



Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

Evidence. Engagement. Impact.

ccsa.ca • ccdus.ca

How to Prevent and Reduce Substance Use Harms for Youth: What Youth Say Works

May 2025



How to Prevent and Reduce Substance Use Harms for Youth: What Youth Say Works

This document was published by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA).

Suggested citation: Wood, S. (2025). *How to Prevent and Reduce Substance Use Harms for Youth: What Youth Say Works*. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

© Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2025.

CCSA, 500–75 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7
613-235-4048
info@ccsa.ca

Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

This document can also be downloaded as a PDF at ccsa.ca

Ce document est également disponible en français sous le titre :
Prévenir et réduire les méfaits associés à l'usage de substances chez les jeunes : leur avis sur ce qui fonctionne

ISBN 978-1-77871-216-6



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Project Overview	5
Summary of Consultation Process	5
Youth Engagement	6
Youth Committees and Councils	7
What We Heard	8
A Note about Language	8
Why Young People Use Substances	9
How Substance Use Impacts Young People	10
Strategies that Prevent or Reduce Harm	13
Recommendations	22
Appendix: Summary of Youth Prevention and Health Promotion Initiatives in Canada	26
Introduction	26
Initiatives and Resources	26
References	36



Acknowledgements

We respectfully acknowledge that the offices of the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction are located on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabe people. The Anishnaabe Algonquin Nation has been present on and a nurturer of this land since time immemorial. We are grateful to have the opportunity to be present in this territory.

Each of the regions from which we gathered for the virtual consultations described in this report are home to many distinct communities of First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and we are grateful to have had the opportunity to connect with many people who are present on these lands.

We acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and that our greater society benefits from the sharing of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge. We strive for respectful partnerships with all Indigenous Peoples, as we try to do better and search for collective healing and true reconciliation.

This resource aims to amplify the voices of the young people who have been consulted and ensure their ideas and perspectives shape decision making related to topics and issues that interest or affect them.

It is critical to acknowledge the time and expertise contributed by the young people who participated in the consultation process and the teams within each organization that support them. Their active, enthusiastic engagement, and the perspectives and insights they shared, are invaluable. We would like to thank the following groups:

- The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health National Youth Action Council
- The Canadian Institutes of Health Research – the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health's Youth Advisory Council
- The Royal Canadian Mounted Police National Youth Advisory Committee
- The CHILD-BRIGHT National Youth Advocacy Council



Executive Summary

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) aims to reduce and prevent substance use harms for people living in Canada.

Between November 2024 and January 2025, CCSA completed a consultation process to ensure our ongoing work aligns with young people's priorities and centres their experiences in decision making.

We connected with four youth advisory councils and committees with a national reach and diverse youth membership to understand how to help prevent and reduce substance use harms for young people in Canada. We talked directly with youth about what they think would be helpful in their own life, friendship groups and communities.

This report is a synthesis of the key messages we heard from young people throughout this consultation process related to why they use substances, how it impacts their lives, and strategies that could prevent or reduce substance use harms.

Recommendations are made throughout the report on how to strengthen various strategies and interventions to better meet the needs of young people. These recommendations from youth align with evidence-supported approaches.

Here are some overarching messages we heard loud and clear, over and over from the youth we consulted:

- **Identify the “why” when addressing substance use with young people:** Young people use substances for many different reasons, and everyone is different. Youth often start using substances for social reasons — to fit in and socialize more effortlessly — but often continue because they are using it to cope with stress, mental health challenges or pain. Home and family life can also be a major influencing factor. How youth substance use is addressed and potential harms are reduced depend on the underlying reasons or motivation for each individual.
- **Focus on factors other than peer pressure to not exclude critical areas like social skill building:** Peer influence is a factor in substance use; sometimes there is pressure from peers, but there can also be an internal desire to connect, bond, fit in and reduce social anxiety. By continuing to focus on peer pressure, a critical area for personal skill building may be missed.
- **Educate on the full spectrum of substance use health and provide resources accordingly:** Youth want to hear the full story of substance use through education, programming and trusted adults. Educators in substance use health shouldn't be afraid to discuss the entire spectrum of substance use health, focus on impacts that go beyond the physical (like social, relational, mental health, academic and family impacts), and include both prevention efforts and harm reduction support.



- **Use peer-to-peer and lived experience models of education and support:** Youth are more receptive to information from people with lived experience of substance use, especially if they are relatively close to them in age. Leverage this by having more community–school partnerships that involve younger people with lived experience in support and education programs and create resources from a peer-to-peer perspective. As one young person we spoke to said, “If peers are a big reason why people get into using drugs, why can’t peers influence them to get out of drugs?”
- **Help young people assess their own level of risk to make informed personal decisions:** It’s one thing to know the risks, but youth need tools to assess their own risk. Resources that help youth reflect on their own “why” of substance use and examine additional relevant risk factors in their life (such as family history, environment, substances being used, etc.) will help young people make their own choices based on their personal situation.
- **Encourage young people to care by focusing on what matters to them:** Identity (discovering who they are) and their social connections (developing peer relationships and feelings of belonging) are central elements and driving forces in their lives. It makes sense then that these would be major contributing factors to substance use and areas of impact when negative effects of substance use begin to occur. Intervening in these areas through clear, evidence-based information and competency and skill development is critical.

Overall, it’s important that multiple approaches and strategies that address youth substance use be layered and used together. For organizations hoping to support youth substance use health and well-being, we encourage you to:

- a) Assess where you are best suited to intervene, depending on your organizational focus, expertise, resources, access to individuals or communities, etc.
- b) Review the recommendations in this report to increase your potential for impact.
- c) Consider whether youth have a seat at the table in your organization’s decision making. If not, find a way to involve young people in a meaningful way to increase your relevance and impact.
- d) Understand your contribution as part of a large web of prevention interventions and seek out partners from multiple jurisdictions and sectors who may be doing complementary work on other pieces of the puzzle to strengthen your collective impact.
- e) Evaluate whether you are making your intended impact, and if you’re not, identify critical areas where you need to shift your approach.



Introduction

Project Overview

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) aims to reduce and prevent substance use harms for people living in Canada.

“Harms” can include negative effects on health — both physical and mental — and problems at school, work or in relationships.

Alcohol, cannabis and other drugs can affect everyone differently, but young people are especially at risk of negative effects because their bodies and brains are still developing.

The main goal of this consultation was to understand how to help prevent and reduce substance use harms for young people in Canada by talking directly with youth about what they think would be helpful in their own life, friendship groups and communities.

As we assess how best to use our position as a national organization and our subject matter expertise to support the well-being of young people, it is critical to keep youth voices at the table. To do this, CCSA recently engaged in consultations with young people across the country to re-connect with their needs, ensure our ongoing work aligns with their priorities and centre their experiences in decision making moving forward.

