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**Best Practices for Chronic/Persistent  
Youth Offenders in Canada:  
Summary Report**

**NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE / CENTRE NATIONAL DE PRÉVENTION DU CRIME**

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**Canada**

# **Best Practices for Chronic/Persistent Youth Offenders in Canada<sup>1</sup>: Summary Report**

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<sup>1</sup> Link to the full report:

[http://people.ucalgary.ca/~crilf/publications/Final\\_Draft\\_Best\\_Practices\\_Report\\_May\\_2009.pdf](http://people.ucalgary.ca/~crilf/publications/Final_Draft_Best_Practices_Report_May_2009.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family, Centre for Initiatives on Children, Youth and the Community, The Alberta Law foundation or the National Crime Prevention Centre, Department of Public Safety Canada.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Police Strategies and Programs for Persistent/Chronic Youth Offenders.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Monitoring/Enforcement Model .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Multi-Agency/Intervention Model .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Therapeutic Model .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>13</b>

## Introduction

In 2006, the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (CRILF) began work on the three-year project, *A Study of Youth Offending, Serious Habitual Offenders, and System Response in Calgary*. One objective of this study was to develop a knowledge base of best practices in Canada and internationally for chronic and persistent youth offenders. With funding from the Alberta Law Foundation and the National Crime Prevention Centre, and in partnership with the Centre for Initiatives on Children, Youth and the Community, City of Calgary Community and Neighbourhood Services, and the Calgary Police Service, CRILF researchers performed an environmental scan to assess what programs and strategies police agencies across Canada have in place to address this youth offending population.

This report summarizes information collected on the nature and type of community-based, multi-agency and police strategies and programs that exist across Canada for chronic and persistent youth offenders. In order to examine the programs and strategies used by police organizations in Canada, CRILF interviews with key informants were conducted with a number of police agencies across the country. The key informants for this review included police and agency representatives from across Canada who had experience working with and delivering services to youth offenders.

In total, 255 police agencies and other organizations were contacted across Canada from October 2008 to February 2009, with a total of 140 completed interviews conducted using a standardized interview protocol. Police and other agencies (community organizations) involved in providing services for youth offenders that did not participate in the environmental scan either declined to participate or did not respond before the end of the data collection period.

While the focus of intervention in most provinces was police organizations, in Quebec, services for youth offenders are provided mainly through 16 Youth Centres (YCs) or “Centres jeunesse” located in communities across the province. These are para-governmental agencies almost entirely funded by the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS). They provide a range of services to children, youth, and their families, including young people up to 18 years of age who are subject to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)* and/or the *Youth Protection Act* in Quebec. In order to get a comprehensive picture of the response of Quebec authorities to chronic and persistent youth offenders, requests were sent to all 16 YCs in the province. Interviews were completed with representatives from 12 Youth Centres serving more than 85% of the province’s population and the Director of Youth Protection in Inuulitsivik Baie, who have direct responsibility for providing services to youth offenders in Quebec. A total of 16 police services, including the Sûreté du Québec (SQ), were also contacted. Interviews were completed with representatives from 9 of the police agencies contacted serving approximately 80% of the province’s population.

Table 1 provides details on the number of police services and other agencies contacted in each province and the response rates. Program information was collected from representatives who were not formally involved in the program, which sometimes led to little information about the program being obtained. There was also very little representation of programs connected to aboriginal police services. In addition, due to the time constraints of the study, there were some requests for information that were still being processed when the data collection period ended. Therefore, while this report highlights police strategies and programs for chronic and persistent youth offenders, it is not meant to be representative of all community and police-based programs for chronic/persistent youth offenders that are available across Canada.

