



# CRISM - ICRIS

Canadian Research Initiative  
in Substance Matters

Initiative Canadienne de Recherche sur  
les Impacts des Substances psychoactives

**NATIONAL  
NEWSLETTER**  
DECEMBER 2025

Welcome to the inaugural CRISM National Newsletter, your quarterly snapshot of the research, partnerships and community-driven initiatives advancing substance use health across Canada.

In this issue, you'll find updates from each of the CRISM Regional Nodes, highlights from national initiatives and news from our Indigenous Engagement Platform. Together, these updates reflect our shared commitment to improving substance use health through collaboration, action and knowledge mobilization.

Thank you for being a part of the CRISM community.



## NATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### ASCME Trial Update

The ASCME study has made great progress this year, supported by strong engagement across all participating sites. A total of 142 participants have been enrolled to date, and there have been no related serious adverse events reported throughout the trial. Activation is underway for two additional sites in PEI and Calgary, which will broaden enrollment and carry this momentum into the year ahead. The study team is also collaborating with other research groups and international partners to share insights and align methods, helping to strengthen evidence and expand future treatment options for stimulant use disorder.

### Updated CRISM Website

Our newly [redesigned website](#) is now live, offering improved navigation and easier access to CRISM resources, research updates and activities.

### French Version of the New National Opioid Guideline

The French translation of the updated Canadian Guidelines for Opioid Therapy and Chronic Noncancer Pain (CMAJ) is [now available](#).

### Welcome to Our New Members

We are pleased to welcome three new members to CRISM, **Dr. Yanfei Ma**, Training Support Platform Coordinator, **Sabina Kukurudziak**, Knowledge Translation Platform Coordinator, and **Laurie Argourd**, National Research Support Manager.

### Coming Soon: Cross-Node Research Placement Program

Launching in 2026, this program will provide trainees and Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) with multidisciplinary research opportunities across CRISM Nodes, helping build national capacity in substance use and addiction research.

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## CRISM BRITISH COLUMBIA

### Updated Screening Recommendations Submitted

A manuscript has been submitted to [CMAJ](#) (October 2025) outlining updated screening recommendations for CRISM's **High-Risk Drinking and Alcohol Use Disorder Guideline**. The revision aims to address limitations of existing screening tools, including poor diagnostic performance and misalignment with Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health. It introduces a simple screening algorithm to help identify individuals at low and higher risk of possible alcohol use disorder, reducing past barriers to universal screening. This work reflects ongoing efforts to strengthen national guidance for clinical practice.

#### Progress on Systematic Reviews

The team continues advancing several systematic reviews, include:

- Systematic evaluation of evidence on off-label psychoactive medications for opioid, alcohol, sedative and stimulant use disorders.
- Systematic review of pharmacotherapy for opioid use disorder among people using fentanyl.

#### Proposed Systematic Review: STBBI Screening

The BC Node has proposed a systematic review examining **sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection (STBBI)** screening among people with substance use disorders. The review aims to determine:

- Whether STBBI screening improves health outcomes in this population.
- Which screening tools and pathogens should be prioritized.
- The most effective frequency for screening.

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## CRISM PRAIRIES

### Celebrating Excellence: Dr. Colleen Dell Receives SHRF Achievement Award

CRISM Prairies Co-PI Dr. Colleen Dell has been awarded the 2024-25 Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (SHRF) Achievement award, recognizing a senior researcher whose career has demonstrated exceptional impact, leadership and innovation.

Dr. Dell's work spans animal assisted interventions, addictions, mental health, Indigenous wellbeing and knowledge mobilization. She is also widely recognized for her mentorship and dedication to building the next generation of researchers.

Congratulations Dr. Dell on this well-deserved recognition!



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## Lecture of a Lifetime: Insights from Dr. David Hodgins

On March 25, 2025, CRISM Prairies NPI Dr. David Hodgins delivered the University of Calgary's prestigious *Lecture of a Lifetime*, reflecting on his 35-year career advancing research and treatment in substance use and gambling disorders. His talk, *The Long and Winding Road – Insights into Addiction Recovery*, explore the experiences of individuals navigating addiction and recovery, offering thoughtful perspectives on some of society's most common and complex challenges.

