

Whitehorse CCENDU Report Highlights 2004¹

Prepared by:

This report provides a factual description of the alcohol and drug situation in Whitehorse, Yukon. It will be used by community stakeholders to create an initial drug strategy for Whitehorse. The creation of a drug strategy is based on the visions of two national initiatives: Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (CCENDU) and Health, Education, and Enforcement in Partnership (HEP). These two initiatives lead to a combined model that involves the collection of data on which to base good collaborative decisions. The report examines five issues related to alcohol and drug use: community profile; prevalence/use; harm; criminal activity and enforcement; and programs and services.

Community Profile

- Whitehorse, the capital of Yukon, is home to approximately 70% of Yukon's population. In 2003 there were 22,425 people living in Whitehorse.
- Whitehorse has direct road and daily air service to southern parts of Canada and parts of Alaska.
- Four levels of government are active in Whitehorse: federal, territorial, First Nation and municipal.
- Average earnings in 2001 were \$33,829. The two largest employment sectors are public administration and the retail trade.
- The 2002 unemployment rate was 9.6%.
- The high school graduation rate in 2003 was 89%.
- In 2001–02, the rate of pre-term births was 5.0%, and of low-birth-weight births was 2.4%.
- Research conducted in 2003 found that more Yukoners (35.3%) are physically active than are Canadians overall (26.1%).
- (psilocybin) are reported to be used by some youth. Binge drinking and prescription drug misuse have been identified as a concern by some service providers.
- Apart from information regarding tobacco and alcohol, little recent survey data exist about adults' substance use in Whitehorse or in Yukon as a whole.
- Per capita consumption of alcohol is higher in Yukon than in Canada as a whole.
- Thirty percent of Yukon residents engage in binge drinking, the most risky form of alcohol use. The Canadian average is 21%.
- While the rate of tobacco use in Yukon is in decline, research shows that it is still higher than the national rate. Furthermore, the rate at which young people in Yukon take up smoking is a significantly higher than the rate for young people in Canada overall.
- Adults are thought to be primarily using alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and various prescription drugs. Injection drug abuse is thought to be primarily an activity of adults. These users are exchanging approximately 5,000 needles per month.

Prevalence/Use

- Two 2001 youth surveys found that Yukon youth primarily use alcohol, marijuana, crack cocaine, and tobacco. Ecstasy and mushrooms

- The Yukon drug use prevalence survey, due in mid-2005, will provide up-to-date information on prevalence and harms.

Harm

- Most hospital emergency room (ER) visits and admissions related to drug use involve male patients between the ages of 19 and 49 who use alcohol, cocaine, cannabinoids, or multiple drugs, or who are infected with hepatitis C.
- People in Whitehorse are five times more likely to go to the ER as a result of alcohol use than use of all illicit drugs combined.
- Death certificates and coroner investigations show a decrease in the number of deaths involving alcohol or drugs.
- No statistical information is available on concurrent disorders within the Yukon population. Within the adult corrections population, concurrent disorders are thought to be a significant issue.
- The annual number of reported cases of hepatitis C in Yukon remains steady. The number of reported HIV cases is relatively small in comparison with the number of cases of hepatitis C.
- Anecdotally, the number of people affected by fetal alcohol syndrome disorders in Yukon appears to be significant. (No current statistics are available.)
- Many crimes that involve a victim are related to suspected use of alcohol (particularly crimes of violence; this is less so with property crimes). Non-alcohol drug use is not suspected to be significantly associated with any category of crime in which victims are involved (unlike with crimes involving alcohol).
- In 2003, 55% of all assault incidents involved alcohol, compared with 32% of sexual assault incidents and 65% of spousal assault incidents.
- The number of injuries and deaths in Yukon resulting from motor vehicle crashes involving alcohol consumption declined somewhat between 1995 and 2001.

Criminal Activity and Enforcement

- Yukon youth convictions for alcohol and drug offences include drug possession, driving with a blood-alcohol level over .08, and impaired driving. There is an overall downward trend in youth convictions for alcohol and drug offences. The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (implemented April 1, 2003), which includes more provisions for pre- and post-charge alternatives to the regular court process, might be a factor in this trend.
- Anecdotally, alcohol and drug use is an estimated risk factor for the criminal activity of 50% to 75% of Yukon youth involved in the youth criminal justice system.
- Yukon adult convictions for alcohol and drug offences include impaired driving, driving with a blood-alcohol level over .08, refusal of a Breathalyzer test, and drug possession. There is an overall downward trend in adult convictions for alcohol and drug offences.
- Anecdotally, it is estimated that over 95% of Yukon adults involved in the criminal justice system have significant issues related to alcohol and drug use.
- Anecdotally, alcohol and drug use is reported to be commonly associated with incidents of domestic violence in Yukon.

- Alcohol use/abuse is suspected to be involved up to 40 times more RCMP investigations than are other drugs.
- Whitehorse RCMP investigations where alcohol use is suspected show a significant upward trend for offences classified as “other crimes.” There is a continuing significant relationship between alcohol use and other categories of offences, including crimes of violence, territorial statutes, and property crimes.
- Whitehorse RCMP investigations where substance (other than alcohol) use is suspected show a significant upward trend for offences classified as “other crimes,” territorial statutes, crimes of violence, and drug crimes.
- The combined total number of suspensions and letters of warning related to liquor licences in Yukon has increased in the last three years.

Programs and Services

- A number of agencies were able to provide information related to the number of clients who access their program or service.
- Future collection and sharing of overall client numbers, gender breakdown, age groupings, and drug(s) of choice will aid in describing the prevalence of substance abuse.



¹ Kramer, M. (2004). Whitehorse, Yukon Report. Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (CCENDU).