CCSA has a history of advancing prevention strategies for youth. The United Nations endorsed CCSA’s *Portfolio of Canadian Standards for Youth Substance Use Prevention* (2010), which guided evidence-based approaches, ensuring that prevention efforts are effective and aligned with best practices. Since then, there have been significant advancements in the programs, policies and practices that address youth substance use in Canada (for examples, refer to the appendix).

We continue to work closely with partners, using our substance use health expertise, to support primary and secondary prevention efforts, implemented through universal and selective interventions at the individual, family, school and community levels.

Summary of Consultation Process

Shea Wood, PhD, CCSA Senior Knowledge Broker, connected with several youth advisory councils and committees with a national reach as well as diverse youth memberships to build relationships and understand their interests and priorities.

Four groups expressed interest in participating in a consultation process to dig into the question: What do young people think is most needed to prevent or reduce substance use harms to youth?

That process invited youth members to:

1. **Prepare:** Read through a youth-friendly project summary that was co-created with the youth engagement teams at each organization. That summary provided a clear overview of what was involved in the consultation, questions to consider in advance



of the next phases of engagement and CCSA commitments (such as compensating members for their time and expertise, checking back to make sure we accurately captured their ideas, being transparent about how their ideas would be used, acknowledging their contributions in their preferred way, providing the opportunity to be involved in future collaborative work, etc.).

2. **Chat with us:** Join a 1–1.5-hour, virtual conversation with CCSA staff and other youth to discuss their ideas and brainstorm solutions together.
3. **Confirm what we heard:** Review a summary of what we heard from the conversation to make sure we captured their ideas accurately and provide feedback and clarification.
4. **Tell us how it went:** Tell us what worked well and what could be improved in future consultations by filling out a brief survey.

Four discussion sessions were held between November 2024 and January 2025, which included a total of 34 young people from across Canada.

This report includes a synthesis of the key messages we heard from young people throughout this process. It also incorporates recommendations that were offered directly from the young people who participated and those that we have put forward based on what we learned through the consultation.

Youth Engagement

At CCSA, we believe in empowering young people as valued and active partners in addressing issues that are important to them or affect them.¹

As with all engagement, youth engagement happens on a continuum,^{1, 2} from youth as passive recipients of information or services to engaging activities that recognize youth as equal partners or empowered leaders.

“Authentic youth engagement is critical in every step of a process like this where an issue involving youth is being examined. Youth can and should be involved in every level of the implementation of a substance use prevention program and the research done during the process of it. Youth are the experts of our own experiences.”

– Alexis Holmgren, former member of RCMP-NYAC

The type of engagement (e.g., inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower³) and associated engagement activities used in a project or initiative depend on several factors, such as the context of the project or initiative, the purpose of the engagements and the scale of those engagements.



Youth engagement contributes to positive youth development^{4,5} and can benefit the project, organization, community and system.⁶

There are also risks involved; if resources and capacity are not properly assessed, it could lead to engagement practices that at best do not achieve the goals of the work and at worst, lead to harm. When engagement is not meaningful, it can risk further stigmatization and oppression of a group, tokenism, loss of trust and have other harmful effects.⁷

If you are interested in working directly with youth to identify and implement strategies and solutions – which is great – we recommend checking out the available resources (such as the [Quality Standard for Youth Engagement](#) by the Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions) and training to learn about the principles and standards of engagement and how to implement them, so you can prepare for and conduct this work in a meaningful way.

Youth Committees and Councils

Young people from four different youth committees and councils participated in the consultation sessions. Each group is associated with a specific organization, has its own mandate and priorities, and includes members from across Canada from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. Members from these groups expressed interest in participating and acknowledged the importance of substance use health in the overall health and well-being of young people living in Canada.

[The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health National Youth Action Council](#) (CAMH-NYAC) is a national community of young people ages 14–29 years who participate in consultations, program and research activities, and the development of resources. Members are advocates for young people experiencing challenges with their mental health and substance use health who use their expertise to shape mental health and substance use services and systems to better meet the needs of young people.

[The Canadian Institutes of Health Research – Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health’s Youth Advisory Council](#) (CIHR-IHDCYH-YAC) brings together young people ages 12–25 years old with diverse backgrounds and life experiences from across the country. Members have a passion for health and health research and provide youth perspectives on the development of priorities and policies that impact people from coast to coast to coast.

[The Royal Canadian Mounted Police National Youth Advisory Committee](#) (RCMP-NYAC) brings together up to 100 young people from across the country to inform how the RCMP supports youth and shapes strategies, policies and programs. They provide their perspectives on relevant topics including reconciliation, bullying and cyberbullying, online safety, transportation safety and impaired driving, substance use, mental health, healthy relationships and sexual consent, and gender and sexual diversity.

[The CHILD-BRIGHT National Youth Advocacy Council](#) (CB-NYAC) is composed of young people with lived and living experience of a brain-based developmental disability. They provide their



perspectives and expertise to inform research development and knowledge mobilization projects within the CHILD-BRIGHT network and beyond.

What We Heard

A Note about Language

We started each virtual conversation discussing some terminology (e.g., substance use, prevention, harm reduction). The goal was to clarify what we all meant by certain terms so we could get on the same page and understand each other well during the conversation.

Some of the youth consulted made it clear that young people don't always feel that what they're doing is "substance use" — they call each type of use by its name. For example, drinking or using alcohol, vaping or drug use (which typically refers to the use of "hard" or illegal drugs).

Throughout the conversations, most used the terms "substances" or "substance use" and adopted this shared vocabulary, but it's important to consider that the language organizations use may not always match or reflect the experiences of young people.

We also began the conversation by looking at the Community Addictions Peer Support Association's substance use health spectrum.⁸

The young people were quite interested in the spectrum; they agreed with the idea of a spectrum or scale approach to substance use, and many noted they had never seen it before and thought it would be beneficial to share with youth in education initiatives.

It shows that substance use is not "all or nothing." Youth often get the message from adults in their life that substance use equals substance "abuse," and if someone uses a substance, like drinking or vaping, they're out of control and the problem can't be fixed. This sometimes becomes a self-perception as well, so young people don't try to change their own substance use once they start.

That binary is also reinforced by school substance use policies, which don't usually say whether there is a difference between how much or how often students use, or how much it is harming them.

Showing the spectrum to young people might help them understand that they can go back to lower risk substance use at any point, and they can always change their habits even if they haven't hit rock bottom or gone to the extreme end of the spectrum.

The following sections all reflect the points made by the young people consulted, often in their own words. Some phrases are verbatim from the consultation, and others are composite sentences have been created, using as much of their vocabulary as possible, based on multiple similar points made across consultations.



