

**Profile and Projection of Drug Prosecutions**

**Jurisdiction Report**

**PRAIRIES**

**(including Manitoba, Saskatchewan,  
Alberta and the Northwest Territories)**

by

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## Highlights for the Prairies

- In 1998, there were 6,236 adults charged by the police with a drug offence, accounting for 16.3% of Canada, which is slightly lower than its population share of 17%.
- From 1977 to 1998, the **number of adults charged** with a drug offence decreased by 60% from 15,454 adults charged in 1977 to 6,236 adults charged in 1998. However, the number of adults charged has been on an upward trend in the last few years.
- In terms of **types of drugs**, there had been a decrease in the number of adults charged with a cannabis offence since 1981. In contrast, there had been a large increase in the number of adults charged with cocaine offences since the late 1980s. The number of adults charged with miscellaneous drug offences experienced fluctuations in the last 20 years. However, heroin offences recorded a decrease in the period examined.
- In terms of **nature of offence**, drug possession now accounts for 56% of all adults charged with drug offence while drug trafficking accounts for 37%. The remaining 7% involve cultivation and importation of drugs. The proportions of drug possession and drug trafficking have remained stable in the last few years.
- A comparison between the number of adults charged with drug offences and the number of drug cases handled in **the Prairies provincial criminal courts** (excluding Manitoba) reveals that for every 100 adults charged, about 67 cases end up in courts.
- Based on the **extrapolation method of projection** selected, the number of adults charged with drug offences will increase about 10% in the next five years, increasing from 6,236 in 1998 to 6,863 in 2003.

## **Background**

In September 1996, the Agent Affairs Unit of the Criminal Law Branch within the Department of Justice requested the Research and Statistics Division to analyze the level of drug offences in the past and to make future projections. The purpose was to provide information to facilitate discussions relating to volume and case management of drug cases.

This is an update of that project. There are two products in the project: a national report and a series of jurisdictional reports. The reports provide information on historical profile of the trend of drug offences in the past 20 years plus a five-year projection of the trend into the future.

## **Data Sources**

The profiles and projections were based on police reported data collected by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. The period of data used was from 1977 to 1998, the latest data available. As the objective is to produce indicators of workload in drug prosecutions, data on the number of adults formally charged by the police are used.

These data were collected by the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) which represents the crime data of every police force in Canada. The data from this survey are the most current and reliable data on drug offences that are available in Canada today. [At the request of the Agent Affairs Unit, the number of drug offences here include only those under the Narcotic Control Act (NCA), excluding those under the Food and Drugs Act (FDA).]

In addition to police data, we also look at some data from provincial criminal courts as collected by the Adult Criminal Court Survey (ACCS). However, the data are at the present incomplete, with data from 9 jurisdictions representing 80% of the national total number of cases. Data from British Columbia, Manitoba and New Brunswick are not yet available.

## **Profile of Historical Trends (Figures 1-2, Appendices 1-2)**

Police data from the UCR are broken down by the types of drugs, including heroin, cocaine, cannabis, and miscellaneous drugs. Data are also broken down by nature of offence, including possession, trafficking, importation, and cultivation.

In terms of types of drugs, number of adults charged in the Prairies with cannabis offences accounted for 70% of all drug offences in 1998, followed by cocaine (21%), and miscellaneous narcotics (9%). Less than 1% of adults were charged with a heroin offence that year.

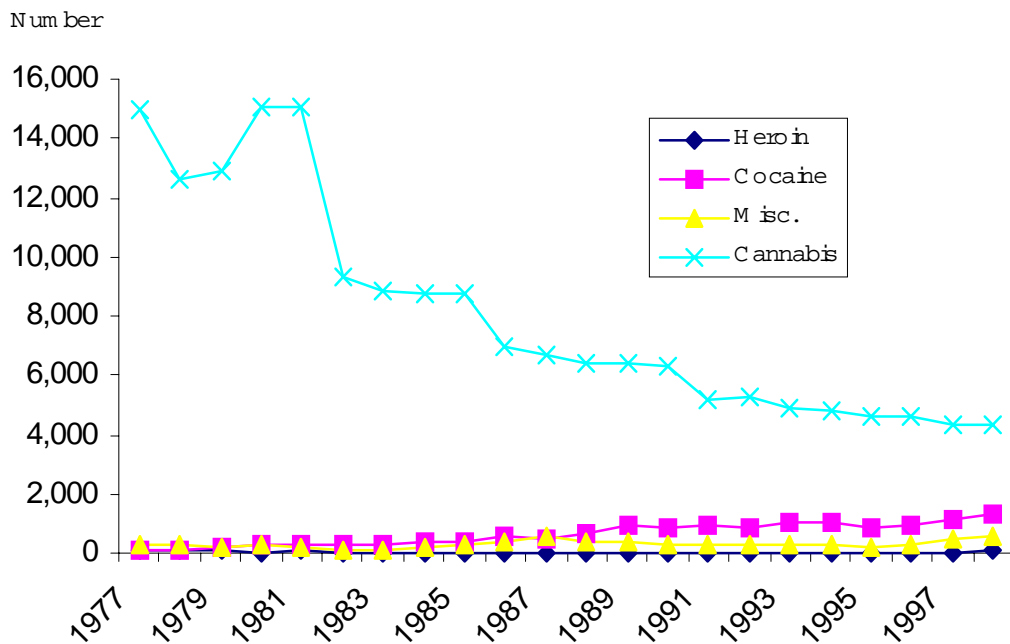
**Heroin** offences have decreased from 120 adults charged in 1977 to 51 adult charged in 1998 (-58%).