**Table 1**  
**Police and Other Agencies Contacted and Interviewed, by Jurisdiction**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>N Contacted</b>	<b>N Interviewed</b>	<b>% Response</b>
British Columbia	25	15	60.0
Alberta	25	18	72.0
Saskatchewan	26	12	46.2
Manitoba	25	14	56.0
Ontario	50	20	40.0
Quebec			
Police Agencies	16	9	56.3
Centres jeunesse	16	12	75.0
New Brunswick	19	10	52.6
Nova Scotia	18	10	55.5
Newfoundland and Labrador	14	7	50.0
Prince Edward Island	9	5	55.5
Northern Territories	12	8	66.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>54.9</b>

## **Police Strategies and Programs for Persistent/Chronic Youth Offenders**

As aforementioned, this report presents a summary of the results obtained from interviews conducted with police and related agency representatives from across Canada. While police programs were the focus of the environmental scan, it is important to note that there are many other services and agencies across Canada that work with youth offenders or youth who are at risk of offending or reoffending<sup>3</sup>. In particular, the YCJA has added a number of community-based sentences that provide youth court judges with more options for responding to youth offending. A number of provinces make use of programs offered through other agencies, such as the John Howard Society, to work with high risk youth.

<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the definitions of youth who are at risk for offending, reoffending and chronic offending vary by jurisdiction and sometimes by specific program.

The Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP) is a sentence that is similar to probation, but provides more support to the young person as well as closer monitoring. While only five provinces and territories have opted to make use of the ISSP as a sentence that can be imposed by a judge (British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon), other provinces such as Nova Scotia have opted to make the program available to candidates referred by corrections or probation.

In addition, there are many residential and attendance programs offered across Canada that are specifically targeted toward chronic and persistent youth offenders. Camp Trapping in British Columbia is one such residential program targeted to young male offenders, with referrals to the program made through British Columbia's Youth and Probation Services; youth are required to attend as a condition of their probation. The PASS (Progressive Accountability through Supervision and Support) program in Ontario similarly works with youth who are deemed medium to high risk to reoffend, offering services that include anger management and victim awareness courses, as well as individual, family, and school support.

The remainder of this section describes and summarizes police strategies and programs that are targeted at chronic and persistent youth offenders across Canada. The numerous programs, identified in various jurisdictions across the country, are organized by a typology of three models: (1) the Monitoring/Enforcement Model; (2) the Multi-Agency/Intervention Model; and (3) the Quebec Therapeutic Model. While a description with distinct characteristics and examples of specific programs will be provided for each of these models, it should be noted that most of the programs identified across Canada have unique characteristics which reflect both the needs (such as rates of youth offending) and available resources of the communities where they are established.<sup>4</sup>

### **Monitoring/Enforcement Model**

The earliest police strategies and programs in Canada that targeted chronic and persistent youth offenders focused primarily on increased monitoring and enforcement. Most of these early initiatives were based on the **Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program (SHOCAP)**, a model adopted from the United States. SHOCAP is a police-centred inter-agency effort designed to provide a coordinated approach and enhanced communication between agencies working with young persons who are habitual offenders. The primary focus is increased monitoring and enforcement. However, depending upon where the program has been implemented, police may also work closely with social services and probation on case planning and reintegration into the community for the SHOCAP targets, while ensuring that there is strict compliance of their court-ordered conditions. Targeted offenders are

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<sup>4</sup> A more detailed description of the individual programs as well as a comprehensive literature review of the factors related to chronic/persistent offending can be found in the following report: DeGusti, B., MacRae, L., Vallée, M., Caputo, T., & Hornick, J.P. (2009). *Best Police Practices for Chronic/Persistent Youth Offenders*. Prepared for the Alberta Law Foundation and the National Crime Prevention Centre. At [www.ucalgary.ca/~criif](http://www.ucalgary.ca/~criif).

usually chosen for the program through the use of a formal screening instrument or are referred by an inter-agency review committee.

The SHOCAP model was first brought to Canada in 1988 by the Calgary Police Service. Currently, the main goal of this Calgary program, which has evolved into the Serious Habitual Offender Program (SHOP), is to curtail the criminal activity of the targets monitored. However, officers also work with social workers to ensure that SHOP targets have access to rehabilitation and reintegration services.

