

Adult and youth correctional statistics, 2020/2021

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In the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an unprecedented decline in the number of adults and youth in a correctional institution, and counts fluctuated in tandem with pandemic-imposed restrictions. Overall, in 2020/2021, the annual average daily count of adults in provincial, territorial and federal custody declined 16% from the previous year. The annual average daily count of youth in custody decreased by more than one-quarter (-27%) in 2020/2021, the largest decline in almost two decades since the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* came into force.

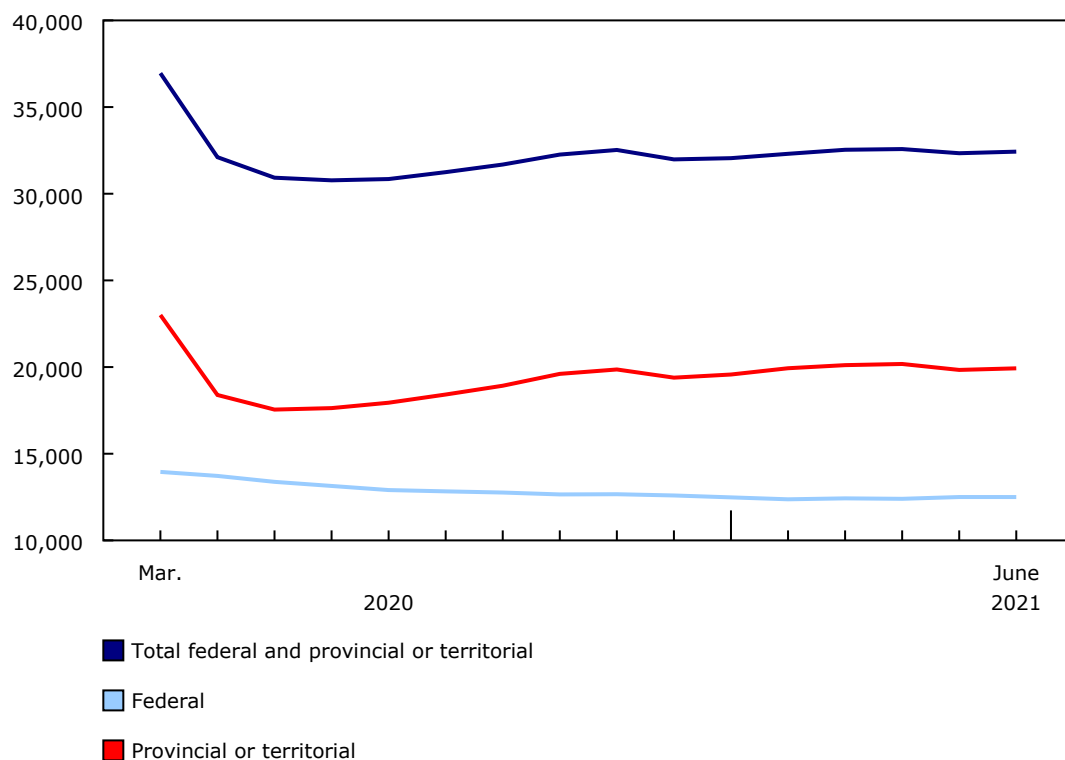
While the pandemic brought historic changes in the size of the federal, provincial and territorial correctional populations, the changes at the provincial and territorial levels were more pronounced. Specifically, in 2020/2021, the annual average daily count of adults in provincial and territorial custody declined 21% from the previous year to about 18,950, while the federal custodial population declined 9% to about 12,830. These declines were the largest recorded at both the federal and provincial and territorial levels since the late 1970s, when information was first available. For more information on the differences between the provincial, territorial and federal correctional systems, please see Note to readers.

Most of the decrease in provincial and territorial custody occurred in the first month of the pandemic, from March to April 2020, when the monthly average daily count of adults in custody fell 20%. Provincial and territorial custody counts declined again the following month (-5% in May), then trended upward over the remaining course of the year, increasing 14% from June 2020 to March 2021.



Chart 1
Total federal, provincial and territorial adult custodial population, March 2020 to June 2021

average daily count



Note(s): Counts are based on the average number of adults in federal and territorial custody (includes sentenced custody [including intermittent sentences when in], remand and other temporary detention) per day for each month.
Source(s): Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report (3313).

Number of youth in custody drops by one-quarter during the first year of the pandemic

During the early months of the pandemic, changes in the number of persons in the youth custodial system mirrored the declines seen in adult provincial and territorial custody. From March to April 2020, the monthly average daily count of youth in custody decreased 18% (youth figures exclude Quebec; see Note to readers).

