



Canadian Centre  
on Substance Use  
and Addiction

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# Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2022–2023 Federal Budget

Submitted by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use  
and Addiction



## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** That the government continue its multi-year fund (\$10 million over five years) to support CCSA's **cannabis** work, which includes research, knowledge mobilization and the development of targeted materials to support evidence-based decisions and actions for cannabis policy and practice.

**Recommendation 2:** That the government establish a multi-year fund (\$10 million over five years) to support CCSA's role as a leader in **alcohol** research, knowledge mobilization and the development of targeted materials to support evidence-based decisions and actions for alcohol policy and practice.



## Who We Are

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) is the only national organization with a legislated mandate to reduce the harms of alcohol and other drugs on people in Canada. Created by an Act of Parliament almost 35 years ago, CCSA provides national leadership by harnessing the power of research and providing evidence-informed guidance to decision makers, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives to galvanize individual and collective efforts.

CCSA is uniquely situated to provide an objective, evidence-informed perspective that centres on health and public safety. We support policy makers across Canada in making informed decisions about substance use. CCSA also plays an important role as a convenor among all levels of governments, key stakeholders, people with lived and living experience of substance use, and many other crucial voices on the issues surrounding substance use. While CCSA is requesting funding, our research will go beyond our organization to benefit municipalities, provinces and territories, organizations, universities and other partners that are interested in ensuring that their decisions around substance use are evidence based.

## Substance Use and Canada's Economy

- Substance use costs Canadian society almost \$46 billion a year or almost \$1,258 for every person in Canada.
- In 2017, substance use caused more than 275,000 hospitalizations and a loss of nearly 75,000 lives.

Substance use is associated with a staggering health impact and cost to society. It affects many areas, including health care, lost productivity and criminal justice. National, provincial, territorial and municipal jurisdictions struggle to manage this impact on health and related costs, while also providing the direct services and supports to those seeking assistance for at-risk substance use and substance use disorders, and the many related comorbidities.

CCSA plays two unique roles. We are a trusted source for evidence-based substance use information. CCSA is also a public educator that translates substance use knowledge into an easy to understand, easy to access format. Stakeholders use this knowledge to improve their policies, programs and practices. Our stakeholders include service providers, decision makers, policy makers and employers.

As part of this work, CCSA collaborates with the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research on the Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms project. This project includes a report that estimates the costs of substance use in Canada from 2015 to 2017 using the most reliable, up-to-date data sources and methods. (The latest data CCSA has are for 2017.) In 2017, substance use cost Canadians almost \$46 billion. This equates to almost \$1,258 for every person in Canada. Substance use led to more than 275,000 hospitalizations and contributed to the loss of nearly 75,000 lives (Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Scientific Working Group, 2020). These numbers are expected to remain the same or to have risen since COVID-19 (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2021). CCSA will report on updated estimates for the years between 2017–2022 in the coming months.

Alcohol and cannabis are the substances most commonly used by people living in Canada. Their chronic or at-risk use significantly impacts the health of people across the country and the use of



hospital and health and social resources. In 2017, alcohol use cost more than \$16.6 billion, which is over 36% of the total cost of substance use in Canada, the most out of all substances (Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Scientific Working Group, 2020). Because of the prevalence of their use, our two recommendations in this submission focus on cannabis and alcohol.

## **Recommendation 1: Cannabis**

***That the government continue its multi-year fund (\$10 million over five years) to support CCSA's cannabis work, which includes research, knowledge mobilization and the development of targeted materials to support evidence-based decisions and actions for cannabis policy and practice.***

- Cannabis has been legal since 2018.
- The impacts of legalization still need further exploration.
- Canada has one of the highest rates of cannabis use in the world.
- Cannabis-related hospitalizations for psychiatric conditions in Canada are rising.

