

Press Release

For Immediate Release  
To All Media

Source: Union of Canadian Correctional Officers–CSN (UCCO-SACC-CSN)

## **Prison Needle Exchange Program Handling Needles: Not Our Job!**

Ottawa, June 7, 2019 – Hundreds of correctional officers delivered a giant needle to Parliament in protest of the Prison Needle Exchange Program (PNEP). The PNEP allows inmates in Canada’s federal prisons to obtain an injection kit to keep in their cells. “Dealing with needles is not our job,” explained Jeff Wilkins, UCCO-SACC-CSN’s National President. “The PNEP is currently operationalized by correctional officers, meaning that we are responsible for keeping track of the needles in our populations and medically intervening during potential overdoses. The current program is putting the health and safety of correctional officers at risk.”

### **Overdose prevention sites: A possible option**

Correctional Service Canada (CSC) will be establishing, for the first time, an overdose prevention site (OPS) as an alternative to the present PNEP. It is scheduled to be rolled out at the end of June in Alberta’s Drumheller Institution. “Drumheller will establish an overdose prevention site in which inmates will visit the institution’s health care facility to use their drugs under the supervision of a health care professional,” said Wilkins. “This model both provides for harm reduction, as the inmates would be using a clean needle, and allows for immediate medical intervention if a potential overdose situation were to occur. The OPS is a model that is safer for inmates, correctional officers, and all staff, as needles will be controlled and not out in our open population units.”

The message is clear: needles need to be removed from prison cells, and the continued rollout of the PNEP must come to an end. “The PNEP does little to reduce the harm of spreading infectious diseases,” continued Wilkins. “We have already witnessed the abuse of this program when an authorized needle was found in the cell of an inmate who was not authorized to have it. When inmates share the needles, disease can spread. At the present moment, there are many initiatives in place to stop the spread of infectious disease, and the members of UCCO-SACC-CSN are certainly in favour of the government providing means for harm reduction, as long as it is not at the expense of our health and safety and that of other staff.”

### **Ongoing mobilization efforts**

Since the program was announced one year ago, UCCO-SACC-CSN has been mobilizing to make its voice heard. “We’ve met with Correctional Service Canada, as well as ministers, MPs, and senators, and organized many demonstrations to protest the PNEP and raise public awareness,” said the National President. “But as long as CSC continues to implement programs that allow needles to be in our populations and in cells, UCCO-SACC-CSN will continue to demand safer solutions.”

As of now, the Prison Needle Exchange Program is only implemented in six of Canada’s forty-nine federal institutions. “There is still time for the government to make the right choice,” concluded Wilkins.

### **About the union**

The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN) represents over 7400 members in the five major regions of Canada: the Pacific, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, and the Atlantic. UCCO-SACC-CSN represents correctional officers in all 49 federal institutions.

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