



Canadian Centre
on Substance Abuse
Centre canadien de lutte
contre les toxicomanies

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Substance Abuse Costs Canadian Hospitals Hundreds of Millions of Dollars per Year ***Alcohol Abuse the Prime Culprit***

Ottawa, November 20, 2014 — A new report from the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) highlights that substance abuse is a serious and increasingly costly health concern in Canada.

Analysing the latest data provided by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, CCSA's report, *The Impact of Substance Use Disorders on Hospital Use*, found the cost of hospitalizing people with substance use disorders is significant, increasing 22% over five years to \$267 million in 2011 from \$219 million in 2006.

More than half of these costs are attributable to alcohol-related disorders, highlighting the importance of frontline medical professionals having access to and using tools that can assist with [early screening and intervention](#) for problematic alcohol use, as well as resources to educate patients about [low-risk drinking](#).

This study is the first in Canada to examine, by substance, how alcohol and other drugs, including marijuana and prescription drugs, are affecting the hospital system. However, the report focused only on the small proportion of Canadians admitted to a hospital bed with the primary diagnosis of a substance use disorder requiring treatment for the severe and direct harms associated with substance use such as acute intoxication, convulsions or withdrawal symptoms. The report did not include those admitted to hospital for accidents or injuries that happened as a result of alcohol or other drug use. It also did not include those seeking help at emergency departments who were not admitted to beds, or those seeking help from community treatment facilities or outpatient services.

The following substances were responsible, in descending order, for consuming the greatest amount of hospital resources in 2011. Of note, alcohol accounted for almost 10 times more hospital costs than opioids, the second most costly substance. (Note: This is not a comprehensive list of the substances examined; please see the technical report.)

- Alcohol: \$145 million
- Opioids: \$15 million
- Cannabis: \$14 million
- Cocaine: \$13 million

The study produced a number of key findings from age-related data:

- For alcohol, those aged 45–64 collectively stayed the most days in hospital and accounted for the biggest increase in days stayed between 2006 and 2011.
- Those aged 25–44 spent the most total days in hospital for opioids, although the largest increase in days stayed for opioids was among seniors aged 65 and over.
- For cannabis, youth aged 15–24 stayed the most days in hospital and had the biggest increase in number of days stayed.



Quotes

“While these figures are alarming, we must examine the data with the understanding that this is just the tip of the iceberg. The total overall costs of substance abuse to the entire healthcare system are much more significant. This is a clear call for a greater focus on early identification of substance use disorders. Resources like the Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral tool assist health professionals in intervening before substance use disorders reach a level requiring hospitalization.”

Rita Notarandrea
Chief Executive Officer (interim), CCSA

“This data, which represents only a small portion of the healthcare costs from substance use, again highlights that alcohol has by far the greatest impact. Better screening and treatment in the healthcare system is needed, but alone will not make a difference. Reducing the costs of alcohol use will require a willingness to change policies related to marketing, accessibility and price.”

Dr. Robert Strang
Chief Public Health Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness

“In 2011, the costs of treating those with cannabis use disorders became more expensive than treating cocaine— a clear indication that this is not the benign substance that many Canadians assume. It is also concerning that the largest number of days stayed for cannabis was seen among youth, whose developing brains are the most susceptible to harm.”

Dr. Amy Porath-Waller
Director of Policy and Research (interim), CCSA

“Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines set out limits that, if followed, help people keep themselves out of harm’s way. This report reinforces the need to focus on alcohol education and prevention efforts, given the widespread use of alcohol and high costs to society when misused.”

Dr. Matthew Young
Report author and Senior Research and Policy Analyst, CCSA.

Resources

The Impact of Substance Use Disorders on Hospital Use

- [Technical Report](#)
- [Report in Short](#)
- [Infographic](#)

Media Inquiries

Please direct media inquiries to media@ccsa.ca.



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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.

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