I welcome the publication of the Strategic Plan of the Aboriginal Programs and Relationships Section, Corrections Branch.

It outlines the pursuit of strategies, partnerships and actions to address the problem of over-representation of Aboriginal Peoples in the justice system.

The strategic plan proposes strategies to reduce overrepresentation of Aboriginal Peoples in the justice system, while achieving the mission of the branch to "protect communities and reduce reoffending." The plan identifies the need to actively engage Aboriginal offenders in changing their criminal behaviour. This need is addressed by the branch developing, delivering, and evaluating culturally appropriate programs and services.

The branch is committed to building a workforce that understands the needs of Aboriginal offenders and their communities.

It is my duty to ensure that Aboriginal offenders participate in programs and services that reduce their likelihood of reoffending. Aboriginal offenders will only make lasting changes in their lives when they are empowered to take responsibility for their choices. The implementation of this plan will support them in this journey.

The branch continues to consult Aboriginal communities and work with other government and non-governmental agencies to build effective partnerships. The purpose of these relationships is to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal offenders and victims in the justice system.

Brent Merchant
ASSISTANT DEPUTY MINISTER

"The branch is committed to building a workforce that understands the needs of Aboriginal offenders and their communities."
The Corrections Branch is committed to eliminating factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal Peoples in the justice system. Although Aboriginal Peoples comprise 4.4 per cent of the adult population in British Columbia, they represent 24 per cent of the adult custody population and 21 per cent of offenders supervised in the community.

The branch has embarked on initiatives to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal people who come into contact with the justice system. It created the Aboriginal Programs and Relationships Section in January 2008 to address the root causes of Aboriginal criminality and victimization. Its purpose was also to engage communities and organizations in the management of Aboriginal offenders.

The section works in close partnership with branch staff, other ministries and Aboriginal communities to achieve common objectives related to Aboriginal offenders. The section will monitor the implementation of this strategic plan to ensure that the delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal offenders is culturally and gender appropriate. An emphasis on traditional values and the diverse cultural protocols of Aboriginal Peoples will assist in educating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with the goal of strengthening cultural connections in the branch.

The goals and objectives outlined in this plan involve building on current programs, policies and strategies. The branch has taken a leadership role in establishing an Aboriginal section and building meaningful relationships with Aboriginal people and their communities.
The section is committed to providing corporate support and advice to the divisions of the Corrections Branch. These divisions are responsible for managing offenders to decrease recidivism and support community reintegration.

Reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal Peoples in the correctional system is a significant challenge for the branch and the diverse Aboriginal communities across the province. While the branch cannot control admissions into the corrections system, it can affect recidivism for Aboriginal offenders through the implementation of this plan.

This strategic plan will be updated to reflect input from branch staff, Aboriginal partners, offenders and updated programs and policies across government.

Background to this Strategic Plan

Aboriginal people face dramatically higher levels of offending, victimization and incarceration than non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people experience lower educational achievement, unemployment, poverty, higher rates of substance abuse, suicide, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, family violence, and family and community dysfunction.

The underlying social and economic factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal Peoples in the justice system are complex and interrelated. These factors include historical treatment and the loss of identity, language and culture. Aboriginal Peoples have experienced a history of institutional abuse in residential schools.
During the past two decades, the Corrections Branch has fostered relationships with Aboriginal communities that led to an increased level of distrust of people in positions of authority including social workers, court officials, and probation, correctional and police officers. Aboriginal people also face significant challenges navigating the criminal justice system.

During the past two decades, the Corrections Branch has fostered relationships with Aboriginal communities, in particular, with community-based justice programs. While strong relationships have been established in service delivery, there is more work to be done by involving Aboriginal people to inform the development of programs and policies. Stronger partnerships and relationships depend on such involvement to reflect Aboriginal cultural values in programs and policies.

Internal and external initiatives of the branch already exist to address the issue of overrepresentation of Aboriginal Peoples in the corrections system. This strategic plan outlines a path for improved co-ordination of these corporate initiatives.

An important challenge for the branch is to ensure that we continue the work towards increased trust and respect between Aboriginal people and the corrections system. Education, overcoming systemic barriers, and strengthening relationships are issues that still need more work. The Aboriginal Programs and Relationships Section believes that by collaborating with Aboriginal people to create a common vision of safe and healthy communities, we can reduce the level of reoffending and victimization in British Columbia.

As we begin to implement this plan, the branch acknowledges the cultural diversity of Aboriginal Peoples and their traditional territories.
Mission Statement
To strengthen relationships between corrections staff and Aboriginal Peoples by working together to improve the experience of Aboriginal offenders in the correctional system.

Guiding Principles
Respect: We acknowledge the right of Aboriginal Peoples to engage in the practices, languages, and traditions that are their heritage.

Culture: We value, honour and recognize the diversity of Aboriginal traditions, history, culture, and community.

Safety: We value Aboriginal justice initiatives that protect victims, reduce reoffending, and promote healthy and safe communities.

Family: We value the Aboriginal offender’s connection to families, elders, and communities.

Empowerment: We value an approach to justice that is supported by the community and based on local customs and traditions.