Why Young People Use Substances

Social reasons: Young people try and use substances to fit in socially with peers. Sometimes this involves peer pressure or suggestions from peers that they should use substances. Other times, it is the young person's desire to bond with peers and feel a sense of connection or belonging that leads to substance use in social situations.

“Eventually, use might lead to isolation, but it started from a place of wanting connection.”

– CAMH-NYAC member

Substances can make young people more social and livelier and reduce social anxiety for youth who can't easily relate to other people. You start to be “fun” in social settings with substances, then continue using them because you always want to be the “fun person.”

Coping mechanism: Young people often use substances to cope with stress, mental health problems or pain. Using substances can help them numb pain and escape their problems. It can be easier to use drugs to distract or comfort you than to address the root causes or access services. Many young people who feel pressure and stress from school, home life or personal problems use substances to avoid, escape or self sooth.

Family experiences: Using substances is sometimes a response to what is happening in families and homes. This could mean rebelling against caregivers, conforming to family expectations (including cultural and gendered expectations) or repeating patterns modelled in the home.

For example: In some families, all the men drink, and if you don't drink beer with the men, you're excluded. In this way, drinking beer can be tied to identity, gendered expectations and perception of how you fit into the family.

What is modelled in your home and by caregivers, and what they choose to expose you to, can affect substance use. Sometimes this can mean directly seeing your parents use substances and thinking it's okay for you to do it too. Sometimes this is about the patterns you see in your family environment, like unhealthy coping skills. If your caregivers cope with problems through substance use or even through other types of distraction, numbing or avoidance, the young person might mirror this in their own life through their use of substances.

“Those most susceptible to addiction in my experience are those who have/are endured/enduring significant trauma and stress and have not been taught good coping strategies.”

– Brook Tan, CAMH-NYAC



Family and historical trauma: Experiences of trauma can be present in the home or passed down through generations, and both can impact substance use. Unstable, chaotic and traumatic home environments push youth toward using substances as a coping mechanism. For some families with trauma that has been passed down through the generations (like Jewish or Indigenous families), substance use may seem like the only way to cope, survive or escape.

"Many of us are still healing, and parents or caregivers who didn't learn positive parenting may unintentionally repeat harmful cycles."

– Katherine (Kat) Jeremiah-Genier, CB-NYAC

Fun and pleasure: Being high or drunk can be fun. There can be a thrill in altering your state of being and a thrill of taking risks. Young people do it for the feelings of pleasure and enjoyment – the same reason many adults use substances.

Exploration and curiosity: Young people want to explore different ways of feeling. They hear stories from others about what it feels like to use drugs and alcohol, and they want to know what that experience is like. It's a way to explore yourself, push boundaries and discover your personal limits.

Recent changes – accessibility and types of substances: With vaping becoming more popular, there are changing perspectives on what is safe; people think vaping is safer than smoking. Also, it's easier than ever to get substances. The internet and social media (Snapchat ads, Instagram ads, websites, etc.) make it really easy to have substances delivered in packaging that doesn't raise attention from parents.

Likelihood of trying drugs might have more to do with peers and curiosity, but sticking with it might have more to do with coping, not dealing with problems, and not having access to information on what the consequences of long-term use might be. – CAMH-NYAC member

How Substance Use Impacts Young People

How a young person and their life are affected by substance use really depends on the substances being used and where you are on the substance use health spectrum.

Adults often talk about the physical effects of substance use first and not as much the social and relationship effects, or impacts on mental health, career and school. These are sometimes overlooked.

We know that drugs can impact young people's physical health, but often that can be a long-term impact, and it's hard for young people to connect with that.

These other impacts are more immediate, felt and wide-reaching. We need to talk about them more.



Changes in identity and priorities: Using substances regularly changes how you perceive yourself. Your identity is wrapped up in or linked to substance use. You might not spend as much time on yourself, envisioning your goals or putting time into other parts of your life. When your substance use defines who you are, the people you hang out with and the activities you do, it could limit or block other opportunities or your thinking about different experiences for the future. There may also be a change of priorities or loss of focus in the present. Part of this may be because you no longer experience the same sense of “pleasure” when performing activities you initially enjoyed, and perhaps no longer find comfort in them. Instead, you turn to substances for this sense of pleasure.

“Some folks lose their sense of ‘self’ due to substances — they lose what truly made them ‘them.’”

– RCMP-NYAC member

When substance use turns into addiction, it’s even more impactful on your sense of self.

Social impacts: Using substances impacts your social life in young adulthood one way or another. As previously discussed, at first, using substance can make you more social and help you to connect and socialize better with your friends. Some social circles may reward engaging in substance use long term, making it a regular activity for you do together now, and you only belong if you use.

“There is a loss of belief in oneself — addiction to a substance can be extremely dehumanizing, especially to feel that without this one thing, you aren’t able to function.”

– RCMP-NYAC member

Being in these friendship groups, especially the ones that go deep into drug culture, can introduce some traumatic experiences. Seeing friends have negative experiences like bad trips or overdoses (toxic drug poisoning events) is scary, and seeing friends die can be traumatizing.

For some youth, it goes in the opposite direction — their friends don’t want to use substances or don’t enjoy it and want to do other activities together. If you are the one who is using substances, you are alienated from the group. Friends push you away and don’t want to hang out with you. This can lead to conflict or isolation.

Whether your friend group uses substances or not, substance use has a good chance of straining your friendships, your romantic relationships and your social connections.

Physical and mental health: There are various impacts of substance use on your physical health depending on what substances you use. For example, heavy use of cannabis can affect your brain and the way you think, and smoking affects your lungs.



Substance use can trigger or aggravate emotional and psychological challenges. Ongoing use can lead to poor mental health; it's not just the substance use itself that causes this but also the other associated personal, social, academic and family impacts.

Using substances long term “can cause permanent health problems, such as organ damage, brain development issues and an increased risk of addiction.” (Montasir Hossain, RCMP-NYAC).

School and academics: Substance use interferes with academic performance and school engagement. It can impact grades, reduce attention span and hinder the ability to learn effectively.

Problems at home: Lots of parents don't know how to support their kids in the area of substance use. They don't know how to talk to you or support you if you are just experimenting or on the lower-risk side of the spectrum.

Parents often wish you never started using substances and have a hard time moving into knowledge sharing or harm reduction without judgment. Avoiding your parents or sneaking around when you're using substances, and how parents respond to your substance use, can damage relationships.

Parents' reaction to their child's substance use, like stigma or isolation, can make things worse. For example, if someone gets kicked out of their home, it adds further difficulty and stressors, and the person might use more substances to cope with that.

In other families, parents don't want to intervene or care about your substance use. Some young people don't have proper care from their parents, and their parents are struggling or using substances themselves. So, it's not just the teenager's substance use that hurts family life — it's the parents' too.

