

Executive Summary

The vision of the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) is one of a healthier, more productive Canada where evidence and collaboration transform approaches to substance use to generate coordinated action in policy-making and effective service delivery.

CCSA is requesting federal funding of \$76 million over six years for four concrete initiatives to address Canada's policy, information, and practice gaps on substance use and addiction, in order to strengthen society and government's collective response. These initiatives align with federal government policy priorities in healthcare, public safety, and community wellness and are the result of recent consultations with close to 200 stakeholders, as well as with provincial and territorial Deputy Ministers of Health:

- Establishing a Substance Use and Addiction Portal;
- Scaling and Spreading Best Practices across Canada;
- Providing and Reporting on Health System Performance Data; and
- Leading in Collaborative Education and Awareness

Collectively, these initiatives will close gaps in the foundational infrastructure for creating an evidence-based, proactive, and engaged community- and system- level response to mitigate and reduce the negative personal and economic impacts that substance use and addiction have on Canadians. Reducing substance use and addiction means more productive, prosperous Canadians, capable of maximizing their economic opportunities and contribution to their communities,¹ while reducing the burden that substance use has on Canada's health, social services, and justice systems.

Introduction

CCSA is the only pan-Canadian agency with a legislated mandate to provide national leadership to address substance use and addiction in Canada.

CCSA provides value by harnessing research, curating knowledge, and bringing together diverse perspectives from among its more than 3,000 partners and stakeholders nationwide. Over the past three decades, the Centre has been a trusted, credible leader in uncovering policy and program gaps, identifying key health and social infrastructure needs to remedy those gaps, and disseminating – to stakeholders and governments – best practices that emerge from pan-national responses. In order to continue to advance knowledge, research, and information-sharing related to substance use and addiction, CCSA is requesting federal funding of \$76.0 million over six years.

The Centre's work is informed by national, multi-sectoral expert advisory groups and working groups that contribute to the development of effective interventions, treatment, and prevention programs to help Canadians remain healthy and productive in their communities and in their personal lives. Examples of past work include a prescription drug strategy, the national alcohol strategy, national

¹ Original research conducted by the CCSA (2017) found that nearly half of Canadians living with substance addiction struggle to remain steadily employed and pay bills and taxes on time. Those Canadians are also more likely to be arrested, drive under the influence, and commit and/or experience family violence. These rates, however, were considerably lower among individuals in recovery.

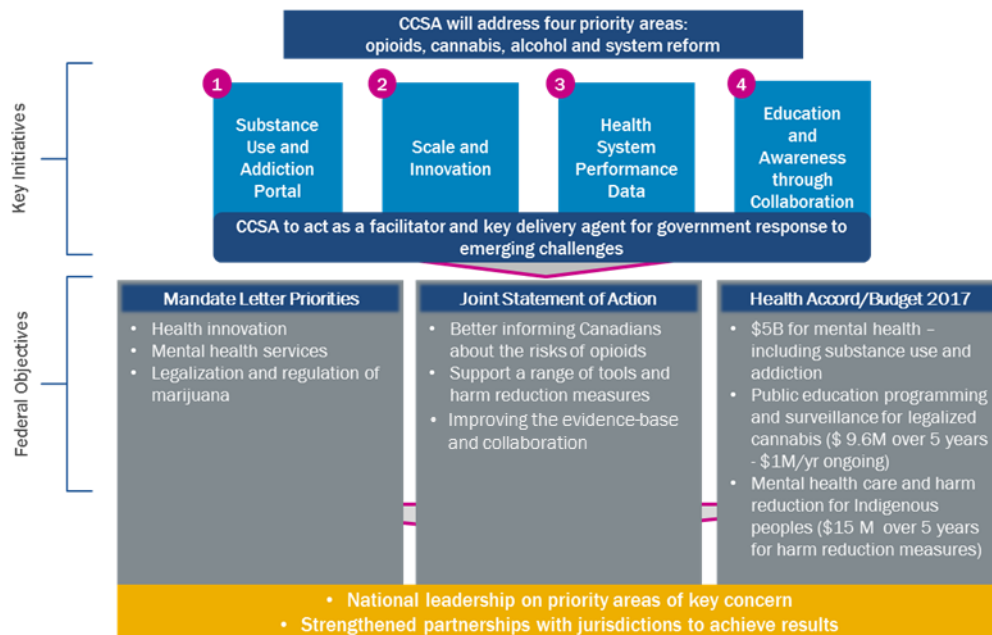
low-risk drinking guidelines, and research advancing knowledge on priority topics such as drug-impaired driving, cannabis, and the costs of substance use in Canada.

Value-Added Approach to Canadian Priorities

CCSA’s strategic framework and business priorities are built on initiatives that will close serious gaps in the national and community-level response to substance use and addiction, with an emphasis on the opioid crisis and cannabis-related issues. These initiatives collect, synthesize, and disseminate timely and much needed information to inform evidence-based policy and program responses in four “Priorities for Action” (opioids; cannabis; alcohol; and health system reform).

CCSA’s priorities align with federal priorities by providing national leadership on important areas of concern, including the *Joint Statement of Action in Response to the Opioid Crisis* and in advancing pan-Canadian collaboration on health innovation. Further, CCSA’s business priorities will enable it to act as a facilitator and key delivery agent for the federal government’s response to emerging challenges.

Figure: CCSA’s Alignment with Federal Priorities



Priority Initiative 1 – Establishing a Substance Use and Addiction Portal

Foundationally, policy-makers in Canada often lack the data and information to inform a comprehensive response to substance use and addiction. While such a policy and knowledge infrastructure gap creates redundancies and inefficiencies for stakeholders, it also comes with a significant cost to Canadian lives, productivity, and health as decision-makers struggle to identify and address emerging and existing substance issues in a proactive, comprehensive way.

