

Substance Use in Canada Series

Improving Quality of Life: Substance Use and Aging

Improving Quality of Life: Substance Use and Aging, the latest report in the **Substance Use in Canada series**, provides a summary of the best available evidence on substance use among older adults.

Adults aged 55 and over represent the fastest growing subgroup of the Canadian population, and are estimated to account for approximately one-quarter of the Canadian population by 2036. As older adults continue to make up a larger proportion of the population, substance use among them will also continue to rise. It will become increasingly important to understand the needs of older adults and how the Canadian healthcare system can adapt to those needs. It is essential to develop strategies to promote healthy aging and take into account the impacts of substance use when planning for the future of the Canadian healthcare system.

Improving Quality of Life: Substance Use and Aging will give decision makers, policy makers, nurses, geriatricians, researchers and others working with older adults an opportunity to consider the evidence as they develop and employ more effective prevention and intervention programs aimed at addressing substance use among older adults.

The objectives of this report were:

1. To consider the impact of the aging population and the increases of problematic substance use among older adults on health outcomes, the Canadian healthcare system and healthcare expenditures;
2. To identify gaps in our knowledge about the harms associated with substance use and their impacts on healthy aging to inform policy, practice and programs for older adults; and
3. To summarize the best available evidence on effective ways to prevent, identify, assess and treat problematic substance use in the older adult population.

Some of the key findings from this report include:

- As the number of older adults in Canada increases, the number of older adults experiencing problems related to substance use is also expected to increase.
- Age-related changes in physiology render older adults more susceptible to experiencing harms associated with substance use.
- Older adults are often prescribed multiple medications and are more at-risk for the harms related to poly-substance use compared to other subgroups of the Canadian population.
- While older adults use substances less frequently than do younger adults, those who do use substances experience more harms associated with them compared to younger adults.
- To better support older adults, service providers need more evidence-informed resources tailored to the older adult population to prevent, detect, diagnose, assess and treat substance use among older adults.