

# What's the best way to treat problem alcohol use?

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Scientists from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) have released comprehensive reviews of the most effective treatments for alcohol dependence, one of the most prevalent addictions in Canada.

Published in the latest edition of the *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, the reviews explore the most effective treatments and interventions for problem alcohol use and concurrent disorders. Almost 40 per cent of people with an alcohol use problem also have a concurrent mental illness, particularly [schizophrenia](#), mood or [anxiety disorders](#).

The reviews can serve as the go-to resource for researchers and decision-makers who fund or deliver treatment and support services, in Canada or internationally. The papers cover the following topics:

Using medication to treat drinking problems: Dr. Bernard Le Foll, Clinician Scientist and Head of CAMH's Alcohol Research and Treatment Clinic within the Addiction Medicine Service, discusses the effectiveness of common medication therapies available for problem alcohol use. Dr. Le Foll and colleagues stress that those effective medications are under-used despite their effectiveness and that treatment for people with concurrent disorders is especially crucial considering their increased risk for [morbidity](#).

Psychosocial treatment for [alcohol dependence](#): Dr. Jürgen Rehm, Director of CAMH's Social and Epidemiological Research (SER) Department, examines the effectiveness of psychosocial treatments to

help treat drinking problems. With co-author Dr. Garth Martin, Dr. Rehm finds that cognitive-behavioural therapies, motivational therapy and brief interventions have the strongest research evidence for effectiveness, but notes that greater attention needs to be paid to ensure that therapists deliver care in a consistent manner, in order to minimize varied outcomes.

The societal burden of not treating alcoholism: Dr. Brian Rush, Senior Scientist and Head of the Health Systems and Health Equity Research Group, contributes a guest editorial on the two reviews, and looks at the five factors that need to be in place for these interventions to have an effect at a population level. He concludes that treatment and support can have an impact in reducing the burden to society and costs incurred by the criminal justice and healthcare systems.

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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