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The Schizophrenia Society of Canada Supports Appropriate Treatment of Inmates Living with a Mental Illness

(Winnipeg, November 5, 2009) - The Schizophrenia Society of Canada (“SSC”) welcomes the 2008/09 Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator (“OCI”) tabled November 2, 2009 in Parliament. Commenting on the Report, SSC President Jim Adamson says: "It is commendable and most appropriate that four of the 19 key recommendations address the treatment and support of inmates who live with a mental illness within Canada’s federal prison system.”

According to the OCI Annual Report, mental health services in federal penitentiaries are woefully deficient. Across the country, prisoners are denied treatment because of a shortage of clinical staff and inadequate mental health facilities for the prison population. The Schizophrenia Society of Canada along with its provincial schizophrenia societies has maintained that the treatment and support of inmates who are mentally ill in Canadian prisons is sub-standard, and sometimes almost non-existent.

Howard Sapers, Correctional Investigator of Canada says in his annual report: “Federal correctional mental health care services are under extreme duress - there are deficiencies in terms of capacity, quality, standards and responsiveness of care. Criminalizing and then warehousing the mentally ill burdens our justice system and does nothing to improve public safety. The demands in this area of corrections are increasing dramatically; the unmet needs are immediate and troubling. The overall situation of offenders with mental health disorders has not significantly improved since my Office first reported on this troubling situation back in 2004.”

The prevalence of offenders with significant mental health issues upon admission has doubled in the past five years. Eleven percent of federal offenders have a significant mental health diagnosis and over 20% are taking a prescribed medication for a psychiatric condition; just over 6% were receiving outpatient services prior to admission.
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The Correctional Investigator’s report highlights the seriousness of the conclusion that our prisons have become warehouses for the mentally ill. Over the past three decades Canada has moved toward a community and outpatient system of "de-institutionalizing" the mentally ill from provincial facilities, to "re-institutionalizing" them as prisoners.

“Criminalization of those with mental illness is unethical. If these inmates do not receive hospital-standard psychiatric care, their chances of rehabilitation are extremely low and their risk of re-offending remains high. Allowing inmates to go without comprehensive

treatment services for their mental illness is a failure of the Correctional Service to address mental health needs of offenders on many levels,” says Chris Summerville, CEO of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada.

^[1] Public Safety Canada, *Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview: Annual Report 2008*, December 2008.

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