

Article details: 2016-0064	
Title	Canadian Institutes of Health Research funding of prison health research: a descriptive study
Authors	Fiona G. Kouyoumdjian MD PhD, Kathryn E. McIsaac MSc PhD, Jessica E. Foran MA, Flora I. Matheson PhD
Reviewer 1	Dr. Lynn Stewart
Institution	Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, Ottawa, Ont.
General comments (author response in bold)	<p>Overall the article is well written and addresses an area of health research that has had too little attention. I recommend publication with only minor revisions. I congratulate the authors for undertaking this examination.</p> <p>1. From the abstract:"Strategic initiatives including funding opportunities could be developed to support prison health research in Canada, which could improve the health and healthcare of prisoners and health in the general population" It is unclear why this would improve the health of the general population. I would rework this sentence. We have revised this sentence.</p> <p>2. To make the point stronger that the funding level is not appropriate relative to the importance of addressing prison health issues, the author could consider comparing it to funding provided to other areas, (although the discussion does provide somewhat of an analysis of what would be an appropriate level of funding). We appreciate this suggestion and we agree that it is challenging to contextualize whether the level of funding identified is appropriate. We do not know of published data describing the amount of funding provided in specific areas, so we are not able to incorporate that into the discussion. We hope that the discussion of this issue in the Interpretation section sufficiently addresses this issue.</p> <p>3. To really determine if the funding level is fair, you would have to know how many researchers applied and how many were funded relative to researchers from other areas. There may be very few individuals with interest or expertise in this area who apply for funding. This speaks to the importance of generating interest through developing incentives to conduct research in this area. Our objective is to describe funding by the CIHR for prison health research. We agree that it is a limitation that we do not know how many researchers applied for funding, and we have stated this in the limitations section. We do not intend to comment on fairness, and we hope that this is not suggested in the revised text. We do suggest that there are opportunities to support more research in this field, if prison health research is a priority for Canada.</p> <p>4. To argue for more funding and more research, it could be made clearer what the societal level benefits of this sort of work would be, i.e., the health opportunity to examine the impact of programs that meet the needs of highly disadvantaged individuals during their incarceration (these are potentially high impact programs for given offenders are high risk for infectious diseases, addiction, self injury, accidents, and mental health problems), reductions in infections that would be carried back to the community on release, etc. We agree this is important, and we have shifted the discussion of the societal-level benefits of improving health in this population from the Interpretation to the Introduction section.</p> <p>5. Finally, although funding through CIHR appears low, it could be acknowledged that within government agencies research has been, and continues to be, conducted, particularly in the areas of offender addiction and offender mental health. We have acknowledged in the limitations section that there is federal government support for research through other agencies including through CSC.</p>
Reviewer 2	Dr. Depeng Jiang PhD
Institution	Department of Community Health Science, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Man.
General comments (author response in bold)	<p>This short article discusses whether CIHR awarded very little funding for prison health research.</p> <p>This paper is clear and easy to read. I do not think that the study overall has potential to make a contribution to the field of prison health research.</p> <p>1. The research objective is not well described. We have stated the objective in the Abstract and at the end of the Introduction.</p> <p>2. Just as noted by the author, it is not sure whether the low level of funding reflects a lack of research on prison health research. Therefore the logic model is not right. We have acknowledged the limitation that we do not know how many applications were submitted for CIHR funding during the period under study in the limitations paragraph of the Interpretation. We think that it is appropriate to look at funding levels and proportion, as an indicator of federal government support for prison health research.</p>

	<p>3. The evidence used to support the conclusion is not accurate. The conclusion that “the absolute and proportional levels of CIHR funding for prison health research are remarkably low” (Line 40-42, Page 6) is not well justified. Why it is remarkable low? Compare to other countries or compare the proportion of prisons? Actually it is similar as USA (Line 44-46, Page 6). We have removed the sentence in which we state that the funding identified is “remarkably low.”</p> <p>4. It is not justified that why the prison health research should be a priority for Canada. The focus of the paper is on describing CIHR funding for prison health research in Canada. We provide some contextual information, such as the population size and burden of disease, in order to suggest that the funding levels may be inappropriately low, but we note that there is no established set of criteria to use to determine health research priorities in Canada. We are not trying to conclusively argue that prison health research is a priority for Canada, but rather to raise the question of whether it is a priority and whether more funding and attention should be focused on this field of research.</p>
Reviewer 3	Dr. Chris Archibald
Institution	Surveillance and Epidemiology Division, Public Health Agency of Canada, Ottawa, Ont.
General comments (author response in bold)	<p>This is a clear, well-written report of a literature review of CIHR-funded research on prisoners’ health in Canada. I have no major concerns with this paper and note the following minor concerns:</p> <p>1. 2nd para of “Interpretation” section notes comparable work done in USA. Is there any comparable work done in Europe or other countries/regions? If so, it would be useful to mention that; if not, should mention that too as it can help point out uniqueness of this work. We have added in a sentence in the Interpretation to acknowledge that no other studies have looked at absolute or proportional levels of funding in other countries.</p> <p>2. In discussion of limitation on page 7, authors should point out that their review was focussed not just on CIHR but also on formal research itself. There may be valuable information on prisoners’ health available from non-research sources such as federal or provincial government reports, surveillance data, etc. We have added a comment in the limitations section of the Discussion to acknowledge this point: “The federal government may also contribute to knowledge generation through routine operations such as surveillance, as opposed to formal research.”</p> <p>3. For search by investigator name, why was this limited to 2015? CIHR grant recipients during the time period of interest may have published papers in 2014 or even in 2013. We expect that investigators who would have been awarded CIHR funding during the period would likely have been publishing papers in this field prior to being awarded the grant, and would likely publish at least once per year, so we think that it is reasonable to limit the PubMed search to one year. Also, the search by investigator name didn’t identify any relevant grants that were not also identified in the subject search, suggesting that a wider window period for the PubMed search would be unlikely to change the total grants identified.</p> <p>4. In “Methods” section, the flow of writing would work better if the short paragraph starting with “We also searched...” were moved immediately before the paragraph starting with “To improve...”, and the word “also” can then be removed. We have revised the organization of the section on the search strategy in the Methods, which we hope improves the clarity and flow.</p>