



TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES

for Canada's Substance
Use Workforce v. 3

**UNDERSTANDING
SUBSTANCE USE**



Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

Evidence. Engagement. Impact.



Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

All behavioural indicators across proficiency levels are examples only and can be adapted or tailored to meet individual organizational needs and mandates.

For CCSA's competencies, substance use is inclusive of situations where professionals are working with individuals who use or have used substances, are diagnosed with a medically recognized substance use disorder or are experiencing harms as a result of using substances. For more information, please refer to the criteria for substance use disorders in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition (DSM-5).

For more information on sex- and gender-based analysis (SGBA+), please visit www.ccsa.ca/sex-and-gender-based-analysis

© Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2021

For additional copies, contact
CCSA, 75 Albert St., Suite 500
Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7
Tel.: 613-235-4048
Email: competencies@ccsa.ca

ISBN 978-1-77178-809-0

UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE

Background or contextual knowledge of substances and substance use as defined in the Competencies, including the sex-specific neurological effects of different substances and the impact of use on cognitive function, and as required to properly inform specific aspects of a professional's work with people.

EXAMPLES

1 = Foundational	2 = Developing	3 = Proficient	4 = Advanced
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Explains what substance use is and: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Its prevalence in Canada The neuroscientific basis of substance use and how it can impact cognitive function and development The neurological, physiological and behavioural impacts of different substances The bio-psycho-social-spiritual risk and protective factors for development of substance use concerns The various reasons for substance use Describes the types of substances often used in the professional's locale Explains the social determinants of health that have an impact on people who use substances and their families and communities, and identifies some of those key factors, for example, genetics, sex, gender, poverty, income, housing insecurity, being racialized, etc. Explains key processes that exacerbate substance use such as stigma, racism, violence and trauma, and experiences of colonialism (e.g., residential schools) Explains exposure to substances in utero as a risk for fetal and child development issues Explains evidence-informed approaches to managing substance use (e.g., harm reduction or abstinence-based approaches) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Applies evidence-informed approaches to identify the severity of the individual's substance use and any other concurrent issues (e.g., physical, psychological, social and polysubstance use issues) Explains the way that substances that alter mood, behaviour and cognitive processes are categorized or classed (e.g., stimulant, sedative) and cites the proper and the street names, if applicable, for key drugs within those categories or classes Explains the range of factors that can increase risk or protection against developing substance use concerns, and works with people to identify such factors in their cases; for example: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation and being racialized Social support Biological markers and genetic vulnerability Historical, social and cultural factors (colonialism) Trauma, violence and adverse childhood experiences Explains the prevalence of concurrent conditions and histories of trauma and violence that may be present for people who use substances, and applies this knowledge when working with them Explains in general terms the impact that stigma, trauma and violence, and cultural and historical events can have on people, and applies this understanding in working with them 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Explains and applies an understanding of the social determinants of health that work alone or together to increase or mitigate risk, and how these factors may vary in different populations and cultures Accesses current research and integrates and applies this knowledge when developing and adapting evidence-informed approaches Works with complex or sensitive cases requiring a sophisticated understanding of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Most aspects of substance use Substance-induced mental health issues (i.e., psychosis) Various cultures and sub-populations The impact of adverse childhood experiences on the brain Applies an understanding of medications, side effects and contra-indications to provide adequate support (see Medications competency for additional details) Participates in planning and conducting research on current trends in various aspects of the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of substance use 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Supervises or coaches others in developing their knowledge of causality, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of substance use, and integrating this new knowledge into their work with people receiving services Supervises or coaches colleagues working with complex and sensitive cases requiring a sophisticated understanding of all aspects of substance use and concurrent conditions Initiates, facilitates or participates in collaborative research that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Advances knowledge about prevention, screening and assessment, and treatment of substance use Explores the range of sex and gender, social, political, economic, spiritual and cultural factors likely to have an impact on substance use Contributes to professional development, including training, skill building, consultation, coaching and mentoring, and exchanges of current knowledge on substance use Develops new tools, techniques and support materials to assist the substance use workforce Advocates at the micro, meso and macro levels for developing and implementing public policy designed to minimize risk while enhancing resiliency Advocates for funding of research and programs designed to improve the lives of all people who use substances

UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE

Background or contextual knowledge of substances and substance use as defined in the Competencies, including the sex-specific neurological effects of different substances and the impact of use on cognitive function, and as required to properly inform specific aspects of a professional's work with people.

EXAMPLES

1 = Foundational	2 = Developing	3 = Proficient	4 = Advanced
<p>7. Explains concurrent conditions and how they affect the prevalence, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of substance use conditions</p>	<p>6. Explains the concepts of the family and social supports as systems with the potential to support or undermine the individual, and the type of impact an individual's substance use can have on the family as a system</p> <p>7. Explains the concept of recovery capital and how it can contribute to improved outcomes</p> <p>8. Consults a wide range of evidence-informed resources, including the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</i>, to develop and apply an enhanced understanding of people who use substances</p> <p>9. Explains in general terms withdrawal management, treatment and recurrence prevention approaches, and applies this knowledge in working with people</p> <p>10. Explains in general terms how and why medications are used in the treatment of substance use and integrates a practical and level-appropriate knowledge of medications when working with people</p> <p>11. Explains in general terms the interactions that medications and other drugs can have and applies this understanding in working with people (see Medications competency for additional details)</p> <p>12. Monitors current research to update and enhance the knowledge base applied when interacting with people</p> <p>13. Explains evidence-informed considerations when treating people who are using different substances, such as opioids, amphetamines, alcohol and cannabis</p>		