In 1999, the first SHOCAPs in Saskatchewan were implemented in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. It has since become the most common program for dealing with the problem of chronic and persistent offenders among Saskatchewan police agencies. While each police service has modified the program to the needs of their communities, including expansion of the program to address specific criminal trends such as break and enters and auto theft, all of the services have maintained a similar focus on monitoring and enforcement.

There are also a number of police-based programs in Ontario that focus on monitoring and enforcement. For example, Halton Regional Police Service has implemented the **High Enforcement Repeat Offender (HERO) program**, which is aimed at adults and youth repeat offenders who show a high likelihood to reoffend. While the intent of this program is primarily enforcement of judicially imposed conditions, HERO officers also assist with referrals to services in the community, provide support and guidance to the HERO candidate, and provide patrol members with information about the targeted repeat offenders.

Another example of a monitoring/enforcement program in Ontario is the Youth Intervention Monitoring Program implemented by the Peel Regional Police in 2005. This program targets youth under the age of 18 who are on some form of judicial release or court-ordered supervision and have gang associations. Neighbourhood police officers are assigned 3 to 5 youth targets and are responsible for monitoring the youths' enforceable conditions.

In smaller communities, such as those found in the Atlantic Provinces and Northern Territories, there does not appear to be as great a demand for formalized programs for chronic and persistent offenders, given their small numbers. Results from the interviews revealed that smaller communities are often served by RCMP and police detachments, where a small number of members communicate with each other on a regular basis about youth and adult offenders who are chronically offending. Through this communication, police members are made aware of youth who should receive extra attention and monitoring in their communities.

## Multi-Agency/Intervention Model

Multi-Agency/Intervention Model programs have developed more recently and are becoming quite common in Canadian jurisdictions, particularly in Manitoba and British Columbia. Their primary focus is on prevention and intervention to reduce reoffending. While multi-agency intervention programs also increase monitoring of the at-risk youth, emphasis is placed upon engagement as opposed to monitoring alone. These multi-agency programs involve the police in partnership with numerous other community-based services. Thus, instead of a police-centred approach, a team approach is used, relying on referrals from the police for intervention services. The primary activities include sharing of information regarding youth at risk for reoffending and coordination of youth services provided by the partnership agencies. In many programs, youth can be referred by any participating agency as long as they meet specific criteria. Some programs also use an assessment tool for identifying youth who are at significant risk to reoffend.

The review of community-based and police programs for youth offenders shows that this multi-agency approach to managing chronic and persistent youth offenders is most commonly used in Manitoba. For example, the city of Brandon operates a not-for-profit organization called the **Multi-Agency Preventative Program (MAPP)**, which includes a network of agencies consisting of: the Brandon School Division, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, Child and Adolescent Treatment Centre, Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba, Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services, Métis Child, Family and Community Services, Community and Youth Correctional Services, Manitoba Justice Crown Attorney's Office, Brandon University Psychology Department, the Brandon Fire Department, and the Brandon Police Service. The organization does not replace agency involvement, but rather endeavours to provide support to the agencies involved in the form of:

...reports of youth activity in the community, school and home environments; information regarding police, courts and or probation; administrative support upon request; a measuring tool to assess areas of improvement and decline over time; a means of exchanging ideas between individuals and agencies; comprehensive files that can be used in case conferences or multi-agency meetings; and a means of networking with others in the community who share the same goals and ideas in helping at risk youth. (MAPP for High Risk Youth, n.d.).

Similar interagency committees are also being utilized in Fisher Branch, Killarney and Oakbank. In Fisher Branch, the RCMP works with agencies in their community to target youth with multiple agency involvement. The RCMP meets with representatives from various agencies, including child and family services, probation services, and psychological services, while also coordinating with First Nations communities to develop unique strategies to help youth. Strategies can include referring youth to drug awareness programs or various leisure and skill development programs, and meeting with school and community justice committees.



