



New study will re-examine the impact of substance abuse on Canadian society

OTTAWA, May 10 /CNW/ — A major new study is underway to address the need for up-to-date information on the social and economic impact of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs on Canadian society. The Canadian Substance Abuse Cost Study (CSACS) will examine both direct costs to health care and the criminal justice system, and indirect costs associated with productivity losses from substance abuse-related death and ill health.

The CSACS is the start of a more systematic monitoring of costs attributable to substance use and abuse called for in Canada's renewed drug strategy, announced in 2003 by the Ministers of Health, Justice and the Solicitor General. Under this strategy, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) has been given lead responsibility for coordinating an updated Canadian cost study every three years.

“Substance abuse represents a significant drain on Canada’s economy,” said CCSA’s Chief Executive Officer Michel Perron. “Assessing its impact is a complex task requiring a wide range of input. Since its inception, CCSA has been able to use its unique mandate to broker the kinds of partnerships that lead to a deeper understanding of issues related to substance abuse.”

The CSACS is being carried out over two years by a multi-disciplinary research team with funding or in-kind support from addictions organizations in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec. Partners in the study also include Health Canada, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction (INMHA). A final report is expected in June 2005.

“Cost estimation studies can highlight specific problem areas where investment of public resources could be beneficial and can also help us to evaluate and compare outcomes of various policy initiatives,” said CSACS principal investigator Jürgen Rehm. “Cost studies also help us to identify information gaps, research needs and improvements to national statistical reporting, program planning and monitoring systems.”

The new study addresses a nine-year gap in information about the costs of substance abuse in Canada. In 1996, CCSA, in partnership with a number of federal and provincial organizations, released the first-ever comprehensive estimate of the health, social and economic costs of substance abuse in Canada. This study estimated the costs of substance abuse to be \$18.45 billion, representing \$649 per person in Canada or 2.7% of Gross Domestic Product. The 1996 study was based on 1992 data, which is now out of date. The CSACS will use the most recent cost data available (2001) to evaluate changes in the nature, extent and consequences of substance use and abuse in Canada since 1992.

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CCSA is Canada's national addictions agency. It was established by an Act of Parliament in 1988 to provide a national focus for efforts to reduce health, social and economic harm associated with substance abuse and addictions.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Organizations providing financial and/or in-kind support to the CSACS include:

- Addictions Foundation of Manitoba
- Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
- British Columbia Ministry of Health Services
- Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction (INMHA)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Ontario)
- Health Canada
- Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (Québec)
- New Brunswick Department of Health and Wellness
- Nova Scotia Office of Health Promotion
- Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada.

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Background

Substance abuse is a significant drain on Canada's economy in terms of both its direct assault on the health care and criminal justice systems, and its indirect impact on productivity as a result of premature death and ill health.

In 1996, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse released a study called *The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada* that estimated the costs of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs substance abuse in Canada to be \$18.45 billion. This represented a loss of \$649 to every Canadian, or 2.7% of GDP. Costs were estimated to be \$7.5 billion for alcohol, \$9.5 billion for tobacco, and \$1.4 billion for illicit drugs.

The 1996 study was based on 1992 data and is now out of date. There have been significant changes in the nature, extent and consequences of substance use and abuse in Canada since 1992. In 2003, Health Canada funded CCSA to develop a research proposal for an updated substance abuse cost study. A federal/provincial partnership was established to sponsor and direct the launch of the Canadian Substance Abuse Costs Study (CSACS).

The CSACS is being carried out over two years and involves the collaboration of investigators from a variety of areas of expertise, including health economics, epidemiology, criminology, social policy and law enforcement. A team of experts will carry out the study using the *International Guidelines for Estimating the Costs of Substances Abuse*. The guidelines were developed through a process coordinated by CCSA and first published in 1996. Revised guidelines were published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2003.

The CSACS research team will produce one set of estimates, based on the previous methodology, that can be compared with the 1996 study and another set of final estimates using updated methodology. Other innovative components of the new study will include:

- a new, more accurate look at costs related to tobacco, including the impact of smoking and second-hand smoke on health, and the consequences of cigarette smuggling for Canada's criminal justice system;
- the application and further refinement of recent groundbreaking work in estimating the proportion of crime that can be attributed to the use and procurement of alcohol and illicit drugs in Canada;
- an examination of coroners' records on overdose deaths associated with illicit drugs and injection drug use.

In the final CSACS report, costs will be presented according to substance, province, and sex and age group. The study will include alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs (including cannabis, cocaine and "crack", opioids such as heroin and other injection drugs) with specific focus on cannabis. In

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the case of alcohol, both costs and benefits will be calculated in light of accumulating evidence that moderate use of alcohol can protect some people against coronary heart disease.

The CSACS research team is composed of principal investigator Jürgen Rehm, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto and University of Toronto (U of T); Ed Adlaf, CAMH and U of T; Serge Brochu, Centre for Comparative Criminology, University of Montreal; Benedikt Fischer, CAMH and U of T; William Gnam, CAMH and U of T; and Eric Single, CCSA. The project will be guided by a 12-member steering committee representing project sponsors and major stakeholders.

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