Harms of quitting or not using: It's important to mention the harms that exist when not using. For people who use substances regularly, quitting or not using for other reasons (like not having access to drugs) can feel worse than the harmful effects of the drug use itself. Coming off of drugs or alcohol is a difficult and painful experience that can cause major health risks — both physical and mental — if not done properly.

Even in less extreme situations, the benefits of using substances might outweigh the long-term harms for some people. For example, chronic physical conditions or problems with sleep; if choosing between chronic pain or insomnia and drug use that helps with these things, being forced off of drugs can bring up other harmful effects or allow these conditions to re-emerge.

Positive effects: Some forms of substance use can bring positive effects, especially in the short term. People use substances for a reason, and the pleasure or states of euphoria they bring can benefit people. For instance, psychedelics might allow people to access parts of themselves that aren't naturally available to them, and it can help them to know themselves better or feel less dominated by traumatic histories.



These positives come with a flipside of potential risks, like having a bad trip with lasting effects if not in a good headspace or situation when using drugs, experiencing an overdose/poisoning, injuries or accidents, and developing habits or more regular substance use to try and access these positive states of feeling.

Strategies that Prevent or Reduce Harm

Build Skills

- Create more opportunities and prioritize youth involvement in activities that help young people build skills and qualities that make them less likely to use substances in higher-risk ways.
- Help youth boost connection early in life. Building healthy relationships with both family and peers is key.
- Establish programs that build skills to resist peer and social pressure, like good communication, self confidence and social skills.
- Teach and practice creative ways for youth to say no to social pressure to use substances – not just the act of saying no, but strategies for how to feel comfortable in a group if they're not using substances.
- Empower young people to have freedom of thought; they can make their own choices if they have the right information and confidence.
- Involve youth in setting personal goals and focusing on achieving them; having a vision for the future and working toward it can help young people stay away from risky substance use.
- Encourage youth to take on hobbies and activities; this is a great prevention strategy for lots of reasons:
 - It takes up youth's time, so they don't fill it with substance use; a lack of access to organized recreational activities can be a major enabling factor for substance use, especially in rural communities.
 - Activities like sports add to young peoples' overall health, well-being and development; they help youth build skills and relationships that reduce their likelihood of using drugs.

"Encourage activities like sports, art or mindfulness practices as alternatives."

– RCMP-NYAC member

"I think it creates teamwork skills, shows you how to win and lose, and how to learn from the losses without going to drugs. It gives you lifelong friendships so you can lean on them when you need it most."

– RCMP-NYAC member



- Establish programs that focus on building youth's other knowledge and skills, such as on-the-land programs that teach survival skills, the outdoors and wildlife. These can help young people learn the importance of life and health, and how to cope with challenges. These programs might also integrate learning about mental health and addictions or simply learning other skills and how to be resilient, which might help to prevent problems with substance use.
- Provide resources and tools for managing stress, anxiety and other emotions that may lead to substance use as a coping mechanism.

Support Parents, Caregivers and Families

Caregivers and families need more support to create an environment for healthy development early in life. They also need to be better prepared and equipped to respond to youth substance use. Healing families can prevent harmful cycles from repeating.

- Improve access to courses or lessons for parents and families to help support healthy child development; educating families about child development, trauma, substance use and positive parenting creates healthier environments.
- Teach caregivers how to recognize signs of substance use. For example, not socializing with parents after hanging out with friends. Looking out for these early signs and symptoms helps address possible future or increasing use or risk.
- Help families learn how to have non-judgmental, fact-based conversations about substance use by providing training and resources.
 - Negative, judgmental interactions, or making youth feel like a bad person for using drugs, can make a bad situation worse, and youth won't seek guidance in the future when they need information or help. This can also lead to a cycle of guilt for youth.
- Give parents tools to discuss substance use in a non-stigmatizing way.

Improve Education and Programming

Prevention is key, and youth want to learn about the risks of substance use — not just the physical risks but also the risks to mental health, emotional health, academic and social life — so they can make their own decisions.

In addition to knowing what the risks are, young people need the tools to help them assess their own risk, taking into consideration the many factors that result in more high-risk substance use. Youth are very “in the moment” and not always as future-oriented, so prevention can be difficult unless the information is personally relevant.



But prevention isn't enough, and we need to do better at supporting young people after they have started to engage in substance use with harm reduction resources and strategies. Harm reduction can be used across the spectrum of substance use health — for people who engage in lower-risk and higher-risk use, and struggle with addiction.

"We're only taught why we shouldn't try substances, not what to do to stop using them once we've started. There are no easy-to-access resources once you've started."

– RCMP-NYAC member

There are some key features that can make education and programming more effective, such as a peer-to-peer model involving younger people with lived experience of substance use, motivation to be more personally connected with the topic and community, and tailoring education to meet specific needs.

- Revitalize substance use education in schools. Substance use is addressed briefly in early health or wellness classes (which may have just focused on saying no to substance use) or through assemblies focusing on repercussions and consequences. This doesn't help youth when they're older and may be trying or using substances.
- Discuss the substance use health spectrum and the difference between use with different levels of risk and addiction in education.
- Highlight to youth that there's always an option to reduce their use; just because they haven't reached high-risk levels doesn't mean they can't make changes. There might be a stigma that if they don't have an addiction, they're not worthy of asking for help.
- Illustrate the many forms of substance use and addiction so young people see themselves reflected in those illustrations and can acknowledge their own substance use as something worth potentially addressing. Sometimes youth say, "I could stop tomorrow" or "Oh, they are talking about someone else or someone who's worse off than me."
- Provide accurate, honest and factual education about substance use:
 - The immediate, short- and long-term effects of substances, including the impacts on youth's physical health, mental health, social well-being and other aspects of life as well as school and future goals. Also, address using multiple substances at once, because this is common.
 - Factors that contribute to high-risk use or cause someone to move around the substance use health spectrum; mental, emotional and environmental aspects that can influence how youth use or trigger changes to use.



- How to respond when there is an emergency or crisis (e.g., bad high, taken too much, overdose, psychosis) and where to get help for yourself or others.
- Implement a peer-to-peer / lived experience mentorship model. This can be really effective in delivering information, education and support. It's easier to receive information from and trust people who have lived experience of substance use, especially if they are relatively close to youth in age.

"I want to highlight the importance of youth feeling like they can personally trust the person giving them resources about substance abuse, which I think can be done by ensuring guidance counsellors or other on-the-ground staff are close in age to the students they are serving, and ensuring that they are friendly, non-judgmental, and have adequate access to and familiarity with mental health and substance use resources (not only information, but services like Big Brothers Big Sisters that can provide direct support to the student in need)."