**Cocaine** offences increased dramatically from 79 adults charged in the late 1970s to 1,019 in 1993 (13 times). After a 21% decrease in 1995 (down to 806 adults charged), the number of adults charged with a cocaine offence increased to 1,279 in 1998 (+59%).

**Cannabis** offences fluctuated in late 1970s to early 1980s. From 1981 on, the number of adults charged with a cannabis offence decreased 71% from 15,079 adults charged in 1981 to 4,369 adults charged in 1998 (-71%).

**Miscellaneous** drug offences have decreased from 308 adults charged in 1977 to 115 adults charged in 1983. It slowly increased to 423 adults charged in 1989 (+268%) only to decrease to 216 adults in 1995 (-49%). The number increased again in the last few years. In 1998, there were 537 adults charged with a miscellaneous drug offence, 2.5 times the level in 1995.

**Figure 1**  
**Number of adults charged with drug offences, by drug type**  
**Prairies, 1977-1998**



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

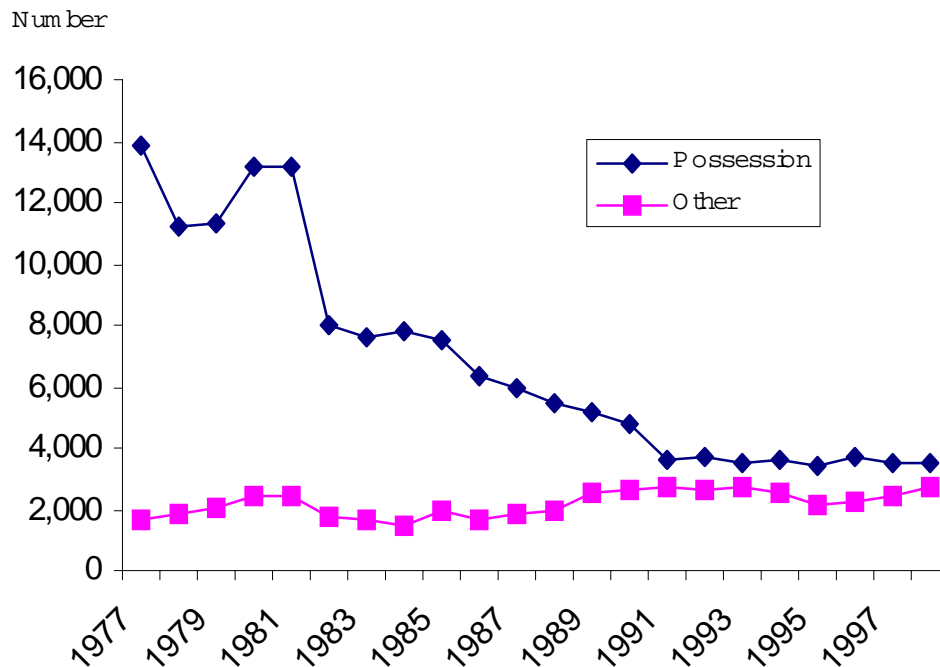
In terms of nature of offence, drug **possession** accounted for more than one half (56%) of all adults charged with drug offences in 1998; drug **trafficking** accounted for 37%; cultivation of

cannabis accounted for 7%. Drug importation offences accounted for less than 1% of the drug offences reported in 1998

The number of adults charged with drug **possession** has fluctuated in late 1970s to early 1980s. There was a large decrease in 1982, when 7,993 adults were charged with a possession offence compared to 13,175 adults in 1981(-39%). Since that year, it decreased to 3,497 adults charged in 1998 (-56%).

The number of adults charged with **trafficking** has stayed in a slow upward trend throughout the years, increasing from 1,552 adults charged in 1977 to 2,300 adults charged in 1998 (+48%). Importation of drugs has remained under 40 adults charged for the period examined with a low of 5 adults charged in 1987. The number of adults charged with a cultivation offence has increased 5 times between 1977 (65) and 1998 (417).