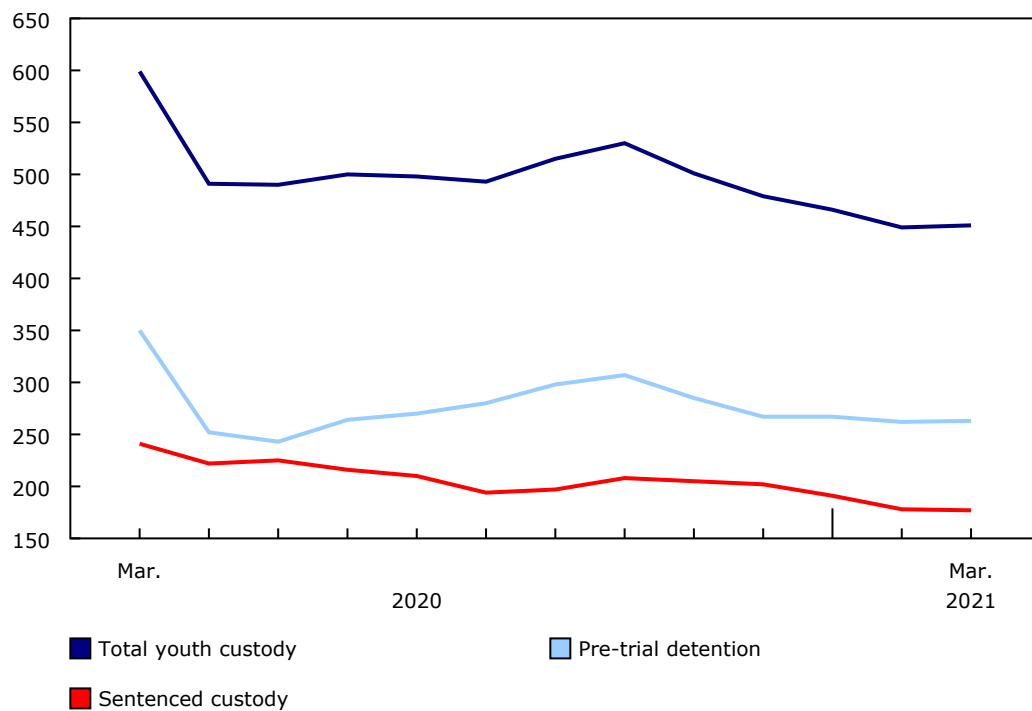
From May to October 2020, as restrictions began to be lifted across the country, the count of youth in custody changed direction to trend upward. However, in November, as another wave of new COVID-19 cases began to emerge and some restrictions were reinstated, the number began to decline again, reaching its lowest point in February 2021 (449 youth).

Over the entire year, the average number of youth in custody per day decreased by one-quarter (-25%) from March 2020 to March 2021. In 2020, as pandemic restrictions were imposed, the police-reported youth crime rate fell 31% from the previous year. For more information on the youth correctional system, please refer to Note to readers.

The average daily count of youth in pre-trial detention (-25%) and the average daily count of youth in sentenced custody (-26%) each declined by about one-quarter from March 2020 to March 2021.

Chart 2
Youth custodial population, March 2020 to March 2021

average daily count



Note(s): Total counts are based on the average number of youth in provincial and territorial custody under sentence, pre-trial detention, Provincial Director Remand and other temporary detention per day for each month.
Source(s): Youth Corrections Key Indicator Report (3313).

The decline in the youth custodial population during the early stages of the pandemic was more pronounced for females than males. The average daily count of female youth in custody declined by over one-third (-36%) from March to April 2020, while the number of male youth in custody decreased 16%. Over the year, from March 2020 to March 2021, the average daily counts of youth in custody fell by 41% for female youth and 23% for male youth.

Adult and youth admissions to correctional services also fall during the pandemic

An admission to correctional services is counted each time an individual begins any type of custodial or community supervision program which includes probation, among others. A single person could experience more than one admission throughout the year.

Although the number of admissions to correctional services has been on a downward trend over the last decade, there were unprecedented declines in the number of admissions to correctional services for both adults and youth in the first year of the pandemic.

In 2020/2021, there were about 238,100 adult admissions to provincial and territorial correctional services, a decrease of 34% from the previous year. Federal corrections saw about 12,200 admissions, 14% fewer than in 2019/2020. Typically, changes in the number of admissions at both the provincial and territorial and federal level vary less than 5% from year-to-year. Admissions to adult correctional services fell in all provinces and territories except Yukon (+3%) and Nunavut (+24%) in 2020/2021.

Adult admissions to custody declined at a faster pace than admissions to community supervision programs such as probation, conditional sentences and provincial parole. In 2020/2021, provincial and territorial admissions to custody fell 37%, while community admissions were down 29%. Provincial and territorial admissions to sentenced custody, which represented about one-quarter of all admissions to custody, declined by 45% in 2020/2021, while admissions to remand to await trial or sentencing fell by 30%.

At the federal level, adult admissions to custody decreased by 21% and admissions to community supervision were down 7% in 2020/2021.

