****Toolbox Talk**

**The COVID-19 Struggle:**

**Alcohol & Substance Use/Relapse**

***Iron Workers International Workplace Safety Series***

For many years talking about mental health wellness at work was generally considered off-limits. Today, the stigma of discussing mental health, suicide prevention and addictions is changing and the Iron Workers International is working to be a leader in this area of safety and health.

¹The COVID-19 pandemic has been a source of disruption and upheaval in our work and family routines for many Canadians including ironworkers and their families. The effect on social and economic well-being has also been a cause of significant stress, anxiety, and concern.

New evidence suggests the pandemic may have an influence on the alcohol and drug consumption habits of Canadians. As stress levels have intensified, alcohol and substance use are reportedly rising significantly. Persons who are isolated, bored, stressed, and experiencing significant disruptions to their normal ways of life are at risk. The negative relationship between substance use and mental health is well established. This is the case for most Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may lead to the use of cannabis, alcohol, and other substances, in the hopes of easing these feelings.

For some people, social isolation, stress, and a decline in mental health may lead to an increase in alcohol consumption. A study on [Canadians' mental health and cannabis, alcohol and tobacco use](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00008-eng.htm), conducted in March and April 2020, showed that those who reported lower self-perceived mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic were more likely to report increased consumption.

Alcohol is the most commonly used psychoactive substance among Canadians. In January 2021, 18% of Canadians reported having had five or more drinks on the days they consumed alcohol, up from 11% in 2017. These results suggest that some people may have increased their alcohol consumption during the pandemic. Among Canadians who had previously consumed alcohol, close to one in four (24%) believed their consumption had increased, as compared with the pre-pandemic period.

At the provincial level, Ontario (30%) had the greatest increase in reported alcohol consumption, followed by the Prairie provinces (27%), British Columbia (22%), Quebec (17%) and the Atlantic provinces (16%).

²4.2% of all Canadians (1.3 million) are addicted to alcohol or suffer from serious problems related to alcohol abuse. This only includes those exhibiting behaviors consistent with alcoholism. Including those who have not progressed far enough in their disease to be counted the actual number is much higher, possibly triple.

Many of these Canadians regularly attend in-person recovery meetings for routine personal connections and fellowship. As physical distancing requirements banned group meetings, many recovery meetings were forced to stop meeting in person.

As COVID-19 disruptions continue, persons in recovery from alcohol and substance use disorders face increasing isolation and lack of group support. Many employers and labour representatives are growing increasingly concerned about members and employees who are in recovery experiencing a relapse if they cannot find a connection to virtual, online recovery meetings or other help.



## Access Free, Live Counselling

**Phone:**

Call 1-866-585-0445 (Adults) or 1-888-668-6810 (Youth)

**Text (SMS):**

Text WELLNESS to 741741 (Adults) or 686868 (Youth) to connect with a trained crisis responder for support

Website: <https://wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>



**If you know someone who needs help, lend your support, listen, and show you care.**

**Contact your Iron Workers Local Union for**

***Employee and Family Assistance Program* information**

References:

¹<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210304/dq210304a-eng.htm>

²<https://familyoutreachontario.com/statistics-about-alcohol-abuse/>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/get-help/get-help-problematic-substance-use.html>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/alcohol.html>

<https://health-infobase.canada.ca/alcohol/ctads/>

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