



# **Corrections and Countering Violent Extremism Symposium**

**Summary Report**

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## Corrections and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Symposium

### *Summary Report*

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Carleton University, Ottawa

### Background

In March 2025, [The Canadian Network for Research on Extremism, Security and Society \(CANSES\)](#), funded through Public Safety's [Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence's \(Canada Centre\) Community Resilience Fund \(CRF\)](#),<sup>1</sup> hosted a two-day symposium on Corrections and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.

The symposium brought together over 100 individuals, including Government of Canada personnel, practitioners working at the intersection of

corrections and CVE, law enforcement officials, policy analysts, civil society organizations, and academics, as well as experts from across Correctional Service Canada including those involved in parole, chaplaincy, and reintegration. Notably, the symposium also featured experts and practitioners working in the assessment and prevention of sexual violence in order to promote learning and the exchange of knowledge across harm prevention fields. The symposium also featured leading P/CVE international delegates from the [Violence Prevention Network \(VPN\)](#) in

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<sup>1</sup> As a core part of Public Safety's [Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence](#), the [Community Resilience Fund \(CRF\)](#) grants and contributions program supports research, prevention, and intervention initiatives across Canada, helping to build capacity and foster innovative approaches to countering radicalization to violence. Since its launch in 2017, the CRF has provided more than \$73 million in funding to 81 projects, including CANSES.

Germany, [the New Zealand Department of Corrections](#), the [Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands](#), the [International Centre for Counter-Terrorism](#) (ICCT) in the Netherlands, and several experts from the Australian Government including the [Australian Department of Home Affairs](#), the [Counter Terrorism Coordination for Corrections Victoria](#), and the [South Australian Department for Correctional Services](#).

Across the two days, attendees heard from seven different panels, two keynote speakers, and participated in two rounds of breakout discussions. The symposium also marked the launch of two new reports from the [Canadian Practitioners Network for the Prevention of Extremist Violence](#) (CPN-PREV): [Advancing Risk Assessment in CVE: Evidence-Based Insights from Systematic Reviews and Expert Consensus](#) and [The State of Validation of Tools that Assess Risk for Violent Extremism: A Systematic Review](#).

## The Issues

The Director of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), Thomas Renard, opened the symposium by identifying two key issues at the intersection of P/CVE and corrections: prison-based radicalization

and terrorist/extremist recidivism. In other words, how do we prevent the radicalization of inmates in correctional institutions without exacerbating the situation? And how do we ensure that ideologically motivated offenders receive CVE programming that effectively promotes disengagement from violent extremism?

While both prison-based radicalization and terrorist/extremist recidivism are rare, they can have serious consequences for corrections staff, practitioners, government agencies, and the public. These consequences include not only the threat of physical harm, but also the subsequent undermining of the public's trust in the multiple stakeholders involved at the intersection of P/CVE and corrections.

Critically, radicalized inmates can pose threats while incarcerated, upon release, and on probation; therefore, P/CVE work should begin in prison and include "both contingency and reintegration plans" (Renard, 2025). Director Renard broke down the post-release period into three distinct, but interconnected, phases:

- 1) Reintegration: the immediate, short-term goals of ensuring a released individual has access to basic needs such as housing, financial support, employment assistance, etc.;

- 2) Disengagement: the continuous, mid-term objective that seeks to sever connections to extremist individuals, spaces, and ideologies, while fostering the development of a pro-social identity; and,
- 3) Stabilization: based on the understanding that disengagement is not a linear process and requires long-term monitoring and social reintegration support.

These three phases also underscore that the responsibility of protecting the public, assessing risk, developing case management, and providing reintegration services does not fall on correctional services alone, but requires a network of stakeholders.

Notably, and with regard to the Canadian context, a key finding of the symposium is that although many Canadian CVE intervention programs have some relations with correctional staff and institutions (parole, probation, prisons), these are often on a case-by-case basis. Because these relationships are often inconsistent and informal, the connection between corrections and CVE programs can be disrupted due to staff turnover. By creating a space for dialogue between national, local, and international partners, this symposium

was an important first step in creating a stronger community of practice to share best practices, mobilize resources and knowledge, and identify shared needs for research and programming within the nexus of CVE and correctional settings.

