

Fact sheet: Substance use and violence in times of crisis

During disasters and emergencies, substance use and violence often rise, affecting individuals and families

Substance use

People use substances like alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, and other drugs for many reasons. Some use them for medical care, recreation, or religious traditions. Others use them to handle stress, pain, or trauma.

During hard times, people may lose access to healthy coping methods like exercise or socializing. Some may start using alcohol and drugs. Others may increase their existing use.

Disasters can reduce or cut off access to legal substances, pushing people toward unsafe alternatives. Hazardous events can also make it harder to get medical help or support.

Substance use and mental health are connected. Stress caused by a crisis or hazardous event can potentially lead to anxiety, depression, and other issues. In-person support groups, doctors, and health care providers may be harder to access at these times. Ideally, virtual alternatives can be available or quickly mounted to bridge these gaps.

Substance use is different for everyone and can be viewed on a spectrum with varying stages of benefits and harms. If you start to notice that a family member or friend is acting differently than before or is having problems in various aspects of their life, they may be struggling with substance use.

Need help with substance use?

- Government of Canada | About substance use
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/about-substance-use.html>)
- Government of Canada | Substance use spectrum
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/substance-use-spectrum-infographic.html>)
- Government of Canada | How to talk to a family member or friend about their drug or alcohol use
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/talking-about-drugs/help-friend.html>)
- Government of Canada | Get help with substance use
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/get-help-with-substance-use.html>)

Family and gender-based violence

Hard times can lead to episodes of family and/or gender-based violence. Stress, financial hardship, and social isolation can make existing tensions worse. In some cases, substance use may also contribute to violent behaviour or make it harder for victims to seek help.

Violence can take many forms, including physical, emotional, financial, and psychological abuse. It can happen in any relationship — between partners, family members, or caregivers. If you or someone you know is experiencing violence, support is available.

Need help with family violence?

- Government of Canada | Find family violence resources and services in your area
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/services.html>)

Need help with gender-based violence?

- Government of Canada | Support services for those affected by gender-based violence

<https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/additional-support-services.html>