In the same way, the Killarney RCMP also participates in a multi-agency committee called the Turtle Mountain School Division Multi-Agency Committee. The committee meets once per month and includes representatives from the RCMP, Child and Family Services, Mental Health, the Turtle Mountain School Division, Probation Services, Community Health, and the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. The number of youth the committee works with varies, from as few as 5 to as many as 20 youth aged 12-18. The referral process for youth to the committee is very informal with agency representatives forwarding recommendations to the committee chair. The committee strives to ensure that plans of action are consistent across all the agencies that youth have contact with. The role of the RCMP is to work closely with probation to ensure that youth are in compliance with their court-ordered conditions.

The province of British Columbia adheres to a provincial Crime Reduction Initiative that aims to decrease crime by targeting prolific offenders who are assessed to be at a high risk to reoffend. In 2005/2006, an initial RCMP Crime Reduction Initiative was piloted in Coquitlam, Comox Valley, Maple Ridge, Port Moody, Penticton, Port McNeill, and Fraser Lake. In these sites, partnerships with health, social services, and justice reform agencies were formed with the intent of targeting enforcement on prolific and priority offenders. For example, in Comox Valley, the focus for adult priority offenders is mostly enforcement, however officers assigned to youth priority offenders partner with schools, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and families to provide rehabilitation with their enforcement. Since this initiative has begun, the pilot sites have seen a significant drop in crime rates, particularly with respect to property crime.

Finally, the Vancouver Police Department's Youth Services Section allocates members to work in a team with social workers and probation officers in programs called **Yankee 20** and **Yankee 10**. The teams specifically target and monitor high risk youth, while also providing rehabilitative services. Yankee 20 members work in the daytime with social workers, while Yankee 10 police members partner with probation officers in the evening to monitor youth and their court ordered conditions. Police members from the Youth Services Section meet with key representatives from probation and social work every second week to determine who should be monitored. They do not use a formal protocol to target youth, but rather assess risk factors for specific youth who have been referred to them. The goal of the cross-disciplinary teams is to achieve wrap-around services for targeted youth by involving agencies from around the city. Each agency provides funding for their own members and the teams usually average over 200 checks per month.

### **Therapeutic Model**

Historically, the province of Quebec has had a unique approach to youth justice. More than the other Canadian provinces, Quebec has promoted a child welfare/child protection approach to youth at risk of offending. Quebec has consistently espoused a social development philosophy where rehabilitation and reintegration are primary goals. Their experience with diversion and alternative sentences dates back to the late 1970s, when Quebec's *Youth Protection Act* was introduced.

In Quebec, Youth Centres (YCs) or “Centres jeunesse,” which are located in communities across the province, are responsible for both youth in need of protection as well as those in conflict with the law under the mandate of the Provincial Director (young persons). These are para-governmental agencies almost entirely funded by the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS). They provide a range of services to children, youth, and their families, including young people up to 18 years of age who are subject to the *YCJA* and/or the *Youth Protection Act* in Quebec. In fact, the philosophical perspective informing youth services is based on the notion that there is little difference between the services provided to children and youth who are in need of protection and those who are youth offenders. Quebec’s philosophy on youth offenders views them as children and youth who are in a stage of development requiring special support. They are seen as susceptible to making errors, having special needs, and requiring structure and counselling to develop and mature.

Given this context, it was important to conduct interviews with representatives from the YCs in the province in addition to the police, since the YCs play such a prominent role in responding to young people – including chronic and persistent youth offenders. The interviews conducted with police representatives revealed that none of the police agencies that participated in this study had programs specifically designed for chronic and persistent youth offenders. With the exception of one pilot project in Montréal, most are mainly involved in prevention programs and extrajudicial measures. In the Montréal project, a Youth Worker (who works under the mandate of the Provincial Director) from the Montréal YC arranges meetings with neighbourhood police officers and young people being released from custody when they are beginning the community supervision portion of their custodial sentences. The objective of this initiative is to provide police officers with access to better information on youth residing in the neighbourhood to improve supervision.

