

Alcohol and Drugs in Canada: Current Knowledge – Future Implications



**CCSA Board of Directors
Breakfast Briefing on the Hill**

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CCSA – Canada's National Addictions Agency

- Mission:
 - ❖ to provide objective, evidence-based information and advice that will help reduce the health, social and economic harm associated with substance abuse and addictions.
- Created by an Act of Parliament in 1988; governed by Board of Directors; reports annually to Parliament
- Builds partnerships (all orders of government, and private and not-for-profit sectors) to achieve consensus, build capacity and leverage investment.
- Goal today – to provide a picture of the current landscape, where we've been and where we're headed.

Current Knowledge: Troubling Trends

- Costs to Canadian society rising:
 - ❖ \$40 billion per year (2002), or \$1,267 per Canadian (up from \$18.45 billion in 1992)
 - Alcohol, tobacco and drug use accounted for 20% of acute care hospital days
- Prevalence rising (1994-2004)
 - ❖ Alcohol: from 72% to 79% (Youth 18-24: 90%)
 - ❖ Cannabis: from 7% to 14% (Youth 15-17: 30%; Youth 18-19: 47%)
- Age of initiation decreasing
 - ❖ People aged 18 to 24 report initiating alcohol use earlier than those who are 25 to 34
 - ❖ People aged 15 to 17 report initiating yet again earlier than 18-24 group
- It's time to re-focus resources and priorities – federally and nationally

Mining the data for greater clarity

- Experimentation with alcohol, tobacco and illicit substances begins in adolescence, peaks in early to mid-20s and then decreases
 - ❖ Prevention and treatment strategies must be designed and tailored to meet and anticipate this predictable trajectory
 - ❖ General prevention strategies should be in place for youth up to Grade 5
 - ❖ Targeted strategies should be in place post-Grade 5
- Proportionally, males abuse alcohol and illicit drugs far more than women – but women experience more harmful results from that use
 - ❖ Prevention and treatment strategies must be gender-specific
- Better understanding of the relationship between alcohol, illicit drugs and tobacco use.
 - ❖ Youth who smoke tobacco 14x more likely to drink alcohol
 - ❖ Youth who smoke tobacco 20x more likely to smoke cannabis

Mining the data for greater clarity (cont'd)

- Most use of illicit drugs and harmful use of alcohol declines after 24 years of age – chronic abuse continues
 - ❖ Prevention and treatment strategies should account for different reasons for use including experimentation and self-medicating behaviour
- Treatment interventions should address and anticipate a broad spectrum of need
 - ❖ Greater use should be made of brief intervention through primary health care system
 - ❖ *Consider: 3 million Canadians are moderate-risk drinkers, in need of brief intervention*
- Greater understanding of the impact and effectiveness of specialized treatment is also required
 - ❖ *Consider: there are 513,729 high or highest-risk drinkers and 343,301 moderate to high-risk users of illicit drugs (excluding cannabis) who are in need of brief counselling and monitoring or referral to treatment*

Learning from our successes – where to from here?

- Two success stories:
 - ❖ Tobacco cessation
 - ❖ Driving while impaired
- Elements of success - ***Everyone pulled in the same direction***
 - ❖ Alignment of all national resources (Federal, Provincial/Territorial, Regional, Municipal, not-for-profit and private sectors)
 - ❖ Comprehensive use of legislative levers (taxation, enforcement, municipal policies)
 - ❖ Multi-faceted, sustained health promotion and awareness campaigns resulted in a societal attitudinal shift
- The challenge remains to create a similar success environment for alcohol and other drugs

A path forward - The National Framework

- Built on two years of consultations led by CCSA and Health Canada with stakeholders across the country.
 - ❖ Articulates **shared vision**, principles, goals, and priorities for action.
 - ❖ Permitted the creation of a **national perspective** and brings coordination and strategy to priority issues
 - ❖ Permits **joint ownership** while leveraging on various partner contributions
- Framework has been endorsed by 34 national organizations and two provincial governments
- First policy output: a National Alcohol Strategy **to support a culture of moderation and reduce alcohol-related harm**
- The National Framework replicates/approaches the conditions that exist around tobacco cessation and driving while impaired...

CCSA – Committed champion and national voice

- CCSA remains committed to:
 - ❖ Bringing clarity, focus and attention to the impact of alcohol and other drugs on our society
 - Health care, criminal justice, social impacts
 - ❖ Addressing the impact of alcohol and other drug use on broader national priorities including
 - Mental health, productivity of the Canadian workforce and shaping Canada's contributions internationally
 - ❖ Ensuring that those in the alcohol and drug field ask themselves the tough questions so that we can proactively address deficiencies and weaknesses
 - Performance measurement, system versus client need
 - ❖ Seizing the opportunity to improve outcomes for all Canadians
 - By serving the Government, Parliament and the alcohol and drug field as Canada's national addictions agency