For youth, admissions to correctional services fell at an even faster pace than adult admissions during the first year of the pandemic. There were about 10,100 youth admissions to correctional services in 2020/2021, 42% fewer than the year before. Youth admissions to custody (-45%) and to community supervision (-41%) declined at a similar pace. Although the last decade has seen steady declines in the number of youth custody and community admissions, the pace of decline was much faster over the first year of the pandemic.

Indigenous adults and youth are overrepresented in admissions to custody

The ongoing impact of colonization and the residential school experience on First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit (Indigenous) persons within the criminal justice system in Canada has been well documented. Research has looked at [the effects of socioeconomic marginalization, trauma, and intergenerational violence on life outcomes as well as substance use, mental health, delinquency and associated criminal behaviour leading to overrepresentation](#).

Similar in proportion to previous years, there was a disproportionate number of admissions of Indigenous adults and youth to provincial, territorial and federal custody in 2020/2021. Indigenous adults accounted for about one-third of all adult admissions to provincial and territorial (31%) and federal (33%) custody, while representing approximately 5% of the Canadian adult population in 2020. Indigenous youth accounted for one-half (50%) of youth admissions to custody in 2020/2021, while representing about 8% of the youth population.

There was even greater overrepresentation of Indigenous women in custody admissions compared with Indigenous men. In 2020/2021, Indigenous men represented 30% of male admissions to provincial and territorial custody and 32% to federal custody. Indigenous women represented 42% of female custody admissions to provincial and territorial custody and 40% to federal custody in 2020/2021. Male Indigenous youth represented 48% of youth male admissions to custody, while female Indigenous youth represented 62% of youth female admissions to custody.

Indigenous admissions to adult provincial and territorial custody (-34%) and federal custody (-16%) both decreased in 2020/2021.

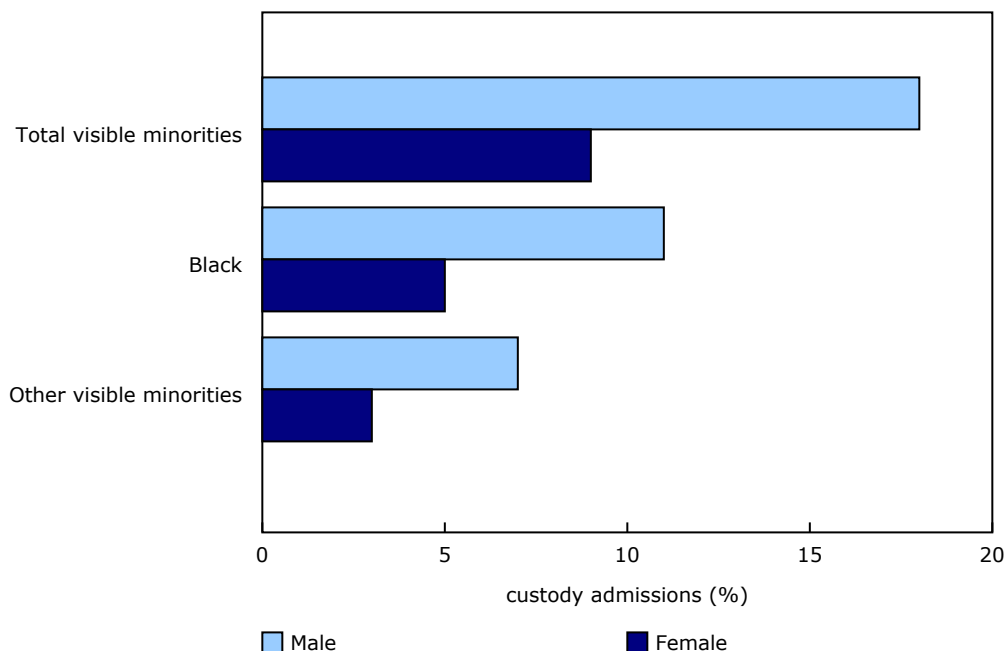
About one in six adult admissions to custody are from population groups designated as visible minorities

In 2020/2021, four provincial correctional programs reported information on adults belonging to a visible minority group: Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Of the approximately 90,300 adult admissions to custody in these provinces, 17% involved population groups designated as visible minorities. Among these admissions, just over 6 in 10 (61%) involved Black individuals. Overall, in the four reporting provinces, 10% of adult admissions to custody in 2020/2021 involved Black individuals, while the Black population represented 4% of the adult population in these provinces.

Adult admissions where the person admitted belonged to a designated visible minority group were more pronounced for men. In 2020/2021, 18% of male admissions to custody were from population groups designated as visible minorities, compared with 9% of female admissions. Moreover, 11% of male admissions to custody involved Black men compared with 5% of female admissions. This pattern is consistent with the previous year and is consistent in the four reporting provinces.

