

Study reveals extent of addictions in Alberta

November 20 2015, by Katie Willis

Addictions directly affect up to one in five Albertan adults. They involve alcohol, gambling, legal and illicit drugs and a variety of other substances and types of behaviour.

Without question, this means that you or someone you know is almost certainly affected by [addiction](#).

"Addictions don't always come to mind when people think about health and health care. It is an important but often overlooked health issue," explains professor Cameron Wild with the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta.

What many people don't realize is one of the most common addictions of all involves [alcohol](#).

According to research commissioned by the Alberta government and conducted by Wild and colleagues in the School of Public Health in 2012, nearly one in 10 men and one in 20 women in the general Alberta population struggles with [alcohol misuse](#).

In their research report, Gap Analysis of Public Mental Health and Addiction Programs (GAP-MAP), Wild and colleagues surveyed 6,000 Albertans and collated information from Alberta Health Services and the provincial government on programs, services and costs related to addiction and mental health.

GAP-MAP provides data on the prevalence of mental health and

addiction issues in Alberta. The report also identifies gaps in treatment and services and provides recommendations for future system planning and development.

"Prevention and treatment services need to be organized in relation to population needs for care," says Wild. "For the first time, Alberta has a clearer picture of how common addiction and [mental health problems](#) are in the general population, and just how services and resources are organized in this area."

The report has received broad interest from program managers and policy-makers. Wild has been invited to contribute to the recent Alberta Mental Health Review using evidence from the project.

Wild notes that most adults who use [alcohol drink](#) responsibly and do not experience problems with addiction. But those who do often will not receive the help they need. For example, research clearly shows that people who misuse alcohol can benefit from basic information, screening and brief interventions.

"Alcohol is a powerful drug, a lucrative source of revenue and a symbol of admired and deviant behaviour—all at the same time," explains Wild. "We need to keep these three components in mind when thinking about alcohol."

Economically, societies profit from alcohol use, but this comes at a cost in terms of population health. At the same time, many continue to hold stereotypes that stigmatize people experiencing alcohol problems and make them reluctant to seek care.

Creative approaches are needed to bring services to meet people where they are—whenever they're ready to consider changing their drinking behaviour.

Wild's work in [substance misuse](#) and addiction ranges from alcohol use on campus to connecting at-risk individuals with evidence-based treatment across Alberta. Online tools such as Check Yourself help university students assess the impact of their alcohol consumption on everything from their wallet and their weight to their mental health.

Wild has also been involved in developing and implementing projects such as the Inner City Health and Wellness Program at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, which aims to connect socially marginalized patients with addiction and [mental health](#) services, as well as primary care and social services.

On a national scale, Wild leads the prairie node of the recently announced Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM). This innovative national project is the first of its kind in Canada, created in response to growing concerns about the impact of substance misuse—ranging from alcohol use to prescription and non-prescription drugs.

More information: Gap Analysis of Public Mental Health and Addiction Programs: [www.health.alberta.ca/document ... -MAP-Report-2014.pdf](http://www.health.alberta.ca/document...-MAP-Report-2014.pdf)

Provided by University of Alberta

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