

A National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harms Associated with the use of Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada

The Issue

The human toll of problematic use of alcohol and other drugs and substances is unquantifiable; the health, social and economic costs considerable.

In 1992 it cost Canada an estimated \$8.9 billion in direct losses associated with the workforce and administrative costs for transfer payments, prevention and research, law enforcement, and health care. The largest cost was lost productivity due to illness and premature death. During the nineties sharing of needles led to a rise in the rate of infectious disease transmission and more recently, increasing use of crystal methamphetamine and diversion of prescription painkillers such as oxycodone all point to a substantially greater toll on those who use drugs problematically, on families and communities, and on Canadian society in general. Particularly vulnerable are youth, seniors, Aboriginal peoples, and those who live in poverty or have co-occurring mental or physical illness.

No sector of Canadian society is untouched by the harms that can result from problematic use of alcohol and other drugs and substances. All levels of government, Aboriginal organizations, NGO's, industry, addictions, policing and enforcement agencies, and other communities of interest, including academia, legal associations, advocacy and human rights organizations, the medical community, caregivers, those who use drugs, and many others, all have a role to play in addressing problematic substance use. Many are doing a lot; but more can be done.

Rising to the Challenge

All sectors are rising to the challenge by joining together as co-partners to develop a *National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harms*

Associated with Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada. The Framework will, for the first time in Canada, bring all concerned parties together to identify priority issues for joint action.

Actions to Date

The Government of Canada is helping to spearhead the development of the National Framework. Working closely with its key federal partners, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada and the Department of Justice Canada, Health Canada is working jointly with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse to bring all sectors together on this important initiative.

Actions to date include cross-Canada consultations and subsequent – and ongoing – thematic workshops on priority issues with representatives from many sectors. The result is a collective conviction that a National Framework for Action is necessary, practical and — most of all — achievable through dedication and the sharing of expertise, experience, ideas and perspectives.


At a national forum in Montreal (June 2005), representatives from all sectors came together to review a draft National Framework for Action. The Framework (revised) reflects the first national consensus on objectives, principles and priorities for action that have been identified collectively and shown to be held in common by all partners.

The Government of Canada's ongoing contribution to the Framework's development, and the strategies that will result from it, include the funding, programs, initiatives and other resources that are part of the federal drug strategy known as *Canada's Drug Strategy*. Other valuable contributions for collaborative national action will be derived from the considerable research, policy, programming, and frontline work that all Framework partners undertake as part of their work in the field of problematic use of alcohol and other drugs and substances.

Next Steps

Subsequent to the meeting in Montreal, partners are moving forward with an endorsement process to have the revised National Framework formally





supported in principle by their respective boards, ministers or governing bodies. While this process is underway, partners are continuing to hold thematic workshops on priority issues, such as public awareness, and the stigma often associated with problematic drug use; and the need for commonly defined language to describe the field. Other work, such as a collectively developed strategy on alcohol, is also continuing.

Over the next 18 months, Health Canada and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse are informally continuing to act as a secretariat, promoting endorsement and application of the Framework, and facilitating thematic workshops and action on priorities, as well as disseminating relevant information. Work on the Framework's governance and management issues will also be undertaken. By 2007 all partners will meet again to discuss progress made in support of the Framework and to adopt a formal governance structure.

While complementing and facilitating current activities, the Framework also guides collaborative partnerships in planning for national responses. Ultimately, more than simply encouraging collaboration, the Framework actively fosters it by bringing partners together to realize the most beneficial results for the greatest number of people in Canada.

For more information on the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, please visit <http://www.ccsa.ca>

To learn more about Canada's Drug Strategy, please visit www.healthcanada.gc.ca/cds