## Key Themes

### *Existing Canadian Approaches to Corrections and CVE*

Correctional Service Canada (CSC), which is responsible for offenders sentenced to two years or more, provided extensive briefings on their programs and methods. These include how an individually tailored, comprehensive reintegration plan is developed for each offender, where planning begins at initial intake. While CSC does not have a specific approach for offenders involved in violent extremism, they tailor existing interventions to an offender's particular needs. This case management approach, which focuses on identifying and addressing risk and protective factors specific to each case, has important similarities with how frontline P/CVE programs in Canada design and deliver case management and direct support. Importantly, symposium participants identified shared approaches and

methods used in both correctional and non-correctional CVE settings.

Provincial corrections proved to be an area for further exploration. The symposium featured research on provincial correctional settings, specifically Dr. Kevin Haggerty's research on provincial prisons in Alberta. The population in provincial systems includes those with sentences less than two years, but the large majority are on remand awaiting trial. Research findings revealed that Alberta's provincial prisons—marked by high Indigenous representation and strong inmate codes that stigmatize violent extremist offenders—are less conducive to radicalization compared to U.S. prisons, where extremist recruitment seems to be more prevalent. Dr. Haggerty's work also noted that among frontline prison staff in the Alberta system, the term "radicalization" is often associated with security risks for the institution, such as incitement of violence or smuggling of illicit substances. This interpretation pointed to an opportunity for additional training and support to help staff more effectively recognize and respond to a broader range of radicalization indicators, especially if it tends to present as more clandestine in provincial prisons.

Canada has also established [CVE intervention programs](#) across the country, many of which presented on their intervention approaches. These programs target individuals at risk of radicalization to violence and also support those who have already become engaged in violent extremism. CVE intervention programs work to assess various areas of risk, needs, and strengths, and build protective factors to divert individuals from pathways into violent extremism. These programs also provide resources to family members, peers, and other front-line practitioners—including social workers, mental health professionals, police officers, etc. Of note, all Canadian CVE intervention programs work to support clients who have become involved with the criminal justice system, such as in diversion contexts, but also when individuals are sentenced and incarcerated—this includes CVE programs visiting clients in prisons and/or upon release to support their reintegration and prevent recidivism within the community.

### ***Risk Assessment & Case Management***

Panellists, keynote speakers, and attendees engaged in numerous discussions about the role of risk assessment and case management at

different stages of an individual's experience with the corrections system.

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Drs. R. Karl Hanson and Jean-Pierre Guay presented about the development and implementation of actuarial tools<sup>2</sup> used to assess the risk of recidivism in adjacent prison populations, such as incarcerated sex offenders. The two speakers noted that when assessing violent extremist offenders, much of the early focus in CVE was on reducing risk, while more recently, there has been a focus on building up protective factors. However, Drs. Hanson and Guay noted that the impact of change in protective factors can be harder to assess than change in risk factors. They also emphasized the importance of context

for assessment; what can be a protective factor in one context might increase risk in another.

Outside of the corrections setting, many of the P/CVE practitioners and organizations present at the symposium reported that they did not use actuarial risk assessment tools nor instruments specifically designed for use on ideologically motivated offenders and violent extremism. Relatedly, Dr. Sébastien Brouillette-Alarie highlighted findings from CPN-PREV's [systematic review](#) on the validation of risk assessment tools for violent extremism, which evaluated the reliability and validity of five structured professional judgement tools: TRAP-18, ERG22+, IVP guidance, MLG-V2, and VERA 2R. The review indicates that the validation of violent extremism specific tools is still in the early stages. In particular, evaluations of these instruments suffer from risk of bias. They are based on publicly available, open sources with large amounts of missing data and use very small samples. Similarly, they are retrospective (not prospective) in design, meaning that true predictive validity analyses cannot – at this point – be done. Based on these findings, the

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<sup>2</sup> *Actuarial risk assessment tools* use statistical data to estimate the likelihood of future behaviour based on fixed factors, in contrast with *structured professional judgment (SPJ)* which rely on evidence-based guidelines combined with expert discretion to assess risk in a more individualized and contextualized manner.

review suggests that using these tools to predict future incidents of extremist violence is cautioned.