A recording of the lecture is available for viewing [here](#).



## New STBBI Report Released

The final report, *Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBI) Among People Who Inject Drugs in Canada: Edmonton Tracks PWID Survey Phase 5*, 2024 Summary Report, has now been released. The report and accompanying infographic are available through the Inner City Health and Wellness Program (ICHWP) website.

## Additional Prairie Highlights

CRISM Prairies continues to support impactful knowledge exchange and training initiatives across the region, including:

- Dr. Colleen Dell and the University of Saskatchewan launched **Animal Awareness for the Substance Use Workforce**, a new 5-hour self led online course – Sign up [here!](#)
- CRISM Prairies affiliated researcher, Dr. Bonnie Lee, recipient of the **2025 Professional Contribution Award from the Canadian Association for Couple and Family Therapy** - Congratulations Dr. Lee!
- New learning initiative addressing addictions related issues, **CRISM Addictions Rounds**, now available on [Youtube](#).
- A new **Municipal Leadership in Addressing Substance Use Harms** micro-credential offered at the University of Saskatchewan.

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## CRISM ONTARIO

### Decriminalization Policy Evaluation

CRISM Ontario is leading ~~major components of the~~ National **Decriminalization** Policy Evaluation, a **multi-jurisdictional study** examining the health, social, and community impacts of decriminalizing simple possession of illegal substances in Canada. The evaluation includes extensive engagement with people **who** use drugs, service providers, public health leaders, and policymakers to understand how decriminalization influences service access, stigma, policing interactions, and overall wellbeing. By integrating quantitative indicators with community-driven qualitative insights, this work aims to identify what supports effective implementation and where gaps remain.

More information available [here](#).

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## Supervised Consumption Sites and Safer Supply Programs Evaluation Work

CRISM Ontario researchers recently published a [Letter to the Editor](#) examining the provincial government's evolving response to the opioid crisis and its shift away from established harm reduction approaches. Despite strong evidence that safer opioid supply (SOS) programs and supervised consumption sites (SCS) reduce overdoses and other drug-related harms, new policy restrictions have led to the closure of 10 SCSs, including six that housed SSPs. Provincial plans indicate that harm reduction services will be replaced by Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hubs, which aim to offer integrated services currently provided by SCSs and SSPs. However, key harm reduction supports, including needle exchange, SCS, and SOS programs will not be included in the HART Hub model.

~~This work is further detailed in the publication [The Erosion of Safer Supply Programs in Ontario, Canada: A Dangerous Step Backward](#), which highlights the implications of these policy decisions for people who use drugs, service providers, and the broader public health landscape.~~



## Community Based Research: Wearable Device Feasibility Project

In partnership with [Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority \(SLFNHA\)](#), CRISM Ontario is supporting a two-phase community led project exploring readiness to pilot a wearable device aimed at managing opioid withdrawal symptoms. This initiative centres Indigenous community leadership and identifies opportunities for culturally grounded innovation in withdrawal management support.

## Publications of Note

CRISM Ontario members continue to contribute to the evidence base on substance use and harm reduction through several recent publications:

- [Exploring unregulated substance use health data in Ontario, Canada: Identifying gaps, addressing challenges, and uncovering opportunities](#) (Frontiers in Public Health)
- [Experiences of stigmatization among people who use drugs in the initial year of British Columbia's drug decriminalization policy: A qualitative study](#) (International Journal of Drug Policy)
- [Stable patterns, shifting risks: The impact of British Columbia's decriminalization and recriminalization policies on drug use behaviours](#) (Harm Reduction Journal)
- [Overall and substance use-specific healthcare utilization among individuals with and without criminal justice involvement in Ontario, Canada](#) (International Journal of Prison Health)
- [Perceptions and experiences with police among people who use drugs in the initial year of British Columbia's decriminalization of illegal drugs policy](#) (Criminology & Public Policy)

These publications strengthen the Node's commitment to informing public health approaches with high-quality, community-engaged research.

