

Technology new gateway into treatment for problem alcohol users: study

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A recent evaluation by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) shows that online interventions for problem alcohol use can be effective in changing drinking behaviours and offers a significant public health benefit.

In the first evaluation of its kind, the study published in *Addiction* found that problem drinkers provided access to the online screener www.CheckYourDrinking.net, reduced their [alcohol consumption](#) by 30% - or six to seven drinks weekly - rates that are comparable to face-to-face interventions. This result was sustained in both the three and six month follow-up.

Problem drinking is a major cause of preventable deaths in Canada as well as [morbidity](#), trauma and violence, yet many of those who struggle with problem alcohol use will never seek treatment. A recent general population survey indicated that 81% of problem drinkers in Canada have Internet access, and about a third indicated that they would be willing to seek intervention via the web.

Brief Internet-based interventions for problem drinkers are promising, and fill a gap in the services available to problem drinkers, according to principal investigator, Dr. John Cunningham Senior Scientist with the Social and Community Factors in Prevention Research Section, CAMH, "An unfortunate reality is that many problem drinkers do not seek treatment. While getting help from a health care professional is ideal, there are barriers to access such as concerns about [stigma](#), a desire to

handle problems on one's own, or simply because treatment is not readily available - online interventions can help reduce these barriers by allowing people to seek help in their own homes."

By analyzing self-report data, the website provides problem drinkers with a report that compares their [alcohol intake](#) to the national average and informs them of the physical and health risks associated with their drinking patterns. The report also calculates the amount of money spent on alcohol annually and how much of their time is spent under the influence each year. Safer drinking guidelines are also provided to website users.

"The Check Your Drinking online screener provides participants with a wealth of information about their drinking, its consequences, and how they compare to others," said Cunningham. "When presented these facts in a non-judgmental manner, participants are able to re-evaluate their drinking and may be motivated to reduce their alcohol consumption."

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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