

Results at a glance

Evaluation of the Youth Justice Initiative (March 2021)

The Youth Justice Initiative (YJI) was established to support the implementation of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) through funding to support programs and services, and to respond to new and emerging youth justice issues. The ultimate objective of the YJI is to foster a fairer, more effective youth justice system.

The YJI consists of three funding components:

- Youth Justice Services Funding Program (YJSFP) - provides funding to provinces and territories to support a range of high priority youth justice services and programs that are consistent with the federal policy objectives contained in the YCJA.
- Intensive Rehabilitative Custody and Supervision (IRCS) Program - provides funding to provinces and territories to support ongoing capacity to perform assessments and provide intensive and specialized services.
- Youth Justice Fund (YJF) – provides funding to non-governmental, Indigenous and community-based organizations, individuals, and other levels of government to respond to emerging youth justice issues and enable greater citizen/community participation in the youth justice system.

WHAT WAS FOUND:

- The evaluation found that the YJI continues to be relevant to share the costs of the youth justice system with provinces and territories in priority areas. The YJI has proven to be flexible in its support to jurisdictions to address an evolving youth justice landscape.
- The evaluation confirmed that the design of the YJSFP, including the identified high priority programming areas, is appropriate and comprehensive.
- Multiple programs and services offered at various stages of the youth justice continuum are supported by the YJSFP. These interventions, which almost exclusively reflect the program's identified high priority programming areas, contribute to provincial and territorial capacity to address federal policy objectives related to the YCJA.
- There is a perceived need among many provincial/territorial representatives for funding for youth who have mental health issues, but who have not (yet) committed an offence that meets the 'serious violent offence' threshold requirement of the IRCS.

- While youth justice programs and services appear to have good capacity overall, there can be some barriers to accessing YJI-funded programs and services in rural and remote locations.
- YJI funds have also been used to increase capacity and pilot interventions for culturally responsive and culturally safe programs and services. Still, the overrepresentation of Indigenous and racialized youth in the youth justice system points to more to be done.
- FPT collaboration regarding youth justice has improved and current committee interactions are well regarded. While progress addressing certain operational issues discussed at FPT meetings has improved, changes do not always occur in a timely manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: The Policy Implementation Directorate (PID), in consultation with its provincial-territorial partners, should explore the merits and consequences of expanding the current Part C (exceptional cases) offence eligibility criterion to include applications for youth who have serious mental health issues but have not met the serious offence criterion.

Recommendation 2: The PID, in consultation with its provincial/territorial partners, should review the YJSFP high priority funding areas and update them as required in order to support capacity development to deliver culturally responsive and culturally safe programs for Indigenous and other racialized youth as a way to work towards addressing their over-representation in the Canadian Justice System.

Recommendation 3: The PID, with its provincial/territorial partners should further discuss and share innovative practices specific to alleviating program delivery issues and service gaps in rural and remote areas.

Recommendation 4: The Family Law and Youth Justice Policy Section, in consultation with the Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials – Youth Justice, should continue to foster collaborative efforts and improved responses to emerging issues in a timely manner.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION: The Evaluation of the YJI was conducted by the Department of Justice Canada Evaluation Branch and covered fiscal years 2015-16 to 2019-20. Its main objectives were to examine the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Initiative, in accordance with the Treasury Board's *Policy on Results* (2016).