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## CRISM QUÉBEC

### 7th edition of the Centre d'expertise et de collaboration en troubles concomitants (CECTC) gathering, led by co-PI Dr. Didier Jutras-Aswad

The Centre d'expertise et de collaboration en troubles concomitants (CECTC) hosted its 7th yearly gathering in November 2025 - an event led by PI Dr. Didier Jutras-Aswad which the Quebec Node proudly supported. The event brought together experts, professionals, and community members to reflect on the challenges surrounding stimulants and concurrent disorders, and to explore new avenues for improving care and services. The Quebec Node was also on site to host a booth and present CRISM's latest work - The 2024 Update to the Opioid Use Disorder Guideline - along with its mission and objectives.



### Dr. Julie Bruneau on Paul Arcand's podcast, "Déjouer la maladie: mon doc et moi"

In a recent episode of Paul Arcand's podcast series, which highlights how research transforms lives, Dr. Julie Bruneau, CRISM's Nominated Principal Investigator and a leader in addiction medicine at the CHUM, is featured for her pioneering work in reshaping hepatitis C care in Canada. The episode shares her collaboration with Isabelle Boisvert, who has lived experience with multiple substance dependencies, and together, through the *Montréal sans HépC* program, they developed an innovative, compassionate approach that brings effective hepatitis C treatment directly to people most at risk, demonstrating the power of research, community partnership, and human-centred care.

### Experiment l'Invisible – L'art de prendre la parole

On September 25, 2025, the Québec Node supported a PWLE-designed event featuring presentations, discussions and an art exhibition highlighting the expertise that comes from lived experience with substance use, homelessness, mental health challenges, criminalization and sex work. Drawing over 400 attendees, the event pursued and reinforced the Node's Partnerships, Inclusion, and Engagement theme led by PI Dr. Karine Bertrand.



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## HCV Network Collaborators

The Node continues to advance hepatitis C care through collaborations with several CIHR-funded networks. These partnerships support innovative approaches to reach vulnerable and substance-using populations, including rapid RNA testing through the Test & Treat clinic, coordinated clinical innovation via the McGill—UofM consortium, and improved engagement through initiatives such as *Montréal sans Hépatite C / CANHEPC*, *MedTeq*, and the *HCV Roadmap project*.

## National Intervention Projects

The Node is supporting the national expansion of two intervention initiatives developed under CRISM's Implementation Science Program:

1. Rolling out a Delphi-developed checklist for initiating opioid agonist treatment (OAT) across 12 emergency departments across Canada, in partnership with the [Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians \(CAEP\)](#). The following emergency departments are participating in the checklist implementation initiative:
  - Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (Montréal, QC)
  - Fort St. John Hospital (Fort St. John, BC)
  - Kingston Health Sciences Centre (Kingston, ON)
  - Mount Sinai Hospital (Toronto, ON)
  - Northumberland Hills Hospital (Cobourg, ON)
  - Peter Lougheed Centre (Calgary, AB)
  - Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre (Halifax, NS)
  - Sechelt I shishálh Hospital (Sechelt, BC)
  - St. Boniface Hospital and Health Sciences Centre (Winnipeg, MB)
  - St. Joseph's Health Centre (Toronto, ON)
  - St. Michael's Hospital (Toronto, ON)
  - Woodstock Hospital (Woodstock, ON)
2. Developing a reference guide to support drug checking in non-traditional settings, including festivals, raves and community venues, to promote consistent and evidence informed harm reduction practices nationally.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Research Development Program

The Québec Node continues to strengthen knowledge translation into frontline practice through its annual Research Development Program, supporting innovative protocols and treatments. Applications for the 2025 cycle closed on October 31, and submissions are currently under review. Funding decisions will be communicated by the end of December.



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## Safe(r) Supply Scoping Review

NPI Dr. Julie Bruneau and Uyen Do published a new scientific article titled "[A scoping review and concept analysis to inform Canada's safe\(r\) opioid supply research agenda](#)" in the International Journal of Drug Policy in November 2025.

