



New report recommends four basic starting points for reducing or eliminating the problems associated with youth substance abuse

OTTAWA/September 5, 2007/ CNW: A report released today by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA)—a national organization working to reduce alcohol- and drug-related harm—provides an up-to-date look at youth substance abuse and addiction in Canada, and outlines four broad strategic directions for addressing the immediate and long-term threats that alcohol and other drugs pose for this vulnerable segment of the population.

Substance Abuse in Canada: Youth in Focus was authored by a team of addiction and adolescent health professionals commissioned by CCSA to explore the impact of youth substance abuse and its implications for policy and practice. In planning this report, CCSA consulted with a variety of experts to identify the issues of greatest concern in 2007. What emerged was a list of topics with a single unifying theme: youth—whether it was concern about the age of initiation for first-time alcohol and drug use (now around 14 or younger), the unusually high levels of cannabis use among young Canadians compared with their peers in other countries, or the rise in hazardous drinking by those under 25. Equally important was an emphasis on prevention and closing the research-to-practice gap.

The report identifies four potential areas for action to deal with substance use and abuse among youth:

Matching services to age and stage

Appropriate programs and services should be available to all young people as they move from childhood through adolescence. This requires that programs and services be adapted and matched to the age and needs of youth. Identifying and addressing underlying risks in young school-aged children is an area where there is much room for improvement.

Implementing effective services

There are few standards and little evidence to support some youth prevention and treatment services. This contributes to discrepancies in the quality of services delivered to youth. There is a need to develop accreditation standards for prevention and treatment programs and to tie funding directly to the implementation and evaluation of these accredited services.

Preparing professionals

We need better awareness and training in early detection, brief intervention and referral among a range of professionals who work with children and adolescents, including family doctors, teachers, psychologists and youth workers. The services these professionals provide need to be better coordinated.

Continuing to develop knowledge

Successful intervention strategies depend on comprehensive program evaluations to determine how to best address the needs of youth according to their culture, ethnicity and age. Yet, these kinds of evaluations are often not done. The truth is, many youth intervention programs operate with limited resources and there is great reluctance to spend money on evaluations.



"Although a sustained commitment to addressing youth substance abuse will require increased attention and resources, this continued effort will pay off by reducing the considerable short- and long-term harms and costs associated with substance use, abuse and dependence," said CCSA's Chief Executive Officer, Michel Perron. "Targeting the underlying risk and protective factors associated with substance abuse has the potential to reduce other negative behaviour, including criminal and violent behaviour."

The full report, *Substance Abuse in Canada: Youth in Focus*, is available at www.ccsa.ca.

About CCSA:

With a legislated mandate to reduce alcohol- and other drug-related harms, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse provides leadership on national priorities, fosters knowledge translation within the field, and creates sustainable partnerships that maximize collective efforts. CCSA receives funding support from Health Canada.

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