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CCSA and National Recovery Advisory Committee Release First-Ever Report Highlighting Recovery in Canada

St. John's, May 25, 2017 — The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) (formerly the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse) and the National Recovery Advisory Committee are pleased to announce the findings from the first-ever Life in Recovery from Addiction in Canada survey. [This report](#) compiles the results of a survey of people in recovery from addiction to alcohol and drugs, and shows that recovery is linked to positive citizenship — engagement with family, friends, the community and the workforce.

In total, 91% of participants in the survey reported that their quality of life was either excellent, very good or good after recovery had been initiated — a finding that suggests hope for people living with addiction. Survey results also suggest that change in how the treatment system and society approach those living through active addiction could extend the benefits of treatment and supports even further.

The findings will be used to inform and educate health service providers, decision makers and the public about the lived experiences of individuals in recovery. The intent is to increase understanding and to help address the stigma associated with addiction and recovery, to drive investment in quality services and to improve overall access, thereby removing barriers to recovery.

Survey Findings

The survey asked respondents to consider a number of questions related to initiating recovery, the experience of addiction, barriers and stigma, and quality of life after recovery had been initiated. Key findings from the report are summarized below.

Initiating Recovery

The factors respondents considered the most important in initiating recovery were:

- Quality of life: 69.1%
- Mental or emotional health: 68%
- Marital, family or other relationships: 64.9%
- Physical health: 45.5%

Pathways to Recovery

Respondents used a variety of pathways to initiating and sustaining recovery, with many choosing a combination of family, professional and mutual support resources. Recovery resources or programs used Included:

- 12-step mutual support groups: 91.8%
- Other specialized addiction treatment programs, ranging from 60.6% for residential treatment to 5% for First Nations addiction treatment programs

Barriers and Stigma

Of respondents, 82.5% reported barriers to initiating recovery, with the most common barriers including:

- Not being ready or not believing the problem was serious enough
- Being worried about others' perceptions of people in recovery



- Not knowing where to go for help
- Lack of supportive social networks
- Long delays for treatment

A full 47% identified system-related barriers to accessing treatment, including:

- Long delays for treatment
- Lack of professional help for mental health or emotional problems
- Cost of recovery services
- Lack of programs or supports in their community
- Quality of services in their community
- Lack of programs or supports that met their cultural needs or were in their preferred language

After Having Initiated Recovery

The majority of respondents in recovery reported having a positive quality of life, with 90.7% rating their quality of life as either excellent, very good or good. Respondents' definition of the benefits of recovery included abstinence, improved health, social connections and functioning, as well as enhanced quality of life. The majority of participants reported barriers to initiating recovery, but 54.2% did not report experiencing barriers to sustaining recovery.

Compared to life during active addiction, when describing recovery, respondents were more likely to report:

- Having stable housing (95.9% versus 65.4%)
- Participating in family activities (90.3% versus 31%)
- Remaining steadily employed (79.1% versus 52.6%)
- Paying bills (93.5% versus 42.2%)
- Paying taxes on time (77.4% versus 43.4%)
- Regularly volunteering for community service activities (66.8% versus 14.4%)
- Planning for the future (88.8% versus 22.3%)

The survey was conducted in the spring of 2016 and received 855 responses from across Canada.

Quotes

“It is time to change the tone of the dialogue on addiction. Many of us know someone who suffers from active addiction, and can speak from personal experience about how difficult it is to access services and supports. Our approach towards the issue must change to reflect key principles of recovery. The key findings of the report released today highlight the benefits of recovery: the enhanced quality of life, improved relationships and more stable employment, among many others. It is now up to all of us to take this information and translate it into action to ensure that those positive outcomes are available to all who are in active addiction.”

Rita Notarandrea, CEO, CCSA

“From my 30-year career as consultant in addiction medicine and as a person in long-term recovery from addiction, I know the evidence showing that treatment of addiction works. I have worked with thousands of people in recovery who, with help from others, improve their health and quality of life, becoming contributing members of their communities. Of course, we need more treatment facilities and programs. That is just the start. What we really need now is to create in Canada a network of



proven community-based recovery support services and to establish a recovery-oriented system of care to complement and sustain the good work of our existing treatment programs. This will help end the cycle of multiple bouts of acute treatment followed by relapse, and instead establish a system of continuing care the way we have with other chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension.”

Ray Baker MD, Associate Clinical Professor, University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine (retired), member of National Recovery Advisory Committee

“This historic survey offers a positive voice of resilience in recovery. A much-needed window on a previously unseen world, it is powerful and welcome news for all Canadians, and, above all, a clarion call for timely leadership and action.”

Ann Dowsett Johnston, award-winning writer and editor, and recovery advocate, member of National Recovery Advisory Committee

“The 855 people who responded to this national Life in Recovery Survey are our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Recovery from addiction impacts all of us and it is real, attainable and sustainable. As a person in long-term recovery of 30 years and having worked in the addiction recovery field for almost as long, this report clearly shows that there is hope for people who suffer from the chronic brain disorder of addiction.”

Stacey Petersen, RSW, Executive Director, Fresh Start Recovery Centre, member of National Recovery Advisory Committee

“For too long, a great majority in our communities – those in recovery, our families, our workplaces and recovery allies – have been silent about our experiences and successes. We need to change that. Instead of sensationalizing addiction, which often occurs in the media, we must do more to celebrate, research and acknowledge recovery. Despite the great number of people in recovery, little has been known about what traits we have in common, the most successful pathways that are used to achieve recovery and how to best maintain long-term remission. There has never been a more important time for Canadians in recovery to tell their stories of success, to be role models, to be of service and to be an inspiration for those who are still struggling.”

Marshall Smith, CCAC, Senior Advisor for Recovery Initiatives, British Columbia Centre on Substance Use, member of National Recovery Advisory Committee

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Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction 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.

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