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Canadian Executive Council on Addictions
Conseil exécutif canadien sur les toxicomanies



Results of major alcohol and drug use survey fills gaps in knowledge

OTTAWA/Nov. 24/CNW – Highlights from the Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS), the first major survey in a decade on the use of alcohol and other drugs among Canadians, were released today in a joint announcement by Health Canada, the Canadian Executive Council on Addictions (CECA) and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA).

While further analysis of the data will be required to fully identify and understand all of the trends, the survey shows that reported use of alcohol, cannabis and other drugs has increased in Canada over the past decade—with alcohol and cannabis continuing to be the most commonly used drugs.

The survey reveals that most Canadians aged 15 years and older drink, but drink in moderation and without harm. According to the World Health Organization's Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), 17% of past-year drinkers are considered high-risk drinkers. High-risk drinkers are predominantly males and those under the age of 25.

“The increase in heavy drinking by young Canadians is of concern and awareness and prevention campaigns should be increasingly targeted at these groups,” said John Borody, President of the Canadian Executive Council on Addictions (CECA).

Self-reported rates of use of illicit drugs such as cannabis also rose in the last decade. Fourteen percent of Canadians reported using cannabis in the past year, nearly double the rate reported in 1994 (7.4%). Of these, however, almost 46% had not used cannabis or had used it only once or twice in the three months preceding the survey interview. Reported youth rates show almost 30% of 15-17 year olds and just over 47% of 18-19 year olds having used cannabis in the past year.

“The rise in cannabis use, especially among young Canadians, is of concern because we know that cannabis is not a benign substance. There are a number of health risks associated with use and these risks increase with a lower age of initiation and more frequent use,” said Michel Perron, CCSA's Chief Executive Officer. “Collectively and individually, all parties involved in this study have a keen interest in taking action on this front.”

The Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS) was designed to provide a detailed assessment of how Canadians aged 15 years and older use alcohol and other drugs. The survey focused on the impact that alcohol and drug use has on physical, mental and social well-being. The survey also questioned Canadians about their attitudes toward measures to control drug use, and on their beliefs about the availability of drugs and the risks associated with use.

A total of 13,909 Canadians participated in the CAS, with a minimum of 1,000 in each province. Although the territories were not included in the CAS, work for surveys in the territories is underway with results anticipated in the summer of 2005.

The information released today represents the highlights of an upcoming detailed report focusing on the Prevalence of Use and Related Harms associated with alcohol, cannabis and other drugs that will be released within the next several months. Further results from the CAS data will be presented through a forthcoming series of reports and research papers.

The CAS is a collaboration of Health Canada, the Canadian Executive Council on Addictions (CECA)—which includes the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM), the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Prince Edward Island Provincial Health Services Authority, and the Kaiser Foundation/Centre for Addictions Research of BC (CAR-BC)—and the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia.

Highlights of the Canadian Addiction Survey: Prevalence of Use and Related Harms are available at www.ccsa.ca.

Backgrounder: <http://www.ccsa.ca/pdf/ccsa-bckgrd-20041124-e.pdf>

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