

## ***A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy***

***Treatment works*** – and more of it is needed - but Canada can also strengthen its support for people with alcohol and drug problems through improved collaboration, communication, and co-ordination between all sectors involved in addressing the harms associated with substance use.

### **Background**

*A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy* is the product of a cross-Canada National Treatment Strategy Working Group established in 2007 to improve the quality, accessibility, and range of options to address harmful substance use - one of 13 priority areas identified under the *National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harms Associated with Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada*. Action on this priority area was initiated and supported by the British Columbia Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. The Working Group was composed of representatives from across jurisdictions and sectors, with clinical, policy, government, community, First Nations, Inuit, client, and caregiver experience and expertise and chaired by two representatives of the Canadian Executive Council on Addictions (CECA): Gail Czukar from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Patrick Smith from BC Mental Health and Addiction Services. The group drew on background materials presenting current knowledge and best practice as well as their own areas of expertise in order to develop a comprehensive, evidence-based report.

### **Report & Recommendations**

Canada can strengthen its support for people with alcohol and drug problems through improved collaboration, communication, and co-ordination between all sectors involved in addressing the harms associated with substance use. In order to achieve this transformation, the report recommends:

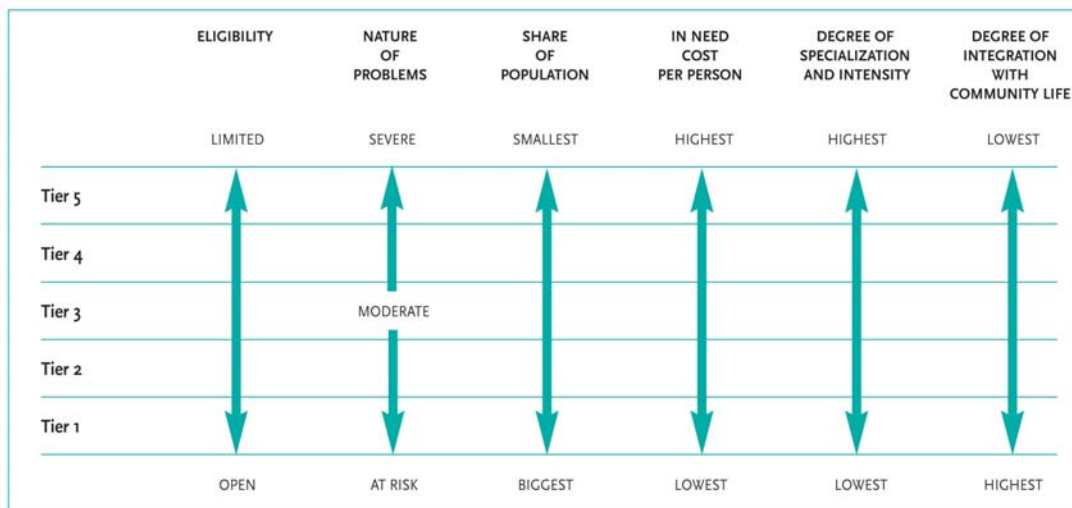
- A continuum of services and supports be developed and implemented that is based on a tiered model in which the tiers represent different levels of services and supports corresponding to the acuity, chronicity and complexity of risks and harms associated with substance use;
- Needs-based planning be undertaken and resources allocated to develop the tiered model across Canada's many jurisdictions;

- A comprehensive strategy be developed to address the stigma and discrimination that prevent many people from accessing services and supports for substance use problems;
- Canada’s knowledge exchange and research capacity be developed to ensure that evidence-informed practices are identified and adopted;
- National data on substance use services and supports be improved, and other resources to support planning and evaluation activities be enhanced; and
- Leadership and co-ordination for implementing the recommendations be established through a National Treatment Strategy Leadership Team.

### The Tiered Model of Services & Supports

*The Tiered Model presents a framework for structuring system design and service availability.* Tiers represent logical groupings of services and supports according to the acuity, chronicity, and complexity of substance use risks and harms, and their corresponding intensity. Lower tier services are broadly available and generally offered at the community level. Higher tier services are resource-intensive and fall primarily within the specialized treatment sector. In order to provide a comprehensive continuum of care, capacity needs to be developed across the tiers – not just within the specialized addiction services.