– CAMH-NYAC member

- Hearing from people who have lived experience with substance use talk about their struggles, strategies for safer use and how they overcame challenges can help youth listen and learn in a different way.
- A more community-based approach in schools could be useful; people with lived experience within schools, peer-to-peer helpers or mentors (closer in age to students than older adults) for people to talk to who need another perspective from a person who has already had that experience.
- Empowering youth to share their stories fosters understanding and hope among peers.

"Hearing from someone who's been through it can help youth relate and see a way forward that feels real to them."

– CIHR-IHDCYH-YAC member



- Help young people personally connect more with the issue or topic and with the community. Some elements could be included in education or programming that would help motivate young people to feel more connected:
 - Use strategies to engage young people's interests, like school and community challenges or contests that help to draw attention to issues around substance use and motivate youth to get more involved.
 - Not only do these types of creative educational approaches get youth more actively involved, but they also help them feel more connected to their community and give them a sense of purpose, which on its own can be a form of prevention.
- Provide resources and supports that are tailored to youth's specific needs. One size does not fit all. Some examples of areas requiring tailored educational resources include:
 - Tailoring to age: Use tools and techniques that are age appropriate and peer-based, and leverage social media and other age-specific interventions. Also, use language that's relatable and well understood, but don't try too hard to be "cool" with language or it doesn't sound genuine.
 - Terms such as "substance use" or "harm reduction" are often used in youth programming, but they aren't always fully understood, so youth don't engage with the programming as they would if more relatable language was used. Using terms such as "vaping" and "drinking," which youth use, would likely lead to better understanding and have better outcomes. Youth may consider themselves "vapers" but not "substance users."
 - Tailoring to personal needs: Youth need to learn how to assess their own risk in situations, study their own patterns to raise personal understanding and seek out support if needed. Give young people tools to make individual decisions that might require different considerations than their peers based on different substances being used, life risk factors and situations.

"Make sure that there is a direct connection between youth and the content... Whether this be highlighting active challenges within schools or sharing stories, I think authorities need to give people a reason, separate from just knowing more, to listen and care." – Yuheng Guan, RCMP-NYAC



- Tailoring to cultural and community needs: Youth need culturally sensitive and responsive education, including different languages and examples from different cultures or types of communities (including rural and urban). Certain groups may experience more risk (e.g., first generation Canadians or newcomers) and are difficult to reach, so we need to put in more effort here. It's also important to remember that some cultures might use substances within their cultural practices, and that should be considered within the education or resource.

Foster Community Connection and Support

The community plays a vital role in supporting the well-being of young people through various means, including contributing to feelings of connection and belonging and providing access to resources and services to youth who can be harder to reach.

- Focus on cultural reconnection in communities. Teaching youth about traditions, ceremonies and cultural practices fosters a sense of identity and belonging. For Indigenous youth, reconnecting with culture is a powerful healing tool.
- Implement on-the-land programs that involve community members and Elders. These can be helpful because of the positive engagement that takes place, including learning from Elders about their life experiences with substance use.
- Provide wider access to harm reduction supplies and supports in community spaces, including:
 - Free test kits (so people can test their drugs).
 - A guide with pictures for what to look for when evaluating the safety of substances (consistency, colour, etc.).
 - Provide on-the-spot support to youth to reduce substance use harms through peer support and at social events, e.g., festivals.
 - Have safe consumption sites.
- Diversify the places where people can get access to information, especially people who aren't regularly in the school system, like through food access programs, hospitals and social services professionals. Go to where young people who engage in more high-risk substance use might get access to the information.

“Community-based approaches led by people who are from the community involved allow a tailored prevention plan to be made while ensuring that ownership remains with the community members who know both what is needed and likely challenges they may encounter on a level that people who don't live there do not typically understand.”

– Alexis Holmgren, former RCMP-NYAC member



- Train and educate more community members on harm reduction interventions. For instance, if people are trained on how to use naloxone, they are more likely to help and intervene, or even simply be aware of what might be going on, if they encounter someone who may have experienced a toxic drug poisoning or overdose.

Leverage the Internet and Social Media

The internet and social media are completely integrated into many young peoples' lives. It can't be ignored.

Youth have access to lots of information online, but they don't always use it to make informed decisions. They need to care enough to take initiative and find the right information. Information on websites and in resources can be incomplete because science is evolving (e.g., vaping). It can be difficult to interpret scientific or research sources — not everyone has that ability. Sources can have conflicting information or be inaccurate, it's hard to know what to trust.

"As youth, our generation is heavily impacted by social media and entertainment."

– RCMP-NYAC member

Youth may have pre-conceived notions from communities, cultures, families, etc., so they aren't able to take in other information that might contradict their existing views.

The media youth consume can easily influence what they think is "cool." The normalization and promotion of substances and substance use in media sends a strong message to youth.

- Address the issues that the internet and social media present and use the opportunities they provide. Develop stronger legislation around how substances are depicted on social media and in media on a broader scale.
- Discourage or prevent substance use normalization and promotion, and put more effort and resources into ads, public service announcements and stories from people with lived experience to share accurate information through various forms of media.
- Leverage the power of social media to create public education campaigns about substance use for youth.
 - Use ads, TikTok videos and other social videos with content creators and influencers. Content should be fact-based and informative but still fun, interactive and engaging.
 - It's also important to note that while public education campaigns can be straightforward, they don't always lead to long-lasting change unless they link people with information they can use and apply to their own situation.
- Use the internet and social media to reach youth through trusted voices to provide them with accessible information and connect them with additional resources. For



example, videos with links to activities that can help youth build skills (learning modules and mini programs to help learn how to deal with certain situations).

- Create online learning opportunities youth can find and access on their own to offer some them privacy in learning more without exposing that they're struggling or having questions if they're not ready for that yet.

Address and Eliminate Stigma

Much more needs to be done to change the conversation within communities around substance use disorders and tackle stigma that surrounds substance use.

- Create safe, non-judgmental spaces that encourage youth to discuss their struggles openly and seek help without fear of judgment. Young people might be afraid to admit what they're feeling and going through if they think they'll be stigmatized and judged by others.
- Separate the person from their substance use behaviour and health. Their behaviour and substance use don't define them, and just because someone uses substances, doesn't mean they are morally evil or a bad person. Parents can help intervene with their child's substance use *behaviour* without stigmatizing them as a *person*.
- Change the way substance use is discussed in educational materials and youth-directed communications. The use of fear, and trying to scare youth out of using substances, is always focused on negative consequences without addressing why people use substances and what contributes to more harmful use. This can contribute to stigma; thinking someone chose to use the substance so they deserve the negative consequences that come with it. When someone is struggling with a substance use disorder, people sometimes act like they chose it.
- Teach that addiction is different for everyone; some people are more prone to addiction than others because of genetics and experiences, so consider a variety of factors that might lead to different levels of substance use rather than making assumptions.
- Reduce substance use stigma through community-school partnerships and include people with lived experience in awareness campaigns and education initiatives, highlighting both their struggles and their resilience.

