

Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS)

Substance Use by Canadian Youth

National Survey of Canadians' Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs



Click on this link <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/pubs/adp-apd/cas-etc/youth-jeunes/index-eng.php> to access the full report, which is one of a series of reports from the Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS, 2004). The CAS (2004) was a collaborative initiative sponsored by Health Canada, the Canadian Executive Council on Addictions (CECA) – which includes the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), 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), as well as the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia.

The CAS was one of the most detailed and extensive addictions surveys ever conducted in Canada, with more than 400 unique questionnaire items. This report is a followup to the *Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS): A National Survey of Canadians' Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs, Prevalence of Use and Related Harms: Detailed Report* (Adlaf, Begin and Sawka, 2005). The detailed report provided an overview of the prevalence of alcohol and illicit drug use in Canada, as well as an examination of the harms experienced by Canadians as a result of such use. While the full report presented some specific prevalence results for youth, the focus was on national estimates. As such, this report takes a more in-depth look at the use of alcohol and other drugs by youth and young adults aged 15 to 24, as well as the problems which they encounter as a result of this use, their reasons for using and the characteristics associated with such use. The discussions and results will be presented with a focus on youth and, in many instances, comparisons will be made to the general and adult populations.

Health Canada's participation in the CAS was an important initiative within the renewed Canada's Drug Strategy (CDS), announced by the government of Canada in May 2003. The CDS is a federally co-ordinated initiative to reduce the harm associated with the use of alcohol and controlled substances. Because most substance use usually

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begins during the younger years, and literature has demonstrated that the rate of substance use is usually much higher among youth, youth are a target population prioritized under the CDS. Decreasing the number of young Canadians who experiment with drugs is one of the major objectives of the CDS. Youth are at an age at which they are required to make many important decisions, including the use of substances. Thus, it is important to monitor the prevalence of use and related harms of substance use among this population, as well as the factors associated with use and different patterns of use.

The assessment of alcohol and other drug use among youth is important because it is only through such research that we can identify current problems in an attempt to develop intervention and prevention strategies. A key premise of prevention is that the activities need to be based on the best available information regarding the nature and extent of youth substance use problems (Roberts, McCall, Stevens-Lavigne et al., 2001). Information gathered through surveys such as the CAS provides us with a wealth of data, not just to describe the current situation, but also to be in a better position to address it. Age of first use, the proportion of users versus non-users, and differences in gender, age group and region are all examples of key factors essential for developing prevention, intervention and treatment strategies for youth. Since the CAS was one of the most detailed and extensive addiction surveys ever conducted in Canada, as well as the most recent, the current report will examine substance use among youth with a focus on the aforementioned factors in an attempt to provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive picture of the current situation of substance use by Canadian youth.