As was the case with the police, interviews with representatives of the YCs revealed that there are no specific programs or services for chronic and persistent youth offenders in the province. A number of YCs are trying to establish working protocols with the police in regard to their dealings with youth offenders and related staff safety issues. However, developing protocols with the police appears to be challenging for many of the YCs because each must deal with several police services within their geographic areas. As a result, protocols have focused mainly on consultation and coordination rather than joint programming, case review, or intervention.

The Youth Centre respondents indicated that a majority of the Youth Centres in Quebec have embraced a differential clinical intervention approach providing a full range of services to youth offenders. This often results in a case-by-case intervention strategy for chronic and persistent youth offenders. The implication of this is that chronic and persistent youth offenders receive services on the basis of their dispositions and individual assessments during intake.

In addition to the case-by-case intervention, the Youth Centres in the province have a variety of specialized programs for youth offenders. For example, the Montréal YC has a specific program for youth offenders who are on an intensive probation supervision order or post-custodial community supervision. The intervention was modeled on the

Boscoville psycho-education approach, where the intervention strategies were based on a cognitive development and behaviour model. While there have not been any comprehensive evaluations of this approach by the YCs, there is an on-going evaluation strategy currently underway. Additionally, there has been at least one study conducted by the “Institut de recherche sur le développement social des jeunes” and the University of Quebec in the Outaouais on the effectiveness of the intensive supervision provision of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)* by the Montréal Youth Centre. A summary of the study indicates that referrals to the program were high risk youth offenders (Cournoyer & Dionne, 2007). The evaluation found that the intervention was effective in preventing recidivism in 76.2% of the cases compared to 47.7% for those youth offenders who were given open custody dispositions.

Another analysis of the potential effectiveness of this treatment approach focused more on chronic youth offenders. It is described in detail in a paper by Le Blanc (2007). Le Blanc suggests that taking a psycho-educational approach enhanced by cognitive behaviour treatment represents the most effective way of dealing with the more difficult or chronic youth offenders.

Nearly all of the medium to large YCs offer special intervention programs to youth offenders in custody. Several provide the cognitive/behaviour interventions previously referred to while others focus more on approaches encouraging intervention negotiation strategies or control-related elements. One example of the cognitive/behaviour programs for youth offenders in custody is offered by the YC Abitibi-Témiscamingue. This program is based on the developmental, cognitive-behaviour approach, the psycho-educational model, and the long term experience of the two youth institutions under their jurisdiction.

Two additional YCs (Mauricie & Centre du Québec and Quebec) have special intervention programs for youth offenders receiving deferred custodial sentences because they believe these youth are at high risk of re-offending and require differential intervention. A number of YCs (Montreal, Estrie, Quebec, and Mauricie) indicated that they offer similar programs to youth offenders completing their custodial sentence through community supervision. The YC Laval, for example, has a program that pairs youth offenders with the case workers who work with them in the institution and an external youth educator/counselor. The two staff members work together with the young people and their families. The YC Mauricie et Centre du Québec provides specialized group counseling to youth offenders found guilty of sexual offences. However, the more serious or chronic youth offenders involved in sexual offences are excluded from this program.

## Discussion

The purpose of this report was to identify police strategies and programs available in Canada that target chronic and persistent youth offenders. This section discusses the implications of the findings from the review, and identifies areas for future work to advance knowledge on these practices and programs for youth offenders.

