

# network news...

connecting canada's substance abuse and allied professionals

January 2009

Welcome to **network news**, an electronic quarterly newsletter designed to connect substance abuse and allied professionals to the latest workforce development initiatives, newly released evidence-informed resources, upcoming events, and much more!

## Partnerships and Priorities and Knowledge Exchange

Early in 2008, CCSA underwent some re-organization and we now have one division for partnerships and priorities and one for knowledge exchange. While there is no longer a division focused solely on workforce development; there is a national priority advisor, Elva Keip, and a knowledge broker/research and policy analyst, Rod Olfert, who address workforce development. Other priorities from the *National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harms Associated with Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada* have been assigned to different national priority advisors, research and policy analysts and knowledge brokers. From time to time, *network news* will provide information on priorities dealing with children and youth, alcohol, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, enforcement, the north, and First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

## An Examination of Substance Abuse Core Competencies in Academic Curriculum: The Social Work Example

This report explores competency-based education in Canadian faculties and schools of social work and the extent to which competencies for substance abuse professionals are embedded in the curriculum. Competency-based education is an approach that advocates for and attempts to provide precise measureable knowledge, skills and behaviours by the end of a course or educational program.

Thirty-three undergraduate (Bachelor of Social Work) and 28 graduate (Master of Social Work) programs were examined against the 18 core technical competencies previously developed by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), with assistance from academic and training experts across Canada. The results of this investigation may be surprising to you.

No Canadian school or faculty of social work offers core addiction studies courses to their students. Of the 32 undergraduate social work programs, 23 (71.9%) offer an addictions elective to their students. However, the curriculum within these electives varies greatly, with the number of competencies being taught ranging from two to thirteen. Fewer than one-fifth of the graduate programs offer a specific addictions elective as part of the curriculum.

Only one-third of the undergraduate courses offered match the 18 core technical competencies developed by CCSA. No faculty or school of social work currently teaches outreach; pharmacology; treatment planning; or understanding substance use, abuse and dependency as part of its core curriculum.

The 15 key informants interviewed were in near-unanimous agreement about the central importance of teaching practical substance abuse-specific competencies in social work programs. They expressed their awareness that employers are increasingly looking at competency-based standards when hiring.

The key informants also reported that students consistently express a high level of interest in substance abuse course work, yet there is a very limited selection of courses available. Because social work studies place considerable focus on preparing students to engage in professional practice, competency-based education has been considered a good fit with social work as both an academic discipline and a professional program.

CCSA is committed to engaging with schools and faculties of social work at both colleges and universities, supporting them in adopting the core technical competencies in a manner consistent with students' needs. We are also very interested in working with other schools and faculties that want to better address core technical competencies in their curriculum, thereby better equipping students to work in the substance abuse field.

[Click here](#) to review the full social work example report.

## Core Behavioural Competencies

This month, work is starting at CCSA to identify core behavioural competencies critical for the substance abuse workforce. We anticipate that this document, when finished, will be a partner to the core technical competencies identified in the report *Core Competencies for Canada's Substance Abuse Field, version 1.0*.

During March 2009, focus groups held across Canada will examine the draft behavioural competencies for relevance and accuracy.

In addition to identifying core behavioural competencies, we expect to group them by workload, recognizing that different positions require different levels of behavioural competency. For example, an outreach worker, a clinical therapist and an executive director may use some of the same behaviours, but the level of competency at which each operates will be different.

Behavioural competencies to be examined for inclusion as core include: initiative, change management, flexibility, self-care, self-control, teamwork and cooperation, commitment to learning, and interpersonal understanding. There are about 20 behaviours currently being explored for relevance and inclusion.

## CCSA Drug Prevention Strategy for Canada's Youth

### Helping Youth Make Informed Choices

The media/youth consortium, one of three key initiatives, will be launching a new website in March 2009. This site will provide young people with evidence-based information about drugs and their related harms in a fun and engaging manner.

While the initial focus of the site will be on the physical effects of drug use, the site will ultimately include information about the social and economic issues related to drug use, with complementary messaging in a variety of new media formats. CCSA is also working with key stakeholders to inform youth about this new resource. If you are interested in learning more about this new site or how you can help extend the reach of drug prevention messages with youth in your community, contact Karine Plouffe, National Priority Advisor at [kplouffe@ccsa.ca](mailto:kplouffe@ccsa.ca).

### Partnerships

In July 2008, organizations across Canada committed to pool and leverage their abilities by working together on the National Advisory Group on Youth Substance Abuse Prevention (YSAP). YSAP is composed of experts in the field of prevention, including youth representatives, and is co-chaired by CCSA, the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement and the Drug Prevention Network of Canada.

The mandate of YSAP is to develop, implement and evaluate deliverables related to a prevention strategy for youth between the ages of 10-24. These deliverables were developed through a process involving provincial, territorial, organizational, community and youth representation. At the first YSAP meeting, the group's members identified seven priority areas for action on youth substance abuse prevention: family support, risks and protective factors, special populations, youth engagement, evidence-based prevention messages, translating research to practice, and alcohol. These priorities form the basis for the *Action Plan on Prevention Initiatives and Ideas for Youth*. Planning is now underway for the second meeting of YSAP, which will be held in January 2009.

## National Standards

Watch for a description of the National Standards initiative in the March 2009 newsletter.

## Professional Toolkits

### New professional toolkit on Ethics and Professionalism

This new toolkit describes ethical principles and values and links them to professionalism. It goes on to identify how ethics and professionalism apply in day-to-day work with clients, in organizations and across professions.

### Coming soon:

- Professional toolkit on Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral

## Upcoming Events

### Psychopharmacology Conference on Safety Issues

February 13-14, 2009

Vancouver, BC

### Third Annual Conference of the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy

March 2-3, 2009

Vienna International Centre, Vienna, Austria

### Mental Health and the Justice System Across the Lifespan

6th Annual Forensic Psychiatry Conference

April 1-3, 2009

Vancouver, BC

### Harm Reduction 2009: Harm Reduction and Human Rights

International Harm Reduction Association

April 19-23, 2009

Bangkok, Thailand

[Click here](#) to view all events listed on the Canadian Network.

## Voices from the Field

### ***Lesley in Kitchener, ON—New beginnings in withdrawal management***

This is a story of a new direction and new partnership for a Withdrawal Management Centre. After several months of researching our community addiction needs and identifying unserved populations, we shifted from traditional abstinence-based residential services to a more harm reduction–recovery model ... [click here](#) to read on and see what other clients and workers are saying about those who work in the field of substance abuse.

[Submit your message today!](#) Share your words of hope and celebrations of success.

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