FIGURE 1: DIMENSIONAL DESCRIPTION OF THE FIVE TIERS



*The central premise of the Tiered Model is client-centered care.* Clients should be able to access evidence-informed, effective services that respond to their individual needs from any point in the system. This will require both coordination and collaboration at the system and service levels, for example through evidence-based system planning and shared service protocols. The efficacy of services and supports for substance use across the tiers need to be evaluated – not just those within the specialized addiction system.

*Tiers are not fixed or prescriptive* – there is no “Tier 1 service” or “Tier 4 client”. An individual service may, for example, have an intensive residential program (Tier 5) with a long-term community follow-up component (Tier 1). Clients should be able to move between services and/or tiers as appropriate to their needs and preferences.

## **Next Steps**

*A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy* provides a broad framework for improving services and supports for substance use at the systems level. The first step toward implementing the Strategy will therefore be to determine how the recommendations can be applied within the diverse range of jurisdictions, organizations, systems, and sectors across Canada.

Please refer to [www.nationalframework-cadrenational.ca](http://www.nationalframework-cadrenational.ca) for additional information and to download the complete report.

## Targetted Messaging: Primary Care

### Key messages

- *The majority of those with substance use problems will enter the health care system – but only a minority will come into contact with specialized addiction services.*
- *People respect and listen to their doctors.* That means that primary care providers are in an ideal position to identify and provide initial interventions for clients with substance use concerns.
- *Early identification and intervention results in improved outcomes.* The National Treatment Strategy proposes inter-sectoral collaboration to develop the tools needed to improve clients' access to the services that they need.

### Next Steps

- Identify the information and resources that needed to identify and act on substance use problems among primary care patients.
- Collaborate with partners in the specialized addictions treatment sector, researchers, and the knowledge exchange network to fill these gaps.
- Participate in the knowledge exchange network and communities of practice that will be developed through the recommendations of the National Treatment Strategy.
- Collaborate with partners in the addictions, mental health, housing, and social welfare sectors to develop models of shared care.

### Impact

- Increased ability to comprehensively address patient needs
- Improved access to information and resources
- Increased opportunity to share knowledge and expertise with colleagues in primary care, addictions, and related sectors
- Earlier identification and better outcome for clients with substance use problems

## Targetted Messaging: Service Providers

### Key messages

- *Treatment works.* The work of front-line service providers is effective, but the system in which they work can be improved to help ensure that people with substance use problems have access to the evidence-based, client-centred services that they need.
- The diverse needs of those with substance use problems extend beyond the capacity and expertise of the specialized addiction treatment sector. The National Treatment Strategy provides a framework for improving the services offered to clients by promoting an integrated, multi-sectoral continuum of care.
- *All systems, sectors, jurisdictions, and organizations can learn from one another* in implementing this Strategy. The Strategy recommends leadership and co-ordination to work with service providers and develop tools and mechanisms that will help front-line service providers apply the Strategy to their own unique contexts, and to exchange knowledge and experience with others.

### Next Steps

- Examine how the principles and recommendations in the National Treatment Strategy relate to individual organizations and service delivery contexts.
- Participate in the knowledge exchange network and communities of practice that will be developed through the recommendations of the National Treatment Strategy.
- Collaborate with partners in the primary care, mental health, and social sectors to develop models of shared care.

### Impact

- Increased communication and opportunities for collaboration between colleagues in the addictions field, and between partners in other relevant sectors such as primary care, mental health, and social services.
- Support through research and knowledge exchange for the development and implementation of evidence-based, client-centred, practice.
- Increased system-level recognition of the importance of resourcing effective substance use services and supports.
- More streamlined service delivery systems that are responsive to individual client needs and best use the resources offered by agencies across the continuum of care.

## Targetted Messaging: System Planners

### Key Messages

- *The impacts of harmful substance use are felt across jurisdictions, systems, and sectors – yet there has traditionally been a lack of resources, communication, and co-ordination among those trying to address the problem.*
- This Strategy outlines an evidence-based Tiered model of services and supports that can be used to guide the development of *an integrated continuum of care that will improve system efficiency and reduce the barriers to service* faced by system clients.
- *All systems, sectors, jurisdictions, and organizations can learn from one another in implementing this Strategy, and we will be working with system planners to develop tools and mechanisms to help apply the Strategy to unique contexts, and to exchange knowledge and experience with others.*

### Next Steps

- Use the Tiered Model and recommendations of the National Treatment Strategy to assess current system capacity.
- Examine how the Tiered Model and recommendations of the National Treatment Strategy can be applied to unique contexts and used to guide system change.
- Contribute to the development of the national knowledge exchange network and communities of practice by collaborating with colleagues in other jurisdictions to share experiences in applying the Tiered Model and other recommendations.