The literature on youth at-risk identifies many factors that are correlated with youth entering a trajectory of chronic offending behaviour. These factors fall into five main domains: individual, family, peer, school, and community. Generally, chronic and persistent youth offenders experience a number of complex and influential factors, such as mental health issues, family violence and breakdown, negative peer associations and gang involvement, school difficulties, and unsafe communities. An understanding of the impact of these factors at various stages in child and youth development, from early childhood to late adolescence, would allow for the development of more effective prevention and intervention strategies. As such, early identification of risk factors and subsequent intervention is important in order to promote resiliency. Furthermore, according to the literature, collaborative efforts in the different contexts in which a child develops are essential to increase the likelihood of success. Police in Canada are increasingly taking an early intervention approach for youth at-risk of chronic and persistent offending behaviours.

In light of this, strategies that are most effective for intervening with chronic and persistent youth offenders encompass elements that impact upon risk factors in all of the five domains identified. Police services that work with community service representatives are likely to be more effective in responding to chronic and persistent youth offending than those who operate programs in isolation from other agencies that the youth has contact with (e.g., probation, child protection services). The multi-agency/intervention strategies that are used in Manitoba and some parts of British Columbia (e.g., Vancouver Police Department Youth Services Section) are programs that promote information sharing between police and other agencies as well as the direct involvement of those agencies in providing services for youth who offend in the community.

The research literature suggests that these are likely to be the most effective programs. Those involved are able to remain apprised of developments that occur within all domains of the youth's life and can further ensure that plans that are implemented are not counterproductive to each other. The multi-agency approach also ensures that siblings of youth already in the program can receive early intervention. Some of the Monitoring/Enforcement programs that use interagency committees for decision-making as well as referrals to other community resources, such as the SHOP program in Calgary and some of the SHOCAPs in Saskatchewan, also exhibit characteristics of an effective strategic approach, but to a lesser extent.

Overall, the review of programs for youth offenders revealed a greater number of police initiatives for chronic and persistent youth offenders in Ontario and western Canada. Many police representatives cited the change in the youth justice legislation as the primary reason for focussing resources on chronic and persistent youth offenders. The

*YCJA* provides more options for community-based sentencing, which means that an increased number of youth are serving their sentences in the community. As a result, some police services have found that increased monitoring and surveillance for chronic and persistent offenders is an effective approach for ensuring that youth comply with their court-ordered conditions.

In Quebec there were no police programs specifically designed to address chronic and persistent youth offenders, nor are the Youth Centres in the province dealing with chronic and persistent youth offenders as a separate population. The respondents indicated that these young people are not being assessed for special programs outside of the continuum of services and programs that already exist in the province. Importantly, the respondents did not believe that such programs were necessarily required. Instead, chronic and persistent youth offenders are dealt with primarily through the individual sanctions imposed by the justice system. It is within this context that special individualized treatments and services for youth offenders have been developed in Quebec, including those youth who present as chronic and persistent offenders.

The respondents indicate that a majority of the Youth Centres in Quebec have embraced a differential clinical intervention approach providing a full range of services to youth offenders. This often results in a case-by-case intervention strategy for chronic and persistent youth offenders. The implication of this is that chronic and persistent youth offenders receive services on the basis of their dispositions and individual assessments during intake. Thus, a young person who presents with a record of numerous offences will receive more service and more intensive interventions.

The unique approach to youth justice in Quebec is reflected in the fact that it had the third lowest police reported youth crime rate in Canada in 2006. In addition, it had the lowest youth charging rate in the country, and the lowest youth charging rate for violent crime. The province had a high diversion rate under the *Young Offenders Act* and continues to have a high rate of diversion under the *YCJA*. In fact, data on youth justice from Quebec shows that youth crime rates in the province are going down (Caputo & Vallée, 2008). For example, the number of youth offenders serviced by the YCs decreased by 32% from 2002-03 to 2005-06. Those services provided by community-based agencies also showed a decrease of 23%. Similarly, the number of cases referred by the courts has decreased by 22.5% since the implementation of the *YCJA*. In a recent examination of the impact of the *YCJA* (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009), when compared to other provinces, Quebec was found to consistently have the lowest rate of youth court cases, youth in remand custody, and proportions of youth sentenced to custody in recent years, and was second to B.C. in the proportion of chargeable youth who were charged since the implementation of the *YCJA*. This suggests both that the police are handling cases more informally under the *YCJA* and that the rates themselves are decreasing.

