

Results at a glance

Evaluation of the Indigenous Justice Program

The Indigenous Justice Program (IJP) is a federally led initiative that is cost-shared with all thirteen provinces and territories and delivered in partnership with Indigenous communities. The Program has been in operation for 30 years, since 1991. The overall objective of the Program is to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system (CJS), both as offenders and as victims.

The Program's two funding components were included in the evaluation, namely the Community-Based Justice Fund and Capacity-Building Fund.

WHAT WAS FOUND

- The need for the Program is evidenced by an increasing overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the CJS. The factors contributing to the overrepresentation are well established. Colonial policies and practices of systemic oppression of Indigenous culture, language and traditions, residential schools and the '60s scoop' resulted in intergenerational trauma and marginalization of Indigenous communities that continue to have major social, economic and health consequences today.
- The IJP provides culturally appropriate alternatives to the mainstream CJS, and is responsive to the needs of the accused by helping them understand and address the underlying factors contributing to the offences. In this respect, the community-based justice programs have largely been responsive to the needs of offenders who have participated in their programs and, more broadly, to victims and community members.
- The IJP has increased Indigenous communities' involvement in designing and delivering a wide range of justice related programming including prevention, diversion, civil and family mediation, reintegration, and supporting individuals on bail and probation. Elders play a key role in community programs, helping to engage both offenders and victims, and are frequently involved in community justice committees.
- Program visibility and capacity to engage with stakeholders are dependent upon the availability of staff, resources and infrastructure, as well as skills and ability of Community Justice Workers to build relationships. The Capacity-Building Fund supported a number of regional gatherings and workshops where Community Justice Workers, community members and CJS representatives (such as police officers or Crown prosecutors) come together to share best practices, learn about various issues and topics

impacting communities and build relationships. There is significant interest in further training and capacity building activities.

- In many communities, collaboration has increased across a range of stakeholders. Community Justice Workers most often reported improvements in collaboration with the Crown prosecutors, who are most likely to refer clients to the Program. The relationship with police remains a challenge.
- The IJP has undertaken various efforts to increase the awareness and visibility of the community-based programs, but it is too early to see tangible changes as a result of these efforts. Given the decision to divert individuals to the community-based justice programs remains largely with the CJS, lack of awareness of the community programs and discrimination denote an important barrier.
- The IJP has significant impact on the well-being of offenders. An estimated 90% of clients successfully complete the programming.
- The Program is well managed and data shows that both its economy and efficiency have improved since the last evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: The Indigenous Justice Directorate, in collaboration with provincial, territorial and community partners, develop a compendium of training, resource materials and best practices available to Community Justice Workers.

Recommendation 2: The Indigenous Justice Directorate, in collaboration with federal, provincial and territorial partners, identify program-level initiatives to help address systemic inequities in the criminal justice system.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION: The Evaluation of the Indigenous Justice Program was conducted by the Department of Justice Evaluation Branch and covered fiscal years 2016-17 to 2020-21. Its main objectives were to examine the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Program, in accordance with the Treasury Board's *Policy on Results* (2016). A planned recidivism study and comparative costing analysis could not be completed in the evaluation timeframe. They will be completed at a later date.

