienced workers present on-shift, cancelling of prisoner rehabilitation and recreation programs, and a general sense of workplace exhaustion or fatigue.
- Officers believed human resource problems related to staff shortages and poor retention could be attributed, at least in part, to concerns around management (i.e., lack of leader accessibility and presence, mandatory overtime, disconnect from front-line workers).
- Officers identified improvements that could be implemented to enhance safety and security, including more accessible emergency exits, additional pathways to various units inside the institution to prevent problematic/anti-social intermingling among some prisoners, and better staff-to-prisoner ratios.
- Officers spoke to the need for adaptive and expanded training that teaches new recruits about the social dynamics of prison and prison interactions, how to deal with prisoners in this context, how to better meet their diverse needs (i.e., cultural, mental health), and how to appropriately use force.
- Officers believed that mental health and wellness resources, services, and programs could be made more accessible and should be expanded for staff. Such programs include Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), the revival of the 'wellness officer' position, support during legal accusation/liability, access to a psychologist, and improvements to sick leave and Worker's Compensation. Participants recognized officer mental health is conducive to prisoner mental health and vice versa.

- Officers identified more equitable monetary compensation and fairer access to time off is inherent to staff feeling that their work is valued and appreciated.
- Officers flagged how the current design of HMP challenges the regulation of prisoner interactions, particularly with respect to overcrowding, double-bunking, and the lack of physical space. They recommended smaller housing units/pods to make reassigning incompatible prisoners and regulating the flow/traffic of prisoners easier, and to provide prisoners with adequate space and privacy on a daily basis, which they believe will improve well-being and reduce the risk of conflicts.
- Officers requested a separate entrance for staff for safety purposes and a protected parking lot removed from the direct observation of prisoners.
- Officers spoke to the need for wider cell doors and larger meal hatches to support managing prisoners requiring assistance or to deescalate situations, particularly when officers must enter cells to preserve life or safety.
- Most officers expressed a preference for indirect supervision systems over direct supervision because of the inherent safety and logistical problems they believe direct supervision poses. They emphasized direct supervision can only effectively work with more officers on the units. Many COs were unfamiliar with how a direct supervision model works in practice, and thus were skeptical of dynamic supervision being safe, and fearful how being implemented may exacerbate occupational strain, fatigue, burnout, hypervigilance, and exposure to vicarious trauma (i.e., listening to disturbing talk and storytelling among prisoners).
- Officers listed many perceived advantages to indirect supervision, including more awareness of blind spots, ability to assess risk levels, plan, and make calculations (i.e., through CCTV) before entering a cell, more downtime from hypervigilance and contact with prisoners, and less vulnerability to physical violence.
- Officers requested modern technology, including an improved camera system to reduce the number of blind spots in the institution, and an improved communication system (i.e., radio systems, intercoms, earpieces, iPhones) to allow for better communication practices among staff and between ranges.
- Officers requested dedicated staff quiet/recreational spaces where officers can take downtime, prepare food/beverages, shower, change uniforms, exercise, relax, decompress, build community, have access to a computer, engage in leisure activities, and recharge.

- Officers similarly requested a separate space where the Emergency Response Team (ERT) could plan and store appropriate equipment (i.e., extra uniforms, protective vests, duty belts, etc.).
- Officers requested ergonomic workspaces and office equipment (i.e., comfortable chairs) to improve worker health.
- In terms of physical prison design, officers stressed the importance of softer lighting—including natural light—and fresh air for staff and prisoners, improved ventilation and air quality, better soundproofing, dimmers that can be used at night by prisoners to counter lighting issues, and more open space.
- In terms of better meeting prisoner program and rehabilitation needs, officers recommended implementing re-entry preparation programs; increased mental health supports (i.e., access to healthcare professionals, more therapeutic environment); more vocational (i.e., trades), educational (i.e., GED), life skill (i.e., hygiene), art (i.e., music), addictions (i.e., AA and NA), cultural (i.e., healing lodges, prayer rooms) and recreation (i.e., outdoors) programs with accompanying staff levels to operate the programs; as well as minimum security units/townhouses to house low-risk prisoners and promote their contact with families and independent function.
- With regard to improving prisoner safety, officers recommended including panic buttons or a duress system in prisoners' cells, and improvements to institutional vehicle maintenance and emergency preparedness to facilitate quicker prisoner transport times.
- Most officers did not agree that segregation should be completely eliminated but envisioned how segregation could be re-envisioned and practiced differently to accommodate prisoner needs and improve prisoner and staff safety, including access to alternative rooms to get fresh air, engage in prosocial activities, leisure, and fitness; increased spatial permeability in the segregation rooms; more staff flexibility to provide prisoners with access to phone calls or items of leisure; and more access to medical professionals to help treat underlying mental health concerns