### Impact

- Increased opportunities for collaboration and communication with inter-jurisdictional partners.
- More streamlined service delivery and effective use of resources.
- Increased political-level recognition of the importance of resourcing effective services and supports for substance use problems.

## Targetted Messaging: Policymakers

### Key Messages

- *Substance use impacts all of us.* The harmful use of alcohol and other drugs costs Canada an estimated \$40B per year – yet the treatment systems designed to address this problem are inadequately resourced and co-ordinated.
- *Substance use is a complex problem.* The solution lies in increased integration of the broad range of jurisdictions, services, and supports involved in providing a comprehensive continuum of care.
- *Treatment works.* This Strategy provides the framework needed to ensure that people with substance use problems will have access to evidence-based services and supports that are delivered both effectively and efficiently.

### Next Steps

- Collaboration with the National Treatment Strategy Leadership Team to clarify the components of the National Treatment Strategy and their application to individual jurisdictions.
- Support the implementation of the National Treatment Strategy's recommendations through resourcing system change.
- Use of the knowledge exchange network to communicate with researchers and service providers and identify meaningful ways to collaborate on raising the issue of substance use on the policy agenda.

### Impact

- Bi-directional, meaningful communication between policy-makers, service providers, and researchers.
- Improved political profile and support for substance use services and supports.
- More streamlined, efficient, and effective system of services and supports for substance use.
- More efficient use of resources to proactively address the problem of substance use and reduce its economic, health, and social impact on Canadian society.

## Targetted Messaging: Academics/Researchers

### Key Messages

- *Ensuring that Canadians have access to effective services and supports for substance use requires ongoing efforts in innovation and evaluation.*
- *This Strategy promotes the development of a co-ordinated national research effort to continue to advance both innovation and best practice in system capacity and service delivery.*
- This Strategy also recommends the implementation of national knowledge exchange networks and mechanisms to *increase opportunities for research collaboration* and to ensure that research evidence is used to inform policy and program development.

### Next Steps

- Participate in the knowledge exchange initiatives under the National Treatment Strategy in order to work with policy makers and service providers to identify research gaps and priorities.
- Support national research capacity-building through research collaborations with partners in a range of systems, sectors, and jurisdictions, and through engaging in multiple forms of inquiry.
- Engage in research that is informed by gender- and- diversity- based analysis, and analyses of the determinants of health.

### Impact

- Research conducted that responds to the needs of policy makers and service providers, and is communicated in a way that is meaningful for practice guidelines.
- Increased partnerships and collaboration between organizations, jurisdictions, and sectors conducting research relevant to services and supports for substance use problems.
- Increased national research capacity supported by a co-ordinated national research program.

## Targetted Messaging: People with Drug/Service Use Experience

### Key Messages

- The National Treatment Strategy was prepared in recognition of the fact that *people seeking services for substance use problems currently face many challenges* due to stigma and discrimination, gaps in service, and lack of coordination between different parts of the health care, social service, and addictions systems.
- *The National Treatment Strategy provides recommendations for a client-centered continuum of care* that provides a comprehensive response recognizing the diverse and changing needs of individuals with substance use problems.
- *The National Treatment Strategy benefitted from the input of individuals with service use experience*, and promotes that their unique expertise continue to contribute to policy, planning, and regulatory bodies addressing substance use.

### Next Steps

- Speak with service provider about how the National Treatment Strategy recommendations apply to the local services and supports.
- Take advantage of opportunities to provide your input through participation on planning, policy, or regulatory committees.

### Impact

- Increased participation of users and carers in service and system planning and decision-making processes.
- Improved accessibility and availability of effective, client-centered services and supports for people with substance use problems and their families and other carers.
- Decreased stigma and discrimination faced by people with substance use problems and their families and other carers.