



Issue #8:

THE SOBERING FACTS ABOUT ADDICTION

Condition Report

Addiction does not discriminate. Regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, or culture, addiction impacts us all. In Canada, about four percent of the population in a given year are diagnosed with a substance use disorder, while 21.6 percent will have a substance use disorder in their lifetime.¹

What is an addiction?

The word addiction is often referred to as a compulsive behaviour that is engaged in to receive rewarding stimuli, despite adverse consequences to mind, body, and the overall well-being of an individual.

There are two properties that characterise all addiction stimuli: reinforcement and intrinsic reward. Reinforcement is when an individual seeks repeated exposure to their addiction, while the intrinsic reward is the perceived positive, desirable, and pleasurable feelings from the stimuli. Where these two addiction characteristics are present, control is difficult to manage as the intrinsic reward negates the negative outcomes.

Here are some elements that help to define an addiction:

1. A sense of compulsion or strong desire to engage in the activity (eg. gambling) or consumption of a substance (eg. alcohol, drugs, and prescription medications).
2. Difficulties in controlling engagement in substance-taking behaviour, regardless of its onset or length of symptoms.
3. A physiological withdrawal state occurs when stopping or reducing participation in the activity or substance use, manifesting common withdrawal symptoms for substance use including, aggression, shaking and sweating.
4. Evidence of tolerance, such as requiring an increased dosage of the substance to achieve full effects originally produced by lower doses (a common symptom found in alcohol or opiate dependent individuals).
5. Individual denies there is a problem, often attempting to hide behaviours, even when others observe the negative effects (hiding alcohol bottles or food, or not being forthcoming with accumulating debt).
6. Progressively neglect or cease previous pleasures or interests, gradually increasing the time dedicated to engaging in or recuperating from the activity or substance use. Continuing with activity or substance use despite clear evidence of the harmful consequences, such as;
 - damage to the liver and internal organs from excessive drinking
 - accumulating debt or bankruptcy due to excessive spending to support the addiction
 - increased feelings of depression following periods of heavy substance use
 - drug-related impairment leading to difficulties in focus, memory, or thinking



CANADIAN addiction statistics

of Canadians with Addiction problems each year:

“In any given year,
1 IN 5 CANADIANS
experiences an
addiction problem.”²”



YEARLY COST OF ADDICTION IN CANADA:³

- \$7.1 billion in lost productivity
- \$3.3 billion for direct health care costs
- \$3.1 billion for direct enforcement costs

MENTAL ILLNESS AND ADDICTION LINK:

- People with a mental health disorder are twice as likely to have a substance use problem compared to the general population.³
- At least **20% OF PEOPLE** with a mental health disorder have a co-occurring substance use problem. Similarly, people with substance use problems are up to **3x** more likely to have a mental health disorder.³

MOST COMMON ADDICTIONS IN CANADA.



• An estimated **3.2% of the Canadian population** age 15 and older—approximately 886,000 individuals—abused or are dependent on alcohol.⁴

• Nationally, **210 people** are admitted to hospital every day for alcohol related illnesses, equalling about **77,000 per year** — **2,000 more people than were hospitalized for heart attacks** in the same period.⁴

• **ALCOHOL** is by far the most common drug used by Canadians.⁴

RANKING AMONG TOP THREE SUBSTANCES⁴

Age	#1	#2	#3
General Population (Age 15+)	Alcohol (78%)	Cannabis (10.2%)	Cocaine/Crack (1.1%)
Youth (15-24)	Alcohol (70%)	Cannabis (20.3)	Hallucinogens (3.9%)
Adults (25+)	Alcohol (80%)	Cannabis (8.4%)	Cocaine/Crack (0.7%)

The Sobering Facts about Addiction

Consequences of addiction

There are many consequences of addiction, including the effects on the individual's mental and physical health, relationships and social behaviour, employment, and, potentially, even legal implications. Continued or prolonged addiction may lead to deterioration of health including the development of a chronic physical condition, criminal activities or behaviour, including subsequent incarceration, or worse, death.

Health effects of addiction

Here are some of the effects addiction may have on physical, neurological and emotional health:

Physical Effects

- Cardiovascular or respiratory disorders
- Chronic physical conditions
- Hormone imbalance
- Organ damage or failure
- Prenatal and fertility issues

Neurological and Emotional Effects

- Aggression and mood swings
- Anxiety or depression
- Cognitive disorders and memory loss
- Paranoia
- Psychosis

Social effects of addiction

As chronic substance use or engagement in an addictive activity continues, it may affect more and more aspects of the individual's life. The ability to make sound judgements, concentrate on present activities, control emotions or moods, and maintain other interests or hobbies may change as the addiction becomes more compulsive.

Addiction also creates tension among family and friends, which often results in isolation and withdrawal of both the addicted individual and their social support network. Addicted individuals may isolate themselves from family to minimize judgement or constant reminders of their addiction. Dynamics with friends may change as well. Increasingly, friends and social networks will find they have less in common with persons who continuously abuse substances or engage in addictive behaviours. The addicted person may also find they have more in common with others who exhibit similar behaviours or share the same addiction, which further isolates the person from their support network.

Isolation and withdrawal are detrimental and may lead to loneliness, depression, or the manifestation of social anxieties.

People who are socially withdrawn may be at higher risk for:

- Divorce
- Ending of relationships with friends or family
- Job loss
- Suicidal thoughts or actions

Legal consequences of addiction

Although many addictive substances are highly regulated and, in some instances, even banned by the federal government, this does not reduce the damage caused by substance abuse or addictive behaviours. Beyond physical and emotional detriment, individuals may encounter financial upheaval, bankruptcy or incarceration. Civil lawsuits may arise (eg. Impaired driving), and if found guilty of an indictable offence, the individual could lose their right to vote, have their passport permanently confiscated, and be unable to hold or obtain various forms of employment.

Legal consequences may include:

- Community service requirements
- Large fines
- Permanent arrest or criminal record/drivers licence suspension
- Prison sentences
- Probation
- Restrictions on living communities (ex. proximity to schools)

Addiction is complex. By further understanding addiction, we are more equipped to understand how addiction manifests and the implications it can have on the addicted individual. People who suffer from addiction can have tremendous difficulty recognizing or admitting they have an addiction, and that it takes a lot of strength and support to acknowledge and seek help.

If you or a loved one requires treatment for addiction, speak to your physician or a qualified medical practitioner about the options available. They will be able to provide a list of regional treatment services available based on the severity of the addiction.

Sources:

- 1 Canada, G. O. (2015, November 27). Table 1 Rates of selected mental or substance use disorders, lifetime and 12 months, Canada, household population 15 and older, 2012. Retrieved June 19, 2017, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-624-x/2013001/article/tbl1/tbl1-eng.htm>
- 2 Mental Health Commission of Canada, & Risk Analytica. (2011, December). The Life and Economic Impact of Major Mental Illnesses in Canada. Retrieved July 1, 2017, from https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/MHCC_Report_Base_Case_FINAL_ENG_0_0.pdf
- 3 Canada, Government Of Canada Statistics. "Health at a Glance." Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. N.p., 27 Nov. 2015. Web. 1 July 2017.
- 4 Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. "Alcohol." Canadian Drug Summary. Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Autumn 2016. Web. 1 July 2017.

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For more information, please contact our Client Services Representatives available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

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