Instead of simply assessing the risk of violence or recidivism, CVE intervention practitioners working in the field use a series of tools designed to structure, implement, and improve case management by using holistic assessment approaches that work to capture a variety of risk and protective factors and other systemic circumstances. Examples of these tools include [the John Howard Society of Ottawa's](#) Service Planning Instrument (SPIn), and HEXAGON, developed by the [Centre for Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence](#) (CPRLV). Notably, all of these tools are centred around identifying and assessing risk and protective factors. This was highlighted by Dr. Stephanie Scott-Smith who discussed avoiding the use of CVE-specific risk assessment as standalone tools, and rather using them alongside other psychosocial and evidence-based tools to ensure holistic assessment, case formulation, and planning.

While the P/CVE field has over time identified various categories of risk and protective factors considered relevant specifically to violent extremists, additional research from CPN-PREV

suggests that this "exceptionality" may be overstated. CPN-PREV's [umbrella review](#), which was presented at the symposium, identifies and compares risk and protective factors for both extremist and non-extremist violence. The extant literature suggests that there are at least five risk factors specific to violent extremists: online contact with extremists, impulsivity, radical attitudes, current/past military involvement, and thrill- or risk-seeking. However, the review found that "in many cases, the individual-level risk factors that steer a person toward extremist violence strongly overlap with those driving "traditional" violent offending" ([CPN-PREV](#), pg. 5). For example, criminal history, a key risk factor often overlooked in extremists, was one of the strongest predictors of extremist violence. The push to include risk factors associated with non-ideologically motivated violence and criminality was also supported by new research from the [Organization for the Prevention of Violence](#) (OPV). OPV's Deputy Executive Director, Dr. Mike King, explained how improving an individual's general protective factors and basic needs, including providing them with housing, mental health support, and employment opportunities, also reduced their extremist beliefs.



### ***Strengthening Awareness, Capacity, and Training***

Throughout the two days, presenters and participants at the symposium focused on how silos among law enforcement, justice, CVE programs, and correctional staff can result in a lack of awareness of specialist CVE intervention programs in Canada, and the kinds of services and resources they can provide. The need for better awareness of Canadian CVE intervention programs, hence, stood out as an area for more collaboration in order to help better inform reintegration plans and refer offenders to specific programming upon release in the community.

Training was also highlighted as a core area for further development. For instance, within law enforcement, police attendees noted an increased need for more training and awareness about violent extremism and the psychosocial CVE services available due to the fact that police forces in Canada have younger staff cohorts (e.g., officers having less than three years of experience who may require more specialized training on this topic). Other areas where training and knowledge resources could be developed were also identified. This included the need for more resources to understand the current and emerging threat

environment, such as hybrid forms of violent extremism, when common training resources are based primarily on longer-standing forms such as those linked to Daesh/ISIS and Al Qaeda.

One of the solutions discussed to enhance awareness, capacity, and shared understanding was to draw insights from adjacent fields, particularly violence and harm prevention, which was a key focus of the symposium. The field of preventing and managing sexual offending was a field that received particular attention at the symposium, given how it has been well-developed and well-established for decades, including for risk assessment, programming, societal reintegration, and preventing recidivism.

### ***Preventing Silos: A Networked Approach***

Many of the speakers and roundtable discussions highlighted the fact that successful case management that prevents extremist violence and recidivism requires a network of government agencies, corrections staff, civil society organizations, and practitioners.