One major finding of this review of community-based and police strategies for youth offenders indicates the need for police strategies and programs across Canada to be formally evaluated. The majority of the programs have not gone under any evaluations of their impacts. While most police agencies have not conducted formal evaluations of their programs (with the exception of the three SHOCAPs in Saskatchewan), many

program respondents interviewed were positive about their interventions for chronic and persistent youth offenders. Overall, there seems to be a need for increased resources to ensure program continuity and effectiveness. For many of the respondents, this need has been amplified by the increase in community-based sentences under the *YCJA*, which places greater demands on police to work in partnership with community-based agencies to ensure that youth are successful with their court-ordered conditions of release in the community.

Another major issue for the programs is how to define chronic and persistent youth offenders. A definition that is commonly used is youth who commit five or more recorded offences (Carrington 2007; Carrington, Matarazzo, & deSouza, 2005; Wolfgang, Figlio, & Sellin, 1972). However, it is obvious from this review of program that operational definitions of chronic and persistent youth offenders vary considerably across programs, making comparisons difficult. For example, in British Columbia, police are mainly concerned with offenders who have accumulated a particular number of convictions or police contacts, while in other provinces, police programs rely on referrals from probation officers and social workers who use assessment tools that measure a number of different risk factors. While some police officers interviewed discussed the need for a standardized screening tool to assess which youth should be included in their programs, assessing these youth remains complex. Issues that are beyond the criminal justice system have been identified by the practitioners as important to consider, particularly the role mental health plays in the (effectiveness of) programs for chronic and persistent youth offenders. The literature suggests that youth who are heavily involved in the criminal justice system have often experienced a history of mental health and substance abuse problems that need to be addressed before rehabilitation can occur. Police officers noted that mental health conditions may inhibit the success of programs that target youth solely based on their criminal history. Some officers spoke about the need for increased training on mental health issues and conditions such as FASD to ensure that police can be more effective in dealing with youth who are chronic and persistent offenders.

Other police representatives spoke about using crime-specific strategies to manage chronic offenders in their community. Rather than targeting specific types of offenders, some police representatives identified strategies and programs that target a specific crime. For example, many auto theft units across the country target and monitor chronic auto theft offenders. Therefore, police services that decide to use a crime-specific targeting strategy in their communities are unlikely to use an offender driven strategy as well.

The enactment of the *YCJA* has prompted police services across Canada to focus more attention on youth at risk of offending and youth offenders. Many police representatives interviewed spoke about allocating resources to preventative initiatives, such as school liaison and diversion programs. When resources were concentrated in early intervention programs, police were less likely to offer programs that target youth who are already in the justice system.

## **Conclusion**

The focus of the current study was on multi-agency and police strategies and programs for chronic and persistent offenders. Police often measure success by assessing charge rates and youth custody counts. It is, however, well recognized that while it is important to protect the public from being victimized by chronic and persistent youth offenders, the most effective long term solution to the problem of persistent offending is to address needs and risk factors at an early age before youth embark on their criminal trajectory.

The literature also points to the importance of examining the combined influence of factors on offending behaviour as well as the impact these factors have on different stages of development. It is important to conduct more studies in line with this direction of research as it can lead to better intervention programs that are targeted at particular risk factors that have the most influence on youth at particular stages of development. Finally, evaluations of strategies and programs currently available in Canada are important to ensure that resources are being allocated in the most efficient ways possible and that youth are receiving maximum benefit. Programs in the U.K., U.S., and Australia provide established best practice models that may be adapted and implemented for local use in Canada.

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