Spirituality: We value traditional and holistic healing practices that include the physical, mental, spiritual, and cultural aspects of life.

Collaboration: We value ongoing dialogue and working with other ministries, agencies, and communities to improve the lives of Aboriginal Peoples.

Commitment: We value the empowerment of Aboriginal people and communities to ensure that programs and services are culturally appropriate and effective in meeting their needs.

We envision a justice system that responds to the holistic needs of Aboriginal Peoples and their communities, and implements justice initiatives that are based on culture and owned by the community.
Objectives

W ORKING TOGETHER WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES, justice partners, and other stakeholders, the Aboriginal Programs and Relationships Section promotes the following strategies to strengthen the relationships between Corrections Branch staff and Aboriginal people:

1. **Improve** relationships and understanding between corrections staff, justice officials, and Aboriginal people and their communities.

2. **Enhance** the effectiveness of the branch in managing Aboriginal offenders to reduce reoffending.

3. **Be responsive** to the justice needs identified by Aboriginal communities.

4. **Support** this strategic plan and its objectives with a staffed, functional and operational Aboriginal section.

5. **Recruit** more Aboriginal staff to the branch.
Branch Initiatives

The following are branch initiatives to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal Peoples in the justice system:

1 NATIVE COURTWORKER PROGRAM

The Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of B.C. is a provincial organization that operates the federal Aboriginal Courtwork Program. For 38 years, this program has provided services to Aboriginal people who come into conflict with the law. The program:

- Addresses the unique challenges of Aboriginal people in their interactions with the justice system;
- Remains a key component of the justice system; and
- Is located in 28 communities and 74 per cent of the courthouses throughout the province, including the Downtown Vancouver Community Court.

2 ABORIGINAL JUSTICE STRATEGY PROGRAMS

Locally-based Aboriginal justice strategy programs aim to reduce the rates of victimization, crime and incarceration among Aboriginal people, and help the justice system become more responsive to the cultural needs of Aboriginal people. The types of activities carried out by programs vary, because they are driven by the needs and culture of the community. The programs support the needs of Aboriginal people involved in the justice system through court diversion, community sentencing...
alternatives, victim support, and reintegration of offenders returning from custody centres. These programs operate in 36 communities throughout B.C.

3 ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS IN CUSTODY CENTRES

The Adult Custody Division of the Corrections Branch contracts Aboriginal service providers at each of the nine custody centres to provide spiritual leadership, counselling, and cultural programming. These contracts are continually reviewed by the Aboriginal service providers and custody division staff to enhance program effectiveness.

4 TRAINING FOR ABORIGINAL JUSTICE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Aboriginal justice workers from 32 B.C. communities have been trained to deliver Corrections Branch core offender programs in facilitation skills, substance abuse management, and respectful relationships. This training has resulted in Aboriginal justice workers and probation officers working together to co-facilitate the delivery of these programs to Aboriginal offenders.

To encourage community use of restorative justice approaches, the branch has historically provided alternative measures training to Aboriginal justice service providers. In 2009, updated training was provided to 47 Aboriginal justice workers in 32 locations. In 2011, 14 new Aboriginal justice workers were trained. This training included the participation of
Crown prosecutors and police. This training also strengthened relationships between Aboriginal and criminal justice staff.

Pilot training on “Foundation of Corrections Case Management” was delivered to 27 Aboriginal justice workers in 2010. The training focused on the work of a probation officer, case management, risk/needs assessment, and how to strengthen relationships with probation officers. This training will be reviewed to incorporate introductory training on the criminal justice system, bail and sentencing.

The branch supports an annual provincial workshop to support networking, capacity-building, and training opportunities for Aboriginal justice service providers. These workshops are typically hosted by a local Aboriginal restorative justice program.

5 CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING

To improve relationships and understanding between the Corrections Branch and Aboriginal communities, this strategic plan supports the continuation of shared cultural events when funding is available. These events bring together members of Aboriginal communities, corrections staff, and other justice partners (e.g. judges, police and Crown counsel) to encourage dialogue and relationships.
The goals of this strategic plan are:

- Reduced rates of Aboriginal reoffending;
- Improved access to culturally appropriate correctional programs for Aboriginal offenders;
- Reduced overrepresentation of Aboriginal Peoples in the correctional system;
- Elevated awareness and sensitivity to Aboriginal culture by Corrections Branch staff;
- Increased number of Aboriginal staff in the Corrections Branch; and
- Effective relationships between the branch, government, Aboriginal communities, and agencies serving Aboriginal people.
The Aboriginal Programs and Relationships Logo

The male and female figures wear crests that represent the circle of togetherness and unity. The circles surround the four directions – east, north, west and south – and the people from each direction. The crests also symbolize the four seasons and Métis cartwheel. The figures hold the Métis sash with open hands to reflect friendship, truth and peace. Twelve fringes on the sash represent the months of the year.

The scales of justice are decorated with the infinity symbol and supported by a seagoing canoe. These three symbols combined draw attention to the equality among people in the longhouse as they flow in a forward motion together.

All design elements are contained in the traditional longhouse. The longhouse or big house is a sacred place where people foster relationships and communication, and share knowledge.