***“Successful case management and violence prevention relies on effective communication between all of the actors involved”***

This point was underscored by symposium attendees who represented each of these bodies. Alexander Sievers, Program Director at the VPN, divided the roles of relevant stakeholders into three groups: 1) correctional staff, who monitor, provide security, and support interventions; 2) P/CVE program staff, who design and deliver interventions, engage in risk assessment, and implement case management; and, 3) community groups, who provide social support, build pro-social pathways, and reduce stigma to ease reintegration. Importantly, the role of community is not limited to civil society organizations and their staff; it also includes unaffiliated, individual community members living in these spaces. This web of stakeholders is context specific, and determining who is responsible, and able, to engage in P/CVE programming and case management varies at the municipal, provincial, and national levels. We learned about the nuances of the relationships between these groups in Germany and Victoria State, Australia, as well as in non-Western contexts such as Mali, Iraq, and Kosovo. While each of

these settings has its own set of challenges, two overarching themes emerged from the symposium: the importance of communication and trust in multi-sectoral contexts.

Successful case management and violence prevention relies on effective communication between all of the actors involved. ICCT’s work in Mali and Iraq has shown that a lack of communication can result in the overburdening of one sector. For example, failing to share information with civil society organizations can result in the bulk of responsibility falling on understaffed and underfunded government agencies. Relatedly, overloaded governments and law enforcement agencies may pass cases off to P/CVE NGOs and civil society organizations without providing the information necessary to manage them effectively (e.g., having a clear understanding of a client’s sentencing conditions from courts). Strong communication is not just about sharing information regarding individual cases; it also encompasses inter-agency sharing of best practices and monitoring and evaluation reports, as well as data sharing. Crucially, speakers highlighted that the most effective communication is built on trust.

Throughout the symposium, corrections staff and practitioners stressed the

importance of fostering trusting relationships with the individuals they serve and work with. Trust helps stakeholders gather accurate information from individuals that allow them to do effective risk assessments, develop bespoke case management plans, and connect individuals with the services they need. Trust also makes it more likely that clients will buy into P/CVE programs. Building trust should begin in prison. Pierre Ndoumaï, a Manager in CSC's Chaplaincy and Reintegration Services Division explained how their "offender-driven approach" includes access to faith-based services and counselling. CSC's chaplaincy provides a unique opportunity to build trust through a confidential relationship, meaningful dialogue, and mentorship. Indeed, faith-based services continue to play an important role in supporting disengagement both inside and outside of the prison setting. The case management tools developed and used by symposium attendees are also designed to facilitate dialogue and "non-confrontational conversations regarding their engagement in violent extremism" (CPRLV). In the words of CVE intervention practitioner Sarah Grenier from the CPRLV, these tools foster "involvement in the program and trust with the support advisor." In addition to

trust between service providers, correctional staff, and their clients, roundtable discussions highlighted the need to build trust between stakeholders in the hopes that greater inter-agency trust will facilitate communication and data sharing initiatives (where appropriate and in line with ethical considerations).

## Next Steps

By convening a diverse range of stakeholders from national, local, and international organizations operating at the intersection of P/CVE and corrections, the symposium served as a critical step toward strengthening a collaborative community of practice. It fostered greater awareness of CVE intervention programs, enhanced cross-sector communication, and laid the groundwork for sustained partnerships within Canada and beyond.

Building on the momentum of the symposium, CANSES is launching a [Corrections Working Group](#) dedicated to advancing new research, policy, and practice-focused resources relevant to the CVE and corrections space. This working group will also facilitate regular meetings to foster ongoing collaboration. We invite all interested individuals to sign up to become a

[CANSES member](#) and join the working group.

In summary, the symposium underscored the pressing need for continued research in key areas such as risk assessment tools, the identification of risk and protective factors for violent extremism, and the integration of insights from adjacent fields beyond terrorism and extremism studies. Engaging provincial and territorial correctional institutions, as well as expanding the focus on youth offenders,

remain two critical gaps that require sustained attention and targeted action. Finally, symposium attendees also emphasized the value of developing practical resources, including the creation of resource guides and training opportunities tailored to the corrections and CVE context. To this aim, CANSES will be supporting the next phase of this work by providing funding to eligible individuals and organizations. This work will catalyze innovative projects, deepen research, and strengthen capacity within this intersection of corrections and CVE.

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