This publication clarifies the concept of safe(r) supply in Canada by distinguishing its medicalized and community-based components, offering a more precise framework to assess their benefits and risks in response to the overdose crisis.

## Key New Publications

QC Nodes investigators and members published over **200** publications in 2025, from which we may name:

- [Binge Drug Injection in a Cohort of People Who Inject Drugs in Montreal: Characterizing the Substances and Social Contexts Involved](#) (International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction)
- [Concordance Between Urine Drug Screening and Self-Reported Use in the Context of a Pragmatic Randomized-Controlled Trial in People with Prescription-Type Opioid Use Disorder](#) (The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry)
- [Indigenous people and medications for opioid use disorders: A scoping review](#) (Psychology of Addictive Behaviours)
- [Illicit drug toxicity from opioid, stimulant or sedative use in adolescents: Results of a Canadian one-time cross-sectional study](#) (Paediatrics & Child Health)

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## CRISM ATLANTIC

### Research Development Program (RDP) - Year 3

CRISM Atlantic entered its third year of the Research Development Program (RDP), supporting projects that enhance prevention and treatment practices for people affected by substance use while contributing to new evidence in the field. The 2025 RDP Awarded Projects continue to advance innovative research across the region.

More information [here](#).

### 2025 Working Group Awarded Projects

In 2025, the Atlantic Node launched a funding call focused on its three Working Group Themes, Concurrent Disorders, Youth and Substance Use, and Rural Access and Telehealth. The resulting 2025 Working Group Awarded Projects reflect evolving research priorities across the Atlantic provinces.

Learn more [here](#).

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## Sex and Gender-based Analysis+ Webinar Series

The Atlantic Node hosted the second session of its two-part webinar series on **Sex and Gender-based Analysis+ (SGBA+) in Substance Use Research**.

SGBA+ is an essential framework that examines how sex, gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and other intersecting factors influence health outcomes. Integrating SGBA+ helps researchers design more inclusive and effective interventions that respond to the diverse needs of affected populations.

The full webinar series is available [here](#).



## Publications of Note

Atlantic Node members have contributed several significant publications in 2025, including:

- *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on opioid toxicity mortality rates in Nova Scotia: An interrupted time series analysis (2009–2023)*. (Canadian Journal of Public Health)
- *Mapping the landscape: A scoping review of evaluated substance use harm reduction programs for youth*. (Journal of Drug Education)
- *Patterns of opioid prescribing to opioid-naïve patients after surgical and emergency care: A population-based cross-sectional study using linked administrative databases in Nova Scotia (2017–2019)*. (Drug and Alcohol Review)
- *Association between e-cigarette exposure and ventilation homogeneity in young adults: A cross-sectional study*. (European Respiratory Journal)

These studies reflect the Node’s ongoing commitment to advancing evidence that informs policy, clinical practice and harm reeducation approaches across the Atlantic provinces.

## Indigenous Advisory Council Initiative

The CRISM Atlantic Indigenous Advisory Council is developing a guiding document that outlines principles and protocols to support meaningful, respectful, and inclusive engagement with Indigenous communities and partners. This work will help strengthen relationships and ensure that future research and collaboration reflect Indigenous priorities, knowledge, and ways of working.



## Rural Access & Telehealth Working Group

The Atlantic Node’s Rural Access and Telehealth Working Group is developing an addictions services gap assessment to better understand service needs and access channeled across all four Atlantic provinces.

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## INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM

The Indigenous Engagement Platform continues to advance its work through the establishment of four Intergenerational Circles, supporting knowledge sharing and relationship-building across communities. The next in-person spring meeting is scheduled for May 4-6, 2026, in Montréal, Québec.

The IEP has launched its new website at [www.crism-IEP.ca](http://www.crism-IEP.ca), where the [November newsletter](#) is now available.

In November, IEP representatives attended the [CCSA Conference in Halifax](#), where the [Thunderbird Partnership Foundation](#) presented their Honouring Our Strengths framework, and Indigenous-led model supporting wellness, culture and strengthens based approaches to substance use and mental health.



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