

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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## Federal Men Offenders' Substance Use Patterns over Time: 2006 to 2019

*Over time, a greater proportion of men offenders report lifetime drug use, poly-substance use, and CNS stimulants use. However, the proportion indicating lifetime injection drug use and prior in-custody substance use decreased.*

### Why we did this study

Substance use issues are prevalent among federal men offenders.<sup>1</sup> This study was conducted to examine changes in substance use patterns of men offenders, due to recent changes in substance use patterns among the general Canadian population, particularly substances used.

### What we did

The Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse for men (M-CASA) is administered on admission to federal custody. It assesses pre-incarceration substance use patterns and severity of substance use. In total, 34,202 men were assessed between January 2006 and March 2019 (18% were Indigenous;  $n = 6,154$ ).<sup>2,3</sup>

### What we found

Offenders reporting lifetime alcohol use remained constant at about 95% throughout the study period. However, offenders reporting lifetime drug use increased by 17%, from 60% in 2006-2007 to 77% in 2018-2019.

In 2006-2007, 73% of offenders had an identified substance use issue<sup>4</sup> compared to 78% of offenders in 2018-2019. Examination across severity of substance use indicated that offenders assessed with a low level substance use issue increased by 7% (from 31% to 39%) during the study period – the largest increase across the severity categories.<sup>5</sup> This pattern was particularly evident among offenders with alcohol use issues, with a 10% increase in those with low severity (from 34% to 44%) compared to a 5% increase for drug use severity (from 23% to 28%). The proportion of offenders with a moderate to severe issue remained stable (42% to 40%).

In 2006-2007, the three substances used most in the 12 months prior to arrest were cannabis (27%), cocaine/crack (23%) and opioids (8%).<sup>6</sup> In 2018-2019, after alcohol (25%), the three drugs used most in the 12 months prior to

arrest were cannabis (23%), cocaine/crack (11%), and central nervous system (CNS) stimulants (11%). Reporting of CNS stimulants use increased from 4% in 2006-2007 to 11% in 2018-2019. Opioids continue to be reported; 10% of offenders reported its use in 2018-2019.

Fewer offenders reported reducing/quitting their substance use in 2018-2019 (84%) compared to 93% in 2006-2007. Offenders reported fewer attempts to reduce/quit their consumption; one-third of offenders in 2006-2007 reported four or more attempts compared to 19% in 2018-2019.

Offenders who reported poly-substance use (using multiple substances in one day) increased by 12% between 2006-2007 and 2018-2019, from 32% to 44%. However, the proportion of offenders reporting injection drug use (IDU) decreased by 5%, from 23% to 18%. Reports of substance use during a prior incarceration also decreased during the study period, from 30% to 21% of offenders.

### What it means

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) offers interventions and support for a variety of substance use issues. These results demonstrate decreases in IDU and substance use while incarcerated are promising. However, the increase in prevalence of substance use issues indicate that on-going support for substance use needs is important, particularly with respect to CNS stimulants and opioid use, as well as poly-substance use. Future research comparing offenders with a low versus a moderate to severe substance use issue may provide additional insight into these subpopulations.

### For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, L. & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2015). Lifetime substance use patterns of men offenders (RIB 14-43). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

<sup>2</sup> Data from phase 1 of the M-CASA implementation in the Atlantic and Ontario regions between 2002 and 2005 were also examined, but are not presented.

<sup>3</sup> This sample represents 67% of federal men offenders admitted during the study period.

<sup>4</sup> An identified substance use issue means that the offender's use negatively impacted on various life areas (e.g., criminal justice, marital/family, employment, etc.)

<sup>5</sup> Severity categories: none, low, moderate, substantial, or severe. Severity level was assessed for the twelve month period prior to arrest and examines the impact of both alcohol and other drug use. Low severity indicates problematic substance use. Moderate to severe substance use issues may suggest a substance use disorder.

<sup>6</sup> Alcohol use during the 12 months prior to arrest was always examined in the M-CASA, however, the structure of the question related to substance used most changed in 2014 to include alcohol as one of the response options.

