

The National Alcohol Strategy Monitoring Project

Alcohol is a legal substance with economic and social benefits, but also has a significant impact on the health and safety of Canadians. Canada's National Alcohol Strategy, with 41 recommendations to reduce harms, was released in 2007. Since that time, the National Alcohol Strategy Advisory Committee, a multi-stakeholder advisory committee, has overseen its implementation. As a first step to assess the progress of the strategy, baseline data was identified and reported.

Key Messages

- The National Alcohol Strategy Monitoring Project provides baseline data as a first step in assessing the implementation of Canada's alcohol strategy.
- Progress was made in education and prevention activities such as developing national low-risk drinking guidelines and raising awareness of the guidelines and the harms of alcohol.
- Less progress occurred in key areas such as pricing of alcohol (mandatory minimum pricing), as alcohol prices have not kept up with the price of other goods.
- Policies and regulations on alcohol availability, pricing and advertising might exist, but the extent to which they are implemented and enforced is not readily known.
- The absence of a national system of data collection significantly limited the ability to provide a comprehensive assessment.
- Significant data gaps included information about the alcohol literacy of Canadians, treatment, marketing, drinking contexts and harms to others caused by a person's drinking.

Why Does this Matter?

Alcohol is the drug most commonly used by Canadians. Although alcohol is associated with social and economic benefits, it also has a high potential for significant harms. In 2005, alcohol was identified as an issue requiring national attention during consultations across Canada to identify priority needs in the substance use field. The development and implementation of a multi-layered national strategy to reduce harms linked with drinking alcohol is how Canada intends to move to a culture of moderation.

What Did We Do?

A monitoring framework was developed based on a logic model and indicators for activities completed, and their impact on behaviours and consequences of drinking. Data was reported from provincial and national sources where available, and data gaps were identified.



What Did We Find?

1. Collaboration across sectors to develop a number of foundational resources:
 - *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*
 - Guidance for standard drink labels
 - Guidance for an evidence-based approach to social reference pricing
 - An online resource to aid physicians in screening, brief intervention and referral for alcohol problems
2. Leadership by national organizations and provinces to recognize the importance of reducing the harmful impacts of alcohol:
 - *The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2015: Alcohol Consumption in Canada*
 - Three provinces have put an alcohol strategy in place since the release of the National Alcohol Strategy (Nova Scotia, Alberta and Manitoba)
 - National data reported for the first time on hospitalizations caused by alcohol: *Alcohol Harm in Canada: Examining Hospitalizations Entirely Caused by Alcohol and Strategies to Reduce Alcohol Harm* (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2017)
 - Most provinces have strengthened actions to address alcohol-impaired drivers, targeting drivers with both low and high blood alcohol content
3. Commitment through investment of resources:
 - Individual campaigns were launched to promote awareness of the low-risk drinking guidelines through a range of creative initiatives (Éduc'alcool in Quebec, LCBO and public health units in Ontario, health ministries in most provinces)
 - College of Family Physicians of Canada now hosts and promotes the online screening, brief intervention and referral resource to family physicians
4. Significant limitations in data with the following specific gaps:
 - The number of treatment centres and their use by people with alcohol use problems
 - The proportion of people at risk for alcohol misuse versus those at risk for dependence
 - Sensitive indicators about availability, affordability and marketing of alcohol, which are key levers for reducing the impact of alcohol
 - Indicators for drinking environments that reflect where and when people drink
 - The proportion of Canadians aware of the low-risk drinking guidelines and the concept of a standard drink
 - Data about the harms to people caused by others who drink
 - Alcohol-related mortality and morbidity data, despite the knowledge that alcohol is linked to over 200 different diseases, conditions and types of injuries



Addressing Challenges and Opportunities

- Expand and strengthen the collection of valid, reliable population data related to alcohol. As a first step, stakeholders could reach agreement on a core set of indicators to monitor the progress of the strategy.
- Suggested next steps in implementing the strategy include examining the implementation of pricing, availability and marketing policies.
- Identify population subgroups, such as underage drinkers, that might require greater attention due to their susceptibility.
- Transfer learnings from alcohol to marijuana and establish baseline data and monitoring mechanisms to assess the health, social, economic and public safety impacts of legalizing recreational marijuana on Canadians.

How You Can Learn More

- Find the full report and more information about the National Alcohol Strategy on the Alcohol page on the CCSA website.
- Find partners working on alcohol-related initiatives on our Collaboration page.
- CCSA experts are available to lend their expertise and guidance on how to set up a monitoring framework for alcohol or marijuana.

Reference

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2017) *The National Alcohol Strategy Monitoring Project: A Status Report*. Ottawa, Ont.: Author.

