

# AADAC 2007

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

### SUMMARY

Environmental scanning in AADAC identifies emerging issues and trends, and helps to inform AADAC's strategic planning. The *AADAC 2007 Environmental Scan* considers five broad themes.

#### SUBSTANCE USE AND GAMBLING

- Reducing alcohol-related harm is a significant policy issue in Alberta stemming from release of the National Alcohol Strategy and the evidence of high costs of alcohol abuse in Alberta.
- Alcohol consumption by older adults is increasing. It is estimated that 6 to 10% of Canadian seniors have an alcohol problem.
- In general, cultivation, production and consumption of illegal drugs such as cocaine, heroin, cannabis and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) have stabilized worldwide.
- The International Narcotics Control Board (2006) reports that demand for cocaine remains strong in Canada.
- After a steady increase in cannabis production from 1992 to 2004, a slight decrease in trafficking statistics indicates that production in Canada may have stabilized in 2005. It is unclear if this trend will continue.
- Production and consumption of amphetamine-type stimulants appears to be stabilizing with a clear downward trend in North America, which is attributed to stronger precursor controls.
- While illegal drug use remains stable worldwide, abuse of prescription medication, especially among youth, remains a concern.
- Prescription opioids have become predominant form of illicit opioid use in Canada; heroin use is increasingly marginalized and Canada is the world's top per capita consumer of many opioids (e.g., hydromorphone).
- Gambling availability continues to grow in Alberta, aided by new technology.
- Tobacco will remain at the forefront of provincial policy.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

- The largest projected population growth in Alberta will be in three groups:
  - young children (aged 0 to 4)
  - Aboriginal people: Alberta may have the second highest Aboriginal population in Canada by 2017. Edmonton is one of the four Canadian cities with the highest concentrations of First Nations and Métis people.
  - seniors: Because “old age” now spans a period of 20+ years, characteristics and experiences of seniors are varied and will become more so when the boomer generation hits age 65 in 2011.
- The young adult population is expected to peak at 285,000 by 2011. The population of teenagers is projected to be about 212,000 by 2011.
- Inter-provincial migration will continue to increase. However, “transplants” returning to their province of origin may signal a “return movement” trend.

## ECONOMICS

- Unprecedented economic growth is affecting every aspect of society. Alberta is experiencing the strongest period of economic growth ever recorded by any province in Canadian history.
- The shortage of skilled labour in many industries is constraining employment growth and will continue to do so, average hourly wages are increasing, and investment in major projects continues to rise. Attraction and retention of skilled employees will continue to be a primary concern for all industries.
- The work-life balance has emerged as a critical policy issue in Canada. Understanding the changing division of labour in families is crucial to developing effective policies.

## TECHNOLOGY

- People are increasingly linked through Internet networking sites (e.g., MySpace, YouTube) and cell-phone technology.
- Social networking sites on the Internet create massive online communities, which expand opportunity for collaboration and offer new models of organization and innovation.
- Social networking also provides a new global surveillance system that may be useful in harm reduction. For example, new drugs have a considerable “grace period” during which alleged benefits are promoted but consequences are unknown. It takes longer to gather and disperse evidence of adverse effects such as death, disease, overdose reactions and addictive potential. Organized efforts using social networking to reduce the “grace period” enjoyed by new drugs are a promising harm reduction strategy.

## GOVERNANCE

- “Network government” is increasingly the norm. There is a call in the public sector for greater interoperability (i.e., easier exchange of data and information, allowing easier collaboration), better co-ordination of services and enhanced international co-operation.
- Technological advances, combined with Alberta’s growing population and booming economy, have increased the volume of information (including personal information) gathered, the amount of business transacted, and the need for government resources to meet this growing demand.
- Security issues overlie the exploration of new and alternative models of shared service delivery, especially regarding information protection across various devices (e.g., wireless and portable technologies).
- Changing government priorities may affect funding decisions related to substance use and gambling, and to harm reduction.