



Inaugural National Report

Christiane Poulin
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

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For further information please contact Colleen Anne Dell, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Tel: (613) 235-4048 ext. 235; Fax: (613) 235-8101; e-mail: cdell@ccsa.ca

Executive Summary

The Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (CCENDU) was created in response to an identified need for a surveillance system spanning Canada, bringing together locally-relevant information on drug use, health and legal consequences of use, treatment and law enforcement. The existence of such essential information would facilitate the development, implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to deal with substance abuse - at the local, provincial and national levels.

Beyond coordinating and facilitating the collection, organization and dissemination of surveillance information, CCENDU was conceived to foster networking among key, multi-sectoral partners, to improve the quality of data currently being gathered, and to ultimately serve as an early warning network concerning emerging trends.

Six cities took part in this one-year pilot project: Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax. Activities were overseen by local coordinating committees, as well as a national Steering Committee. The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse was responsible for overall coordination, and research direction was provided by Dalhousie University.

Data and information were collected in nine major areas: alcohol, cocaine, cannabis, heroin, sedative- hypnotics and tranquilizers, hallucinogens other than cannabis, stimulants other than cocaine, HIV and AIDS, and needle exchange. In addition, special studies were conducted on Medical Examiner data, and women and addiction. The following are highlights from the findings:

- Alcohol remains the most commonly used substance, and is responsible for more health, safety and legal consequences than any other drug mentioned in the report.
- Cannabis, the most commonly used illegal drug in all six cities, is increasingly in use among adolescents, but is responsible for little morbidity and mortality.
- Cocaine has a high priority for law enforcement activity, and crack cocaine is a problem particularly in Montreal, Toronto, and, increasingly, Halifax. Injection of the drug is a quickly emerging issue for Vancouver, with great implications for the spread of HIV.

- Heroin use differs considerably across cities, with Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal reporting extensive consequences, and Calgary indicating a possible emerging problem.
- Polydrug use affects all cities.

Despite methodological limitations inherent in using such diverse data sources, the report has been successful in taking the first, key step toward a better understanding of the impact of substance abuse at the local level. Information has been collected, and compared, in a way that has never before happened, and made available in a timely fashion. Data sources have been, or will be improved, as a direct result of CCENU activity. Partnerships have been created, and will be maintained, where none existed prior to the project. In short, CCENDU has provided a key to better understanding of a complex problem.
