NATIONAL DRUG POLICY STATEMENT

Background:
Public policy regarding drugs capable of producing dependence, including nicotine, alcohol, opiates, sedatives, stimulants, inhalants and others, has shifted in content and emphasis over the course of Canadian history. These policy changes have resulted from changes in the public perception of the relative health and social consequences associated with the use of these substances, as well as from deliberate choices of strategy deemed most likely to prevent and ameliorate drug-related problems.

Public debate on national drug policy, requires consideration of various proposals that would change laws or regulations related to the cultivation, manufacture, importation, distribution, advertising, sale, possession and use of various psychoactive substances. Some of these proposals, classified under the general categories of "decriminalization", or "legalization", would increase drug availability.

"Legalization" means relaxation or removal of legal restrictions on the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, possession and/or use of psychoactive substance, whereas "Decriminalization" refers to the relaxation or removal of criminal penalties for the possession and/or use of an illicit psychoactive substance. Other proposals call for increased restrictions on the marketing and availability of drugs now sold under controlled conditions, such as tobacco, alcohol and psychoactive prescription pharmaceuticals.

Finally the total resources allocated to a National Drug Policy require a balance between supply reduction and demand reduction strategies.

The CSAM Public Policy Statement regarding a National Drug Policy is that:

- Canada must have a clear strategy for dealing with the cultivation, manufacture, importation, distribution, advertising, sale, possession and use of psychoactive substances regardless of whether they are classified as legal or illegal.
- Drug possession for personal use must be decriminalized and distinguished from the trafficking or illegal sale/distribution of drugs to others that must carry appropriate criminal sanctions.
- The individual and public health impact substance use, Substance Abuse and Substance Dependence must be taken into account at all times.
- An assessment to ascertain the extent of a substance use disorder and screening for Addiction must be an essential part of dealing with someone identified as an illicit drug user or possessor.
- Appropriate funding must be made available for supply reduction and demand reduction of various psychoactive substances that carry an abuse or addiction liability.

National policies and regulations must present a comprehensive and coordinated strategy aimed at reducing the harm done to individuals, families and society by the use of all drugs of dependence regardless of the classification of "legal" or "illegal"

Recommendations:

- Prevention programs need to be comprehensively designed to target the entire range of dependence-producing drugs to enhance public awareness and affect social attitudes with scientific information about the pharmacology of drugs and the effects of recreational and problem use on individuals, families, communities and society.
- Outreach, identification, referral and treatment programs for all persons with Addiction need to be increased in number and type until they are available and accessible in every part of the country to all in need of such services.
- Law enforcement measures aimed at interrupting the distribution of illicit drugs need to be balanced with evidenced based treatment and prevention programs, as well as programs to ameliorate those social factors that exacerbate Addiction and its related problems.
- Any changes in laws that would affect access to dependence-producing drugs should be carefully thought out, implemented gradually and sequentially, and scientifically evaluated at each step of implementation, including evaluating the effects on:
  - access to young people and prevalence of use among youth;
  - prevalence of use in pregnancy and effects on offspring;
  - prevalence rates of alcoholism and other drug dependencies;
  - crime, violence and incarceration rates;
  - law enforcement and criminal justice costs;
  - industrial safety and productivity;
  - costs to the health care system;
  - family and social disruption;
  - other human, social and economic costs.

CSAM opposes:

- any changes in law and regulation that would lead to a sudden significant increase in the availability of any dependence-producing drug (outside of a medically-prescribed setting for therapeutic indications). All changes need to be gradual and carefully monitored.
- any system of distribution of dependence-producing drugs that would involve physicians in the prescription of such drugs for other than therapeutic or rehabilitative purposes.
CSAM supports:

- public policies that would offer treatment and rehabilitation in place of criminal penalties for persons with psychoactive substance dependence and whose offense is possession of a dependence-producing drug for their own use. Those who are found guilty of an offense related to Addiction, proper assessment and treatment services must be offered as part of their sentence. This goal may be attained through a variety of sentencing options, depending upon the nature of the offense.
- an increase in resources devoted to basic and applied research into the causes, extent and consequences of alcohol and other drug use, problems and dependence, and into methods of prevention and treatment.