Update Policies, Guidelines and Regulations

Substance use happens at school, during school and on school property. School policies around substance use are largely punishment-based, which reinforces the stigma that people who use substances are bad and deserve to be punished.

- Make school substance use policies supportive to help young people reflect on and address their substance use health concerns. This helps with understanding



substance use as part of health and well-being, recognizing that it is often used as a coping mechanism and acknowledging that it might be impacting a young person's life in a way that needs to be addressed.

- Beyond schools, update regressive regulations in communities to reduce access to substances or how attractive they are, like banning vapes that target youth by tasting like candy or putting higher taxes on vapes and specific types of alcohol.

Improve Treatment and Access to Care

When young people are having trouble with their substance use and need help, there's a lot that can be done to better support them.

- Provide accessible, youth-centred mental health services, which are crucial to reducing reliance on substances.
- Equip youth with information on where they can get resources and support on their own without a parent, if needed. Young people may not want to be open about family issues if they don't have their support.
- Ensure continuity in healthcare support as young people age and transition from care as a child to adult care.
- Make addiction counsellors available in schools, especially in those that are high risk.
 - It is important for these services to be opt-in and not forced, but there is a stigma around seeking out those services; anti-stigma education would be helpful at a younger age to reduce shame around using these services.
- Ensure healthcare providers and health service professionals have specific training on developing a holistic approach to dealing with youth substance use (e.g., recognizing it, exploring the reasons for use, offering support beyond medical treatments).
- Create safe sharing circles and spaces in school and communities for youth to be vulnerable and learn strategies they can use to make changes in their life.
- Encourage people to seek help and guidance from family, friends, counsellors, therapists or community members to help them address issues and develop a healthy lifestyle.
- Build connection back into life to help support people to recover from substance use.
- Help youth focus on the good when addressing addiction or substance use problems with youth.

"The opposite of addiction is not sobriety but connection... We need to address loneliness, trauma and community disconnection in the treatment and prevention of addiction."

– RCMP-NYAC member



- Provide opportunities to step back and reflect on what is good in their life like personal strengths, community, where they feel a sense of belonging, opportunities to find their passion and do a hobby, a mentor to look up to, purpose or direction they can find in their life, etc.
 - Being asset-focused allows young people to have hope and helps to build people up in their life rather than just addressing the substance use or what's not working.
- Address the “why” and the underlying factors that have contributed to addiction and not just the addiction itself to help young people with their high-risk or harmful substance use.
 - Youth are going through a lot and people need to listen to their perspective and understand that substance use can be different for everyone including every youth.
 - There's not enough focus on knowing yourself (your brain, your body, your emotions, etc.) as a component of treatment.
- Help youth understand their addiction before jumping into how to treat or fix it.
- Explore why young people are struggling and why they turn to substances, and address it as a method of coping.
- Offer resources and tools for managing stress, anxiety and other emotions that may lead to substance use.

Overall, there needs to be more guides and resources for people who may not know how to help or support someone living with substance use. Many resources seem to focus on severe cases on the spectrum of substance use health. Having resources that encompass a wide range of the spectrum from the perspective of different roles (how to help as a parent, sibling, partner, friend) would ensure that no matter at what end of the spectrum the individual is at, there are resources available that address their situation.

Recommendations

Overall, it's important that multiple approaches and strategies that address youth substance use be used together.

Building personal skills, supporting families, boosting the quality and effectiveness of education, increasing community involvement and capacity, leveraging the internet and social media, addressing stigma, updating policies and regulations and providing better access to care can all be useful interventions.

All are beneficial, but none of them adequately address every young person's needs on its own. Layering various approaches is most effective.



For organizations hoping to support youth substance use health and well-being, our recommendation is to:

- a) Assess where you are best suited to intervene depending on your organizational focus, expertise, resources, access to individuals or communities, etc.
- b) Review the recommendations above to increase your potential for impact.
- c) Consider whether youth have a seat at the table. Have they been involved in shaping the action you want to take? Are they in leadership positions? Have you intentionally sought their contribution or feedback on your idea? If you haven't yet, involve youth in some meaningful way; it will make your project more impactful and relevant to the young people you are aiming to help.
- d) Consider your contribution as part of a bigger, holistic intervention, and seek out partners from multiple jurisdictions and sectors who may be doing complementary work on other pieces of the puzzle. Work together, share what you learn and support each other along the way.
- e) Assess whether you are actually making a difference. Evaluate whether you are reaching your intended impact, and if you're not, identify critical areas where you need to shift your approach.

Several recommendations have been offered throughout this report, and these recommendations from youth align with evidence-supported approaches. There are areas that deserve extra attention, given how much they were discussed and emphasized throughout the consultation process.

Identify the “why” when addressing substance use with young people.

Young people use substances for many different reasons, and everyone is different. Youth often start using substances for social reasons — to fit in and socialize more effortlessly — but often they continue because they are using it to cope with stress, mental health challenges or pain. Home and family life can also be a major influencing factor. For example, what is modelled by family, what people are exposed to at home, how we cope with stress or expectations from home life and the trauma passed down through generations. How youth substance use is addressed and potential harms reduced depend on the “why” for each individual.

Focus on factors other than peer pressure to not exclude critical areas like social skill building.

Peer influence is a factor in substance use, but it's always framed by adults as “peer pressure.” Sometimes there is pressure. But lots of times it's an internal desire to connect, bond, fit in and reduce social anxiety so you can be more comfortable in peer environments. By continuing to focus on peer pressure we may be missing an area of personal skill building that's really needed.



This means not only providing opportunities to learn and practice refusal skills, but also other strategies for how to socialize comfortably, practical tips for “how to be” and “what to do” at parties without substances in hand, and opportunities to engage in activities with people who have similar interests.

We need to start thinking a little differently about what is motivating the feelings of pressure that are associated with using substances with peers to effectively support young people with developing the skills to navigate this space.

Educate on the full spectrum of substance use health and provide resources accordingly.

Youth want to hear the full story of substance use through education, programming and trusted adults. Avoiding it or thinking that by talking about it you are encouraging it isn't helping young people navigate decision making when they are feeling pressure, especially in a time where it's hard to know what information to trust online.

- Don't be afraid to discuss the entire spectrum of substance use health.
- Focus more on social, relational, mental health, academic and family impacts (not just physical effects of substance use); heavy substance use can change your perception of yourself and your identity.
- We absolutely need early prevention efforts, but we need harm reduction support too. It's so hard to find resources to support you in changing your substance use patterns in ways that reduce your risk of harm (beyond quitting completely).

