



August 22, 2017



About CCSA

- **Vision:** A healthier Canadian society where evidence transforms approaches to substance use.
- Mission: To address issues of substance use in Canada by providing national leadership and harnessing the power of evidence to generate coordinated action.
- Value Proposition: CCSA was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.



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Background

- Aside from alcohol, the most frequently used drug among Canadian postsecondary students is marijuana, with 18% reporting use in the past 30 days in 2015.
- Around 2% of students reported use of other illicit substances (e.g., cocaine) in the past 30 days in the same year.
- Students have the perception that the majority of their peers (e.g., over 75%) use drugs (American College Health Association, 2015).



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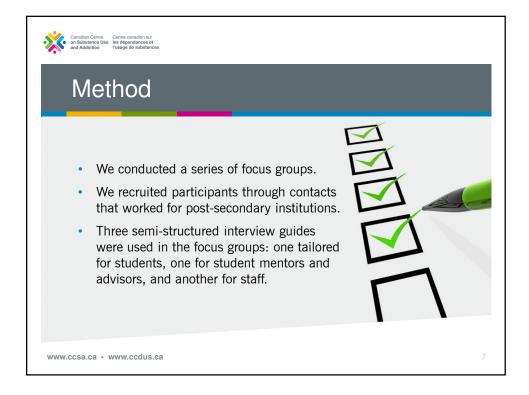
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Objective

- To gain a better understanding of the perceptions of post-secondary students towards drug use and their motivations for use;
- To uncover the current roles campus staff play and the barriers they face in addressing substance use on campus;
- Special focus was given to marijuana use because of upcoming regulation of marijuana in Canada.

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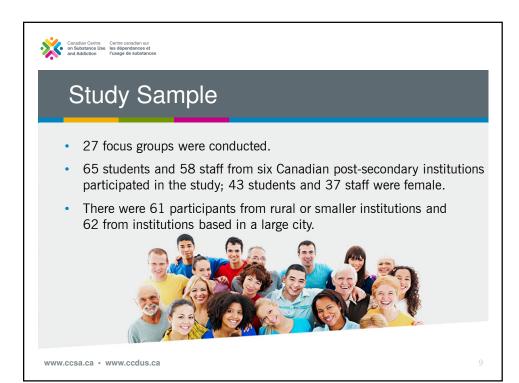


Method (cont.)

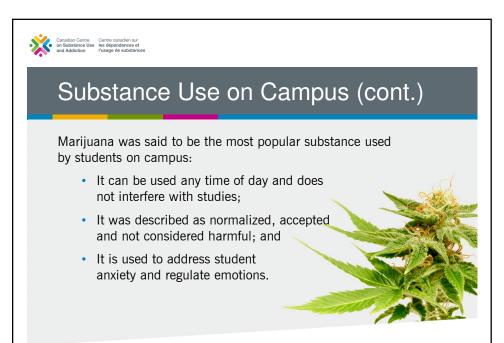
Topics for focus group discussions included:

- · Popular and concerning substances on campus;
- Reasons students use or do not use substances and what influences their decisions;
- The effects of these substances;
- The approaches taken on campus to address substance use;
- · How these efforts can be improved; and
- The challenges faced by staff in addressing substance use and implementing prevention efforts.

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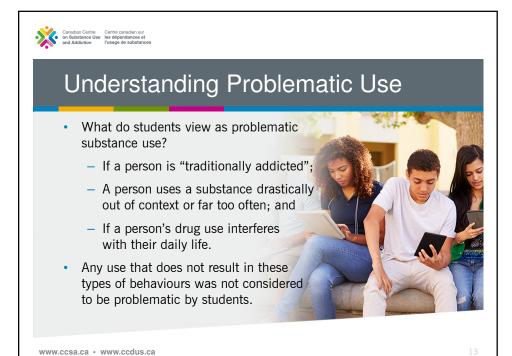


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Substance Use on Campus (cont.)

- A high prevalence of prescription medication use was reported, both prescribed and non-medical use.
- Adderall® was the most commonly discussed prescription drug:
 - Used during exam time to help student focus, but use may extend beyond this period;
 - Perceived as safe;
 - Added benefit of weight loss; and
 - Obtained from other students or a physician.

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Student Challenges

- Pressures of university life causing stress and anxiety:
 - Many big changes including new friends and independent living;
 - Time management viewed as challenging for students; and
 - Students had trouble understanding "healthy" negative emotions.
- Students reported being overloaded with information and messaging:
 - Many health-related campaigns are competing for student's attention.

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Student Challenges (cont.)

- All campuses reported challenges with accessing health services:
 - Biggest issue is lack of staff and resources resulting in long wait times (two weeks to three months);
 - Existing services might not meet student's needs;
 - Services directly addressing substance use often limited to just addiction treatment or referral;
 - Service hours or locations did not facilitate accessibility; and
 - Participants felt that some counsellors did not relate well with students or were inconsistently available.

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Participant Suggestions

- Staff and students made the following suggestions:
 - Increase education and awareness of drug harms for both staff and students (e.g., harms of mixing);
 - Promote open discussion on campus about substance use;
 - Use peer-to-peer programming to address health service gaps;
 - Provide flexible service hours and access avenues; and
 - Develop guidelines for a campus marijuana strategy or policy.

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Evidence-informed Approaches

- · Changing attitudes and increasing knowledge:
 - More information about the effects of substance use is warranted
 - Providing the skills needed to manage substance use could also support students on campus:
 - Life Skills Training can improve coping skills and teach students alternative ways to manage stress
 - Evidence shows that this training can promote problem solving and critical thinking and prevent substance use for post-secondary students

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Evidenced-informed Approaches (cont.)

- Increase access to services and support:
 - Target interventions to different populations;
 - Use appropriate platforms to provide information;
 - Extend service hours; and
 - Use peer-to-peer counselling (e.g., residence advisors [RAs]):
 - RAs should have strong interpersonal skills, high personal standards and an interest in outreach;
 - Provide RAs with resources (time, support, personnel);
 and
 - Train RAs in self-care, the availability of campus resources and the effects of substance use.

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