

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Regional Examination of Federal Men Offender's Substance Use Patterns: 2006 to 2019

From 2006 to 2019, pre-incarceration opioid use increased in the Pacific region while pre-incarceration CNS stimulant use increased in both the Pacific and Prairie regions.

Why we did this study

Unique regional substance use patterns exist among federal offenders in Canada.¹ This study was conducted to examine changes in regional patterns of men offenders' substance use over time.

What we did

The Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse for men (M-CASA), administered at admission to federal custody to examine pre-incarceration substance use, assessed 34,202 men offenders between January 2006 and March 2019.² Offenders were categorized by region: Atlantic (9%; $n = 3,124$), Quebec (28%; $n = 9,448$), Ontario (34%; $n = 11,771$), Prairies (23%; $n = 7,971$), and Pacific (6%; $n = 1,881$).³ Year of assessment was categorized into two-year increments for analysis.

What we found

From 2006 to 2019, offenders indicating a history of lifetime drug use increased across all regions. The Atlantic region had the largest increase (23%; from 60% to 83%), followed by Ontario (18%; 53% to 71%), Prairies (11%; 75% to 86%), and Quebec and Pacific (both 10%; from 56% to 66% and from 72% to 82%, respectively). Lifetime alcohol use remained constant at around 95% in all regions, except Quebec which saw a 7% decrease during the study period (from 97% to 90%).

The proportion of offenders with an identified substance use issue⁴ increased in all regions, except the Prairie region, which decreased slightly from 89% to 86%. The driver of this increase was the proportion of offenders assessed with low severity issues⁵ – the largest increase was in Ontario (10%; from 31% to 41%). The proportion of offenders assessed with moderate to severe issues remained relatively constant during the study period, except in Quebec where there was a 5% increase.

Over time, cannabis became the most used drug across all regions, except the Pacific region where opioids was most

prevalent (increased 9%, from 14% to 23%). CNS⁶ stimulants increased by 5% (from 7% to 12%) to become the third most used drug in 2018-2019 in the Pacific region, behind cannabis. In Ontario, cocaine/crack decreased by 9% (from 19% to 10%) though it continues to be one of the top three most used drugs. In the Prairie region, CNS stimulants increased by 14% (5% to 19%) while cocaine/crack decreased by 27% (from 38% to 11%).⁷

Poly-substance use (use of multiple substances in one day) increased in most regions by 10% to 12%: Atlantic (34% to 45%), Quebec (28% to 38%), Ontario (26% to 37%), and Pacific (43% to 55%). The Prairie region only increased by 3% (48% to 51%), although, offenders in the Prairies and Pacific regions reported the highest percentage of poly-substance use in 2018-2019.

Offender injection drug use (IDU) decreased in all regions between 2006 and 2019, particularly in the Pacific region (from 33% to 19%). Moreover, substance use while incarcerated also decreased in all regions, with the greatest decline in the Prairies (from 34% to 19%).

What it means

Understanding regional differences in substance use can assist the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to tailor interventions and support, as well as information and prevention strategies, to prevalent substance use needs within the region (e.g., opioid use in the Pacific region and increased use of CNS stimulants⁸ in the Prairie region). Furthermore, knowledge of regional differences may assist in allocating interdiction resources in each region.

For more information

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

You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

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¹ Ritchie, M. B. & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2014). Regional comparisons of men and women offenders' substance use (RIB 14-45). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

² 18% were Indigenous; $n = 6,154$

³ 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.

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

⁵ Severity levels: none, low, moderate, substantial and 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.

⁶ CNS = central nervous system

⁷ The top three most used drugs in Quebec (cannabis, cocaine/crack and opioids) and Atlantic region (cannabis, cocaine/crack and CNS stimulants) remained the same between 2006 and 2019.

⁸ For an examination of stimulant use and related harms in Canada, please refer to: <https://www.ccsa.ca.ca/changes-stimulant-use-and-related-harms-focus-metamphetamine-and-cocaine-cocaine-bulletin>