Use peer-to-peer and lived experience models of education and support.

Young people are more receptive to information from people who have lived experience of substance use, especially if they are relatively close to them in age. Leverage this by having more community-school partnerships that involve younger people with lived experience in support and education programs and create resources from a peer-to-peer perspective. As one person said, “If peers are a big reason why people get into using drugs, why can't peers influence them to get out of drugs?”

Help young people assess their own level of risk to make informed personal decisions.

It's one thing to know the risks, but youth need tools to assess their own risk. Resources that help a person to reflect on their own “why” of substance use and examine additional relevant risk factors in their life (such as family history, environment, substances being used, etc.) will help people to make their own choices based on their personal situation. Practical tips that are associated with their own level of risk, like how they could lower their risk of harm and where to get help, would be useful.

Encourage young people to care by focusing on what matters to them

We need to focus on what matters to young people when considering how to help prevent and reduce substance use harms. Developmentally, their identity (discovering who they are)



and their social connections (developing peer relationships and feelings of belonging) are central elements and driving forces in their lives. It makes sense then that these would be major contributing factors to substance use and major areas of impact when negative effects of substance use begin to occur. Intervening in these areas through clear and evidence-based information and competency and skill development is critical.



Appendix: Summary of Youth Prevention and Health Promotion Initiatives in Canada

Introduction

This is a summary of some frameworks, programs and resources currently available in Canada to address the substance use health needs of young people. This is not an exhaustive list; it is a range of examples pulled from valued partners, collaborators and evidence-based sources.

These initiatives cover primary and secondary (harm reduction) prevention efforts, implemented through universal and selective interventions at the individual, family, school and community levels. Some examples focus on overall substance use health and some are specific to cannabis or alcohol.

Disclaimer: The digital world changes quickly, so at the time of publishing this resource, all the included links are active and correct. Organizations may make changes to their resources and URLs that result in some unintended paths or broken links. While this is currently a static resource, we aim to create a hub that is more iterative and easier to update in the future.

Initiatives and Resources

Systems and Community-Based Approaches		
Resource	Organization	Additional Notes and Links
Framework for a Public Health Approach to Substance use	Canadian Public Health Association	A framework of interconnected principles; not youth specific. Also available: A handbook version , a research snapshot of survey, a final report from survey.
Youth Substance Use Prevention Program	Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)	A community-based funding program focused on implementing and adapting the Icelandic Prevention Model in the Canadian context. Other key resources: KDE Hub / Icelandic Community of Practice and an evaluation guide to support community-based interventions to



		prevent substance-related harms in youth.
School-Based Approaches		
Blueprint for Action: Preventing Substance-Related Harms Among Youth Through a Comprehensive School Health Approach	Public Health Agency of Canada	Policy paper also available from PHAC: Preventing substance-related harms among Canadian youth through action within school communities: A policy paper.
	The Students Commission of Canada	Interactive infographic showing how the Blueprint for Action can be applied in school communities Printable summary of the intervention approaches and the Comprehensive School Health framework
	Physical and Health Education Canada	Blueprint for Action Resource Hub with e-learnings, workshops, policies and additional resources.
Wellstream for Schools	Wellstream: The Canadian Centre for Innovation in Child & Youth Mental Health & Substance Use	Includes work related to the Transforming Substance Use Harm Prevention in Schools initiative and relevant reports.
School-Based Drug Abuse Prevention: Promising and Successful Programs	Public Safety Canada	Report published by National Crime Prevention Centre. Resource is significantly dated (2009) but may include pieces of helpful information.



Upstream, Protective Approaches		
The Brain Story	Alberta Family Wellness Initiative	A collection of research and educational resources designed to help people understand how early experiences shape brain development and impact lifelong health and well-being.
Nobody's Perfect Parenting Program		Additional training, resources and programs available, such as resources for social inclusion of newcomer families by Families Canada.
Youth Who Thrive	The Students Commission of Canada	A summary of critical factors and effective programs for 12–25-year-olds, commissioned by the YMCA of Greater Toronto, United Way Toronto and the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services.
Parents Empowering Kids	Strongest Families Institute	A program for parents that helps them learn skills to prevent, manage and overcome childhood behaviour problems.
PreVenture Program		A prevention program for youth aged 12–18 that uses personality-focused interventions to promote mental health and reduce the risk of substance use.
Empowering Family-Focused Approaches: A summary of programs	Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health	A resource highlighting evidence-based, family-focused mental health and addiction care approaches tailored for early years (birth–6) and middle years (7–12).



Educational Content

Including resources, curriculum, guidelines and knowledge hubs

Health Canada Experiences	Health Canada	<p>An online portal for teens, parents and teachers to learn and explore health issues that matter now.</p> <p>Includes in-classroom educational experiences including:</p> <p>Get the Facts</p> <p>Pursue Your Passion</p> <p>Harms of Substance Use Stigma Gallery</p>
Understanding Substance Use: Educator's Guide	Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction	<p>This guide and accompanying video modules have been designed to help educators increase their knowledge and feel more confident to engage in evidence-based, non-judgmental conversations with youth from grades 6–12 about substance use.</p> <p>Understanding Substance Use: Educator's Guide</p> <p>Understanding Substance Use Video Modules</p>
Substance use health and addictions care resource hub	Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health	<p>Harm Reduction & Young People</p> <p>Includes priorities in substance use and addictions services for young people in Ontario:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summary Report• Full Report
DECYDE (Drug Education Centred on Youth Decision Empowerment)		<p>DECYDE is a drug education and awareness strategy created by an</p>



		<p>interdisciplinary research team at Memorial University.</p> <p>Teacher Portal with resources, lesson plans, videos, etc. (Grades 4–9).</p> <p>Knowledge Corner with resources to support general public.</p>
Canadian Substance Use Resource and Knowledge Exchange Centre (SURE)	Canadian Public Health Association	National, bilingual online substance use resource centre.
The ABC's of Youth Substance Use		<p>An initiative to promote evidence-based approaches to youth substance use education in British Columbia schools.</p> <p>Includes curriculum for:</p> <p>Grades K to 5 Grades 6 to 8 High School</p> <p>Also resources on:</p> <p>Delivering Substance Use Education (educators)</p> <p>Preparing Parents and Caregivers for Substance Use Conversations</p>
Rethinking Conversations Around Youth Substance Use	Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH)	<p>JCSH worked with The Students Commission of Canada to develop a set of videos and resources on preventing youth substance use harms using a positive youth development approach.</p> <p>Includes:</p> <p>Video and discussion guide for grades 6–8.</p>



		Video and resource list for grades 9–12. River Parable video for adult allies.
YouthRex Knowledge Hub	YouthRex	A variety of resources curated from other organizations and fact sheets created by YouthRex on many topics (including Substance Use and Cannabis).
STOMP: Students Together Moving to Prevent Tobacco Use	Physical and Health Education Canada	STOMP consists of activity-based and experiential resources for use in the classroom and additional resources for schools and teachers. Though focused on tobacco and nicotine, some activities and resources are applicable to all substance use (e.g., Activity: Refusal Skills).
iMinds	Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (University of Victoria)	A collection of resources for schools related to substance use, cannabis and gambling.
Cannabis-Specific Educational Content		
Get Sensible – Cannabis Education Booklets and Toolkit	Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy	Education with harm reduction focus, developed by and with youth.
Weed Out Misinformation		Harm reduction focused public education campaign created by the Engaging and Educating Young-Adult Cannabis Consumers research team at Humber College.



