

The crime of mental illness

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Canada needs to change its approach to mentally ill prisoners as correctional facilities worldwide contain a higher percentage of people with mental illness than the general population, states an editorial in CMAJ (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

Training of correctional staff, treatment programs for inmates and accurate data on the prevalence and consequences of mental health problems can help alleviate issues for people with mental health issues.

The higher percentage of inmates with mental health issues may be due to the fact people with significant mental health issues such as schizophrenia or personality disorders can act in socially inappropriate ways that can be misinterpreted or clash with the law. Prevention programs in the community are also needed to help address problems well before people might get in trouble with the law.

"Having people with treatable mental health disorders fall into the [criminal justice system](#) serves neither society nor the individual," write Dr. Paul Hebert, Editor-in-Chief and Dr. Noni MacDonald, Deputy Editor, CMAJ with Dr. Stephen Hucker, Forensic Psychiatrist, University of Toronto. "That so many inmates in jails and prisons have mental health disorders — often untreated — is an indictment of society's values and understanding of [mental health](#) disorders."

More information: www.cmaj.ca/cgi/doi/10.1503/cmaj.100405

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