For instance, in recent years, Canadians have witnessed a drastic rise in opioid use, specifically fentanyl, across the country. It does not just affect larger cities such as Vancouver and Toronto, but smaller communities such as Red Deer and Whitehorse. First responders, hospitals, and governments have struggled to contain its use, educate users, and adapt responses to the growing pattern of use.

Another emerging example: in 2018, the federal government intends to legalize cannabis for recreational purposes. As CCSA's recent fact-finding delegations to Washington and Colorado have learned, even with legalization, governments need to be proactive in identifying and addressing the large policy and practice gaps that exist in terms of impaired driving, prevention, treatment, use, and health effects.

The human and economic toll of substance use is significant and many stakeholder and jurisdictions lack access to the data and evidence necessary to inform timely responses. Support for the establishment of a Substance Use and Addiction Portal would facilitate access to information not readily available or obtainable for many. Federal funding for this initiative provides the tools to develop a credible, "one-stop shop" for information, resources, and best practices pertaining to opioid, cannabis, alcohol, and health system reform for partners, stakeholders, and decision-makers within federal, provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and municipal government.

Priority Initiative 2 – Scaling and Spreading Best Practices across Canada

Scaling and disseminating timely, evidence-informed responses to urgent and emerging substance use issues is a critical element of a collaborative, tailored policy response. CCSA intends to address this deficit in dissemination by using its resources to spotlight successful practices across the country in order to accelerate inter-jurisdictional communication on emerging practices and influence collaborative action and change. Through guidance documents, resources, and expertise, CCSA will help catalyze creative and evidence-informed ideas to generate new understanding, address stakeholder needs, and promote innovation that delivers results.

One key focus for this initiative is the expansion of a youth-centred approach to opioid use disorder treatment. Through federal funding, CCSA would engage economically disadvantaged youth by developing resource guides for health and social services professionals and contribute to the existing body of evidence on treating youth opioid use. The objective would be to enhance the capacity of healthcare providers to respond to youth opioid use, scaling these resources to make them available to every corner of the country.

Priority Initiative 3 – Providing and Reporting on Health System Performance Data

While CCSA's first two priorities focus on the collation and dissemination of information and best practices, there still exists the need to develop reliable, accurate data related to the socio-economic cost of substance use and addictions. Without such metrics, policy-makers will struggle to evaluate

the success of any proposed reforms. Citizens and social organizations will also lack knowledge on whether their health system is equipped to deal with existing and emerging issues.

CCSA's initiative on health system performance data will provide data analysis and reporting on patterns and trends to create a national picture of substance use and addiction in Canada. A critical component of this initiative is the development of a costing tool to estimate the healthcare system and productivity costs of substance use. It would enhance government and stakeholder ability to assess the impact of policy and system reforms on society and on the Canadian economy.

Of note, CCSA has undertaken such analysis before, determining that the economic cost of problematic substance use of legal and illegal substances was more than \$40 billion annually. Expanding this analysis to cover other substances, such as prescription drugs, will specifically help governments maximize the well-being of their citizens, as well as the efficiency and efficacy of their healthcare and social services systems, while reducing the negative impacts on productivity and the economy. Complementary research will include research and trend monitoring/reporting pertaining to youth and seniors' use of alcohol, cannabis, and opioids to help communities prepare informed, local, and tailored responses to reduce the harms of problematic substance use.

This initiative will build on the success of the Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use. Led by CCSA, this Community Network coordinates and collates the sharing of quantitative and qualitative data collected by members on local community drug trends, providing this information to first responders, law enforcement, and health and social services practitioners across jurisdictions. Effectively, the Community Network acts as an *early warning system* in detecting national drug trends and responding to and minimizing drug-related harms. Since its introduction in 2014, the Community Network has seen steady growth in membership and usership.

Priority Initiative 4 – Leading in Collaborative Education and Awareness

Education and public awareness are central tenets of mitigating the harmful substance use and ensure that those who do use are aware of not only the associated risks and harms, but also the resources that are available to address addiction and help individuals, families, and communities respond effectively through quick intervention.

Through federal funding support, CCSA intends to leverage – and build on – its current network of diverse stakeholders in order to engage youth and families, employers, municipalities, and college and university campuses in developing resources and responses to substance use in various settings. The results of this collaborative effort will be shared with stakeholders to generate collective action and further knowledge dissemination and best practices.

The work of this initiative enhances much of the success that CCSA and its partners have had in facilitating a coordinated response to the opioid crisis. Additionally, with the impending legalization of cannabis, this initiative will develop tools and resources for public education on the prevention and reduction of cannabis-related harms and encourage a public health approach focused on informed decision-making to help mitigate negative impacts among users.

Conclusion

CCSA is well-positioned to help coordinate the national response to the growing opioid crisis, evaluate and support provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous policy responses to federal

cannabis legislation, and disseminate best practices to stakeholders and decision-makers across Canada on substance use and addiction.

Over the past thirty years, CCSA has developed a credible reputation as a trusted, collaborative partner for policy- and decision-makers across Canada. To deliver on the priorities identified in this submission, CCSA is seeking \$76.0 million over six years.

Health is a key indicator of the economic well-being of Canadians. Substance use and addiction can have tremendous negative socio-economic impacts on the Canadian economy and on families if society and government are not equipped to respond effectively using the best available evidence. CCSA, with renewed funding from the Government of Canada, will mobilize partners across the country to deliver results for Canadians and their families.