		<p>A hub of resources includes:</p> <p>Cannabis Info From Experts</p> <p>Activities and quizzes</p> <p>Posters and handouts</p> <p>Co-hosted: Innovations in Harm Reduction for Youth Cannabis Use Event with associated handout.</p>
Talking Pot with Youth: A Cannabis Communication Guide for Youth Allies	Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction	<p>Provides information and strategies to have meaningful, non-judgmental discussions about cannabis with young people.</p>
Cannabasics: A Primer for Health and Social Service Providers	Canadian Public Health Association	<p>A resource for healthcare and social service providers, delivering evidence-based insights into cannabis, its consumption methods, and fundamental principles of harm reduction – not youth specific but content may be used to support young people.</p> <p>Also available:</p> <p>Beyond Cannabasics – a turnkey workshop with resources, including a facilitation manual, a participant workbook and presentation slides.</p>
Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines – Youth Version	The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health	<p>Guidelines and education resource developed for youth, by youth.</p>
Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines for Youth, by Youth	Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (University of Victoria)	<p>Lower risk cannabis use guidelines, developed for youth, by youth.</p> <p>Full report: Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines for Youth, By Youth.</p>



		Knowledge mobilization resources including poster and zine available.
Cannabis Harm Reduction: Young Adult Digital Storytelling Project		Short films created by young adults highlighting the diverse contexts and experiences of youth who use cannabis, including practical harm reduction principles.
REACH (Real Education About Cannabis and Health)	Saskatchewan Prevention Institute	Cannabis-specific curriculum resource approved by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. It was created through a collaborative effort between the College of Nursing and College of Pharmacy.
The Cannabis Café Facilitator's Guide	University of Calgary's Cannabis Café: Education and Harm Reduction Initiative	The Cannabis Café is an education-based resource that assists in facilitating meaningful and evidence-informed conversations about cannabis with post-secondary students.
Cannabis in Our Communities: A Focus on youth and maternal health and well-being	Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada	A toolkit of resources developed through engagement with expecting or young Inuit parents and youth through focus groups, online surveys and interviews across Inuit Nunangat and urban centres.
Let's Talk about Ujarak: A Cannabis Harm Reduction Toolkit	Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada	A cannabis resource toolkit, guided by Inuit values, created to help Inuit increase their knowledge about cannabis use and how to reduce possible harms.
YMCA Youth Cannabis Awareness Program (YCAP)		YCAP was an education and prevention initiative targeting youth aged 12–24, as well as adults (parents/guardians and



		<p>professionals) with the goal of minimizing risks associated with cannabis use and increasing knowledge and skills required for positive youth development.</p> <p>Initiative was funded through SUAP (Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program) from 2020–2023; no longer active but a site hosting many resources remains available.</p>
Cannabis and Mental Health		<p>The Cannabis and Mental Health Course is an online course created by youth and made for youth.</p> <p>Course: Free 90-minute certificate course for youth, created by youth.</p> <p>Mentor Guide: Activities for educators, peer support and youth workers, parents and youth allies.</p> <p>Additional resources and updates.</p>
VoxCann	Project supported by GRIP (Groupe de recherche et d'intervention psychosociale)	<p>VoxCann is an educational initiative for cannabis education.</p> <p>A variety of resources are available on their website, including fact sheets, podcasts and videos.</p>
Preventing and Reducing Harms Associated with Cannabis Vaping	The Students Commission of Canada	<p>Public education products to illustrate three themes related to cannabis vaping: Root causes and motivations, risks of polysubstance use, and risks associated with product sources.</p>



Cannabis Vaping Videos	Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction	Two videos for youth and young adults providing an overview of cannabis vaping and its risks.
Cannabis Education Resources	Ophea	Evidence-informed information on cannabis to help students develop the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions to support their health and well-being. Includes Discussion Guides and Activity Plans .
Alcohol-Specific Educational Content		
Youth Action for Prevention (YAP)	Saskatchewan Prevention Institute	A youth engagement program that aims to increase the knowledge of Saskatchewan youth (aged 14–24) about alcohol-related harms, including FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder).
P.A.R.T.Y. Program	Centre For Injury Prevention	The P.A.R.T.Y. (Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth) Program is a one-day injury awareness and prevention program for youth aged 15 and older.
Know Alcohol	Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research	Online tool to calculate the impact of alcohol, test your knowledge about alcohol, and access resources – not youth specific.



References

- ¹ Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions. (2021). *Quality standard for youth engagement*. Ottawa, Ont. www.cymh.ca/ye_standard
- ² Hart, R. A. (1997). *Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*. London: Earthscan.
- ³ International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). (no date). IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. [https://iap2canada.ca/Resources/Documents/0702-Foundations-Spectrum-MW-rev2%20\(1\).pdf](https://iap2canada.ca/Resources/Documents/0702-Foundations-Spectrum-MW-rev2%20(1).pdf)
- ⁴ Iwasaki, Y. (2015). The role of youth engagement in positive youth development and social justice youth development for high-risk, marginalised youth. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 21(3), 267–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2015.1067893>
- ⁵ Michelsen, E., Zaf, J. F. & Hair, E. C. (2002). *Civic engagement programs and youth development: A synthesis*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ⁶ World Health Organization (2023). *WHO framework for meaningful engagement of people living with noncommunicable diseases, and mental health and neurological conditions*. Geneva: Author. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240073074>
- ⁷ Colder Carras, M., Machin, K., Brown, M., Marttinen, T.-L., Maxwell, C., Frampton, B., ... Jones, N. (2023). Strengthening Review and Publication of Participatory Mental Health Research to Promote Empowerment and Prevent Co-optation. *Psychiatric Services*, 74(2), 166–172. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.20220085>
- ⁸ Community Addictions Peer Support Association. (2021). *The Substance Use Health Spectrum*. Ottawa, Ont. <https://capsa.ca/substance-use-health/>