Chart 3

Proportion of male and female adult custody admissions from population groups designated as visible minorities, reporting provinces, 2020/2021



Notes(s): Represents data from Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. The Canadian Correctional Services Survey (CCSS) collects information on whether individuals admitted to correctional services are members of population groups designated as visible minorities, according to the Statistics Canada classification. Visible minority refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the Employment Equity Act and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as 'persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour'. Currently, six jurisdictions report to the CCSS, with four provinces able to provide information on visible minorities: Nova Scotia, Ontario (adult correctional services only), Alberta and British Columbia. This information is self-reported by persons supervised on intake to correctional services.
Source(s): Canadian Correctional Services Survey (5251).

About one in five youth admissions to custody are from population groups designated as visible minorities

Three provincial correctional programs reported information on youth belonging to a visible minority group: Nova Scotia, Alberta and British Columbia. In 2020/2021, about one in five (21%) youth admissions to custody in these provinces involved population groups designated as visible minorities. In total, there were about 820 youth admissions to custody in 2020/2021 in the three provinces.

Youth admissions where the person admitted belonged to a designated visible minority group were more pronounced for males. In 2020/2021, 23% of male youth admissions to custody involved population groups designated as visible minorities, compared with 14% of female youth admissions.

Overall, in the three reporting provinces in 2020/2021, 18% of youth admissions to custody involved Black individuals while the Black population represented 4% of the youth population in the three provinces.

Note to readers

The Canadian courts and correctional systems have taken actions to reduce the size of the correctional institution population during the COVID-19 pandemic, while balancing public safety concerns. Measures include the temporary or early release of persons in custody who are considered low risk to reoffend; extended periods for parole appeal deadlines and access to medical leave privileges; and alternatives to custody while awaiting trial, sentencing and bail hearings. Country-wide restrictions and lockdown conditions during the pandemic also meant fewer opportunities to commit crimes, as well as reductions and delays in court processes and in-person hearings.

The provincial and territorial correctional system supervises adults serving custodial sentences of less than two years, as well as those being held in pre-trial custody (remand) or serving community sentences such as probation. The federal correctional system supervises adults serving custodial sentences of two years or more, and those on conditional release in the community including parole. The Youth Criminal Justice Act governs how youth aged 12 to 17 years at the time of the offence are dealt with by the Canadian justice system, and provides for a separate youth justice system based on the principle of diminished moral blameworthiness or culpability of youth.

The present analysis is from the Adult Correctional Services Survey, the Youth Custody and Community Services Survey, the Corrections Key Indicator Report for Adults and Youth, the Integrated Correctional Services Survey and the Canadian Correctional Services Survey (CCSS). To provide insight into the impact of the pandemic on the custodial populations in Canada, average daily counts of adults in federal, provincial and territorial custody in Canada are being collected more frequently. For further information, see the article "[After three months of unprecedented declines, monthly decreases in the adult custodial population in Canada slowed in June](#)" in The Daily, as well as [Table 35-10-0175-01](#).

While the data in this release quantify the magnitude of change, they cannot show the extent to which special safety measures implemented during the pandemic, such as temporary and/or early release or alternatives to custody contributed to lower custody counts.

Admissions are counted each time a person begins any period of supervision in a correctional institution or in the community. These data describe and measure the number of times a person moves from one type of correctional supervision to another. The same person may be included several times in the admission counts when moving from one correctional program to another (for example, from remand to sentenced custody) or re-entering the system later in the same year.

Quebec is unable to provide admissions counts and average daily counts for youth, and therefore is not included in youth admissions figures and average daily counts for this analysis, as well as the youth population figures.

The Canadian Correctional Services Survey (CCSS) collects information on whether individuals admitted to correctional services are members of population groups designated as visible minorities, according to the Statistics Canada classification. Visible minority refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the Employment Equity Act and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as 'persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour'. Currently, six jurisdictions report to the CCSS, with four provinces able to provide information on visible minorities: Nova Scotia, Ontario (adult correctional services only), Alberta and British Columbia. This information is self-reported by persons supervised on intake to correctional services.

For the purposes of the correctional services surveys, "Indigenous identity" refers to persons under correctional supervision who identified with the Indigenous peoples of Canada. This includes those who are First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit). This information is self-reported by persons supervised on intake to correctional services.

Population counts are based upon July 1, 2020 estimates provided by Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography.

Available tables: [35-10-0003-01](#) to [35-10-0009-01](#) , [35-10-0012-01](#) to [35-10-0024-01](#) , [35-10-0118-01](#), [35-10-0154-01](#), [35-10-0155-01](#), [35-10-0203-01](#) and [35-10-0204-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3306](#), [3313](#), [3323](#) and [5251](#).

Updated data are now available in the [Correctional services statistics: Interactive dashboard \(71-607-X\)](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).