CCSA received funding in the 2018 federal budget to support research on cannabis use in Canada. The funds came from the Cannabis Research Initiative of the Substance Use and Addiction Program. The funding gave CCSA \$10 million over five years for research on the impacts of cannabis legalization in Canada and will end this year. With this funding, CCSA has worked with partners across Canada and internationally. CCSA identified research gaps and priorities, contributed to the cannabis evidence-base, and laid a foundation for knowledge generation and collaboration in future years. Some key successes of this funding include promoting awareness of COVID-19 health considerations; tracking COVID-19 policy impacts; launching research to fill knowledge gaps; supporting research collaboration; and understanding COVID-19 and cannabis use.

Canada has one of the highest rates of cannabis use in the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.). Almost 16.8% of people in Canada aged 15 or older (more than 5.1 million individuals) reported in 2019 that they had used cannabis in the past three months (Statistics Canada, 2020) compared to 14.9% or 4.5 million people in Canada in 2018. Cannabis use remains most prevalent among adolescents aged 15–17 (10.4%) and young adults aged 18–24 (33.3%).

Despite some month-to-month fluctuation, the legal retail cannabis market continues to grow, with an increase from \$148 million in December 2019 to close to \$355 million in December 2021. Retail sales almost doubled in Ontario between 2019 and 2021, which aligns with the lifting of the cap on number of stores (Myran et al., 2022).

Data collected by the Canadian Institute for Health Information for 2017–2018 indicated that cannabis was the most common substance associated with substance-related hospitalizations for youth and young adults aged 10–24. Of the more than 23,500 substance-related hospitalizations, cannabis was responsible for 40% whereas alcohol was responsible for 26%.

There is a need to increase public education, mobilize knowledge of existing information and address the gaps in knowledge about the impacts of cannabis on people in Canada. For example, evidence on the medical applications of cannabis is still lacking and how cannabis legalization has



impacted youth is an important area to explore further. There has also been changes in consumption patterns and the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted some studies. Lastly, ongoing monitoring is needed to better understand the impacts of the expanding market and emerging usage patterns on public health, such as problematic use and emergency department visits. With continued funding from the federal government, CCSA can continue to produce and share important evidence and findings around cannabis legalization to support the health and public safety of Canadians.

## **Recommendation 2: Alcohol**

***That the government establish a multi-year fund (\$10 million over five years) to support CCSA's role as a leader in alcohol research, knowledge mobilization and the development of targeted materials to support evidence-based decisions and actions for alcohol policy and practice.***

- Alcohol is the most commonly used substance in Canada.
- Alcohol cost Canadian society approximately \$16.6 billion in 2017.
- CCSA is a leader in alcohol research and knowledge mobilization.

Alcohol is the most socially accepted substance. Almost 76.5% of people in Canada reported in 2018 that they had consumed an alcoholic beverage in the past year (Statistics Canada, 2019). Despite alcohol's popularity among people in Canada, it is a leading risk factor for death and disability worldwide (GBD 2016 Alcohol Collaborators, 2018) and overwhelmingly the primary substance for which substance use treatment is sought in Canada.

The Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms project (2020) estimated that in 2017 alcohol cost Canadian society approximately \$16.6 billion, making it the substance with the largest cost across the country (36.2 per cent of the total costs). The higher costs associated with alcohol use can be attributed to injuries and deaths of people at a younger age, and it was therefore responsible for more lost years of productive life. Alcohol use is also associated with chronic diseases, such as cancer. Furthermore, the rate of hospitalizations caused entirely by alcohol (249 per 100,000) was comparable to the rate of hospitalizations for heart attacks (243 per 100,000) (CCSA, 2019).

CCSA is a national leader in supporting evidence-based decisions and actions about alcohol. Our soon-to-be released Guidance on Alcohol and Health (previously known as Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines) have made international headlines.

There is a clear need for CCSA leadership to ensure that Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health is used effectively in public education. CCSA is developing a multi-year public awareness and knowledge mobilization strategy to ensure that the new Guidance achieves impact. This strategy will support governments' efforts to use and implement evidence-based public education on alcohol use. It will further collaboration with employers, healthcare providers and community stakeholders to help people make informed decisions about alcohol use and manage their own risk.

With a multi-year fund to support CCSA's role as a leader in alcohol research and education, we can continue to produce research, support knowledge mobilization and develop targeted materials that make real differences to the health and public safety of people in Canada.



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