

The Canadian Standards for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention: An Overview

Resources for planning, selecting, implementing and evaluating prevention efforts with schools, communities and families

Effective prevention does not need to mean working more—it means refocusing resources to what has been shown to work.

Canada's first cross-Canada resource for substance abuse prevention, the **Portfolio of Canadian Standards for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention** is an essential guide for those participating in youth substance abuse prevention activities in health promotion, education, social and community development, public safety, and enforcement. It provides teams with guidance—based on the best available evidence—on how best to plan, select, implement and evaluate their prevention efforts with schools, communities and families.

Substance use among Canadian youth is a national priority. Youth are more likely to use substances, engage in risky forms of use, and experience harms from using that can negatively impact their physical and mental health, safety, academic achievement and future goals. Substance abuse impacts violence, vandalism, car crashes and the breakdown of relationships and communities—issues that affect everyone and cost us on social and economic levels. As such, we all play a role in preventing substance abuse and promoting the health and well-being of youth.

Effective substance abuse prevention efforts are critical to ensuring the healthy development and success of youth.

The Portfolio of Canadian Standards is a single resource that meets prevention teams where they are “at” whether they are just getting started in their prevention work or have been involved in substance abuse prevention for a long time—and provides them with expert guidance and tools to strengthen the quality of their efforts.

Developed by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) and the Canadian Standards Task Force—a group of Canadian prevention professionals—and based on the best and most recent evidence on what works in prevention, the Canadian Standards Portfolio is an essential guide in the development and improvement of prevention activities towards a more comprehensive, effective and sustainable initiative. It identifies key components of effective initiatives and provides guidance on how to self-assess and

continuously improve prevention efforts in multiple settings within the context of existing health and safety frameworks.

The Canadian Standards Portfolio is comprised of three sets of guidebooks: standards for prevention in communities (*Stronger Together*), standards for prevention in schools (*Building on our Strengths*) and guidelines for families (*Strengthening our Skills*). These resources address everyday environments where teams can work with youth to build resiliency and provide the tools and information they need to make healthy choices.

The Standards documents provide a practical process on how best to plan, select, implement, monitor and evaluate an evidence-informed initiative. The documents include:

- A **20-minute checklist** to help schools and communities assess where to focus their efforts; and
- A **workbook** to enable teams to assess where their strengths and opportunities lie in current prevention activities.

Standards for Prevention in Schools

Efforts to prevent substance abuse and promote student well-being contribute directly to academic success.

Substance use among teens directly interferes with the mission of schools and may affect academic performance in a number of ways:

- A student who is intoxicated or hung over during the school day learns less; an ongoing pattern will interfere with academic performance.
- Young people have not reached full maturity physically, psychologically or socially; substance use may affect brain development and interrupt crucial developmental processes.
- Student substance use is often associated with other social or emotional difficulties and disruptive behaviours that affect the social and academic environment for others.

Effective prevention does not need to mean working more—it means refocusing resources to what has been shown to work. *Building on Our Strengths: Canadian Standards for*



School-based Youth Substance Abuse Prevention advocates a comprehensive school health approach—one that pays attention to the school’s environment, teaching and learning, healthy school policy, partnerships and services. This approach integrates prevention into the school’s core mission and links to community initiatives that aim to improve the well-being of youth.

The School-based Standards are designed for addictions prevention and public health professionals, as well as school principals and staff, school board administrators, police officers and parents working with school-based substance abuse prevention and health promotion teams.

Standards for Prevention in Communities

Positive outcomes for youth are most likely when prevention effort integrate schools and families and other settings in the community.

While schools have significant opportunities to promote positive youth development, many other influences fall largely outside of school boundaries (e.g., family, media, availability of substances, social norms, cultural values, leisure activities and entertainment). *Stronger Together: Canadian Standards for Community-based Youth Substance Abuse Prevention* advocates that everyone plays a role in prevention and that positive outcomes for youth are most likely when prevention takes a comprehensive approach that links schools and families with other settings in the community (e.g., recreation centres, nightclubs, bars, workplaces).

The Community-based Standards show that while youth substance abuse prevention is a long-term process, wherever a community-based team begins its work, the potential rewards are great: fewer substance use problems occur among local youth, more youth experience positive development, and the quality of life in the community improves.

The Community-based Standards apply to individuals and teams who have an expertise and mandate to help community groups take action to prevent substance abuse among youth.

Guidelines for Prevention with Families

Support for family skills strengthening can have a preventive effect.

Factors from genetics and temperament to broader social and environmental influences can influence youth development and problematic substance use. However,

family-related factors are crucial because they can increase or decrease the effect of these other influences. A positive family environment can have a preventative effect on substance abuse behaviours as well as other health and social issues such as mental health problems, violence, criminal behaviour and risky sexual practices.

Evidence shows that family skills programs positively affect parent–child family relations by:

- Increasing family cohesion;
- Decreasing family conflict; and
- Decreasing family health and social problems, including substance abuse.

Strengthening Our Skills: Canadian Guidelines for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Family Skills Programs emphasizes the importance of including family skills programming both in a comprehensive prevention initiative and as a part of general parenting and family support. It provides direction to groups wishing to implement family skills programming and whose objectives include the prevention of substance abuse among children. The Family-based Guidelines are primarily intended for prevention resource people (i.e., individuals with a mandate and expertise to conduct community and school prevention).

Supporting Tools

To assist individuals and teams using the Canadian Standards Portfolio, a growing collection of practical tools and resources is available at www.ccsa.ca. Another interactive, online resource directed at youth, Xperiment.ca, has been developed to provide youth with information and positive messages to support them in making healthy choices.

A Drug Prevention Strategy for Canada’s Youth

The *Portfolio of Canadian Standards for Substance Abuse Prevention* was part of a CCSA-led *Drug Prevention Strategy for Canada’s Youth*, a five-year initiative that aimed to reduce illegal drug use by Canadian youth aged 10 to 24 years. It involved stakeholders from across the country in all provinces and territories and was funded through the federal government’s *National Anti-Drug Strategy*.

	<p>Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse</p> <p>Centre canadien de lutte contre les toxicomanies</p>	<p>The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse changes lives by bringing people and knowledge together to reduce the harm of alcohol and other drugs on society. We partner with public, private and non-governmental organizations to improve the health and safety of Canadians.</p> <p>Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada’s Drug Strategy Communities Initiatives Fund. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.</p>
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