**Figure 2**  
**Number of adults charged with drug offences, by offence type**  
**Prairies, 1977-1998**



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

As a whole, the **total** number of adults charged with drug offences in Prairies decreased from 15,454 in the late 1970s to 6,236 in 1998. The trend has generally been levelling in the last few years.

It should be noted that the trend of reported drug offences may or may not reflect the level of usage of drugs as the level depends largely on the level of enforcement by the police.

### **Comparison between Police Data and Courts Data**

This section only examines data from Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories (only 1997/98) as Manitoba does not report to the Adult Criminal Court Survey (ACCS).

The assumption in comparing the number of adults charged by the police and the number of cases handled by provincial criminal courts is that a small proportion of the offenders charged may not actually appear before the courts for various reasons such as diversion. If this is the case, then the number of drug cases in courts should be slightly below the number of adults charged.

Two years of provincial criminal court data were used in the comparison (1996/97 and 1997/98). In 1996/97, there were 4,484 persons charged by the police in the Prairies (includes data from Saskatchewan and Alberta) while there were 4,234 cases handled by Prairie provincial criminal courts. The ratio between the two numbers was 0.94, compared to 1.01 for Canada as a whole. Note that the number can be higher than 1 because the time of appearance before the courts is not the same as the time of charging by the police and some cases handled by the courts may have been cases charged by the police in previous year.

However, the situation in 1997/98 was slightly different. There were 4,691 persons charged by the police in the Prairies (includes data from Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories) while there were 3,876 cases handled by Prairies provincial criminal courts. The ratio was 0.83, meaning that for every 100 adults charged by the police, 83 cases were handled in the provincial criminal courts. The lower ratio was also evident in the rest of Canada where the ratio was only 0.68. The reason of these lower ratios is not known.

The conclusion is that for every 100 adults charged by the police in Prairies the average number of court cases is about 67, which is slightly lower than the Canada ratio (85). However, the actual number may vary widely from about 40 to 100, depending on the jurisdiction in question.

### **Methods of Projection**

The statistical method chosen in the following projection is called **Holt's two parameter exponential smoothing extrapolation projection**. The method is to define the ongoing trend of drug offences for those years where we have actual data, that is, from 1977 to 1998, and to

project the trend into the future for 1999 to 2003. The method involves the calculation of moving averages of historical data. While this method uses all data points in the past, it puts most weight on the most recent preceding years. Therefore, what has been occurring in drug offences for the past several years (for example, 1994 to 1998) will weigh heavily on the outcome of the projected trend for the future.

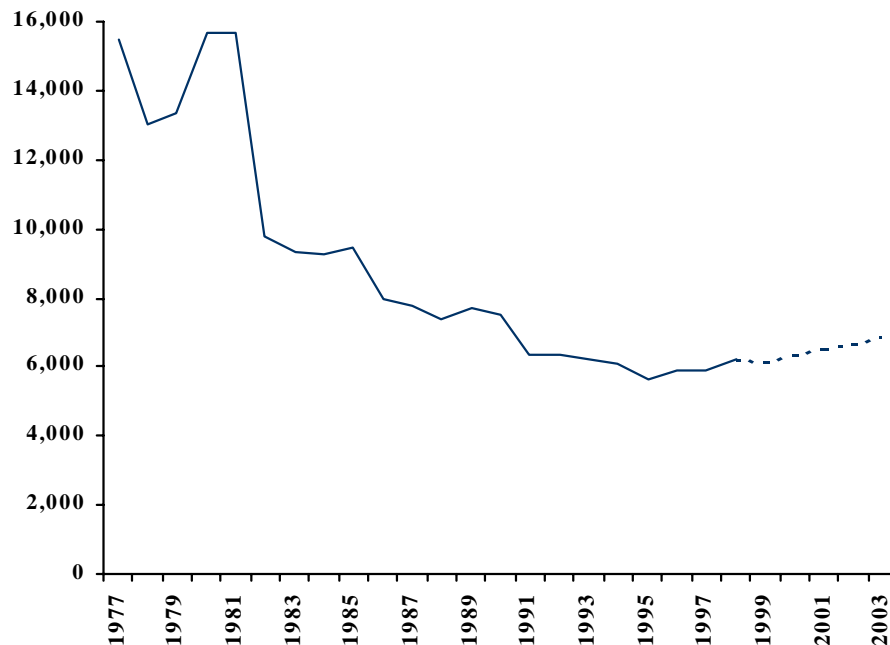
### **Results of the Projection (Figure 3, Appendix 3)**

While the analysis of historical data includes separate profiles based on types of drugs and nature of offence, the projection is only done for overall total number only because small numbers after the breakdown in many of the jurisdictions.

The result of the extrapolation projection shows that the number of adults charged by the police in the Prairies will increase slightly in the next five years. The total increase after 5 years is estimated to be about 12%, from 6,236 adults charged in 1998 to 6,863 in 2003.

**Figure 3**  
**Number of adults charged with drug offences**  
**Prairies, Actual (1977-1998) and Projected (1999-2003)**

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Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

# **APPENDICES**



**Table 1**  
**Number of adults charged with drug offences, by drug type**  
**Prairies, 1977-1998**

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| <b>Year</b> | <b>Heroin</b> | <b>Cocaine</b> | <b>Misc.</b> | <b>Cannabis</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1977        | 120           | 79             | 308          | 14,947          | 15,454       |
| 1978        | 89            | 66             | 270          | 12,618          | 13,043       |
| 1979        | 76            | 155            | 177          | 12,917          | 13,325       |
| 1980        | 29            | 322            | 249          | 15,062          | 15,662       |
| 1981        | 60            | 310            | 196          | 15,079          | 15,645       |
| 1982        | 25            | 271            | 141          | 9,347           | 9,784        |
| 1983        | 27            | 327            | 115          | 8,833           | 9,302        |
| 1984        | 20            | 342            | 167          | 8,719           | 9,248        |
| 1985        | 16            | 412            | 263          | 8,737           | 9,428        |
| 1986        | 13            | 582            | 372          | 7,011           | 7,978        |
| 1987        | 8             | 514            | 574          | 6,676           | 7,772        |
| 1988        | 16            | 615            | 379          | 6,364           | 7,374        |
| 1989        | 28            | 905            | 423          | 6,372           | 7,728        |
| 1990        | 7             | 813            | 319          | 6,348           | 7,487        |
| 1991        | 15            | 924            | 260          | 5,144           | 6,343        |
| 1992        | 3             | 862            | 276          | 5,227           | 6,368        |
| 1993        | 40            | 1,019          | 263          | 4,922           | 6,244        |
| 1994        | 14            | 1,017          | 261          | 4,771           | 6,063        |
| 1995        | 17            | 806            | 216          | 4,578           | 5,617        |
| 1996        | 35            | 955            | 263          | 4,622           | 5,875        |
| 1997        | 44            | 1,112          | 433          | 4,324           | 5,913        |
| 1998        | 51            | 1,279          | 537          | 4,369           | 6,236        |

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Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

**Table 2**  
**Number of adults charged with drug offences, by offence type**  
**Prairies, 1977-1998**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Possession</b> | <b>Trafficking</b> | <b>Importation</b> | <b>Cultivation</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1977        | 13,821            | 1,552              | 16                 | 65                 | 15,454       |
| 1978        | 11,215            | 1,725              | 34                 | 69                 | 13,043       |
| 1979        | 11,284            | 1,979              | 32                 | 30                 | 13,325       |
| 1980        | 13,196            | 2,404              | 21                 | 41                 | 15,662       |
| 1981        | 13,175            | 2,402              | 18                 | 50                 | 15,645       |
| 1982        | 7,993             | 1,738              | 15                 | 38                 | 9,784        |
| 1983        | 7,640             | 1,597              | 23                 | 42                 | 9,302        |
| 1984        | 7,765             | 1,403              | 32                 | 48                 | 9,248        |
| 1985        | 7,478             | 1,892              | 12                 | 46                 | 9,428        |
| 1986        | 6,303             | 1,617              | 12                 | 46                 | 7,978        |
| 1987        | 5,937             | 1,766              | 5                  | 64                 | 7,772        |
| 1988        | 5,447             | 1,818              | 21                 | 88                 | 7,374        |
| 1989        | 5,200             | 2,418              | 9                  | 101                | 7,728        |
| 1990        | 4,821             | 2,501              | 37                 | 128                | 7,487        |
| 1991        | 3,657             | 2,490              | 11                 | 185                | 6,343        |
| 1992        | 3,753             | 2,438              | 6                  | 171                | 6,368        |
| 1993        | 3,541             | 2,450              | 6                  | 247                | 6,244        |
| 1994        | 3,571             | 2,245              | 7                  | 240                | 6,063        |
| 1995        | 3,457             | 1,955              | 8                  | 197                | 5,617        |
| 1996        | 3,672             | 1,995              | 6                  | 202                | 5,875        |
| 1997        | 3,496             | 2,091              | 14                 | 312                | 5,913        |
| 1998        | 3,497             | 2,300              | 22                 | 417                | 6,236        |

Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

**Table 3**  
**Projected number of adults charged with drug offences**  
**Prairies, 1999-2003**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Projected Number</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1999        | 6,164                   |
| 2000        | 6,340                   |
| 2001        | 6,514                   |
| 2002        | 6,688                   |
| 2003        | 6,863                   |

Projections prepared by Research and Statistics Division, Department of Justice Canada.