

ALCOHOL MORTALITY & HOSPITALIZATIONS

Alcohol-Related deaths increased by **17.6%** and hospitalizations by **8.1%** in Canada (2020 to 2022)

While most businesses closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, retail sales of alcohol were declared “essential” in Canada, and retailers were allowed to remain open, permitting carry-out and home delivery of alcohol.¹ One reason for these decisions was to prevent the healthcare system from becoming overwhelmed by alcohol withdrawal cases, typically from cases of alcohol use disorder (AUD).¹ AUD is a “medical condition characterized by an impaired ability to stop or control alcohol use despite adverse social, occupational, or health consequences.”²

This Mental Health and Addiction Brief shows the results of an interrupted time series study (2025) examining the impact of the pandemic on alcohol-related (including those from AUD) deaths and hospitalizations in Canada from January 2016 to December 2022.¹ An interrupted time series is a study where the outcome (alcohol-related deaths and hospitalizations) is evaluated before and after, or during, an event (COVID-19). Overall, the study found there was an increase of both alcohol-related deaths and hospitalizations during the pandemic in Canada (Figure 1).¹ Prairie provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta) experienced the highest excess alcohol-related deaths and hospitalizations.¹ Youth and young adults were affected more by alcohol consumption than older adults.¹ Alcohol-related hospitalizations were three times higher in women than men, while death rates were 2.5 times higher in men.¹ In 2020, a medical examiner report on substance use toxicity deaths in Alberta found that alcohol was present in 41% of deaths and was the third most detected substance in individuals that died from unintentional substance toxicity.³ Recovery is possible and deciding to stop or reduce drinking alcohol is the first step to recovery. Recovery is a continuous journey of changing your lifestyle and can be challenging (Figure 2). In a Canadian survey (2017), 90.7% of participants rated their quality of life as positive while in recovery or recovering from an alcohol or substance use addiction.⁴ If you are in Alberta and are struggling with an AUD, you can get meaningful help today.^{a,b,c}

Figure 1. Alcohol-related deaths and hospitalizations in Canada aged ≥ 15 years¹

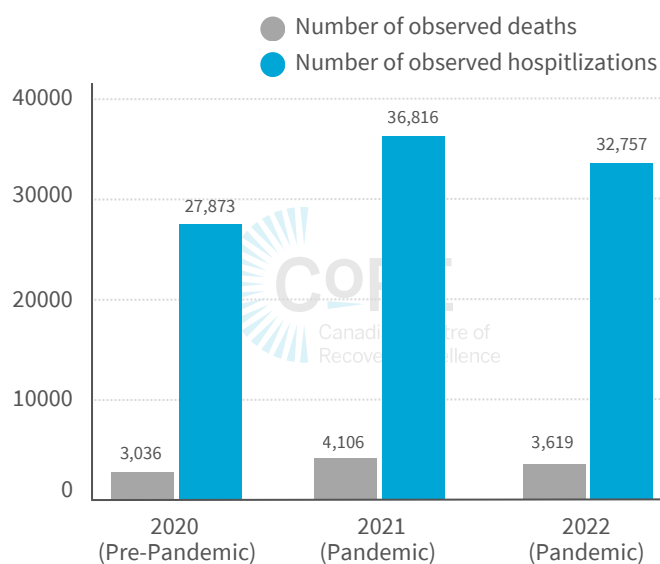


Figure 2. Starting the Recovery Journey

To stop drinking alcohol or keep its use at less harmful levels and to help manage stress, the following tips may be helpful:

- **Manage your everyday feelings, stress, and problems as they happen**, so they do not build up.
- **Build and create a trusted support network** to help you watch for warning signals and help you manage stress in your recovery journey.^{a,b,c}
- Join an **alcoholics anonymous (AA) and/or 12-step support program**—it can be helpful for many people.⁵
- Seek out treatment medications that can help reduce alcohol use.
- **Identify, plan, and find solutions for high-risk situations**, so you can remain confident and in control as they present themselves.

¹ <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.241146>
² <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/understanding-alcohol-use-disorder>
³ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/50cdc6d2-e764-47b0-a29d-3982ae6ddb39/resource/a51ad386-5338-4304-88bc-46ef8f814f56/download/mha-substance-toxicity-deaths-alberta-2020-review-medical-examiner-data.pdf>
⁴ <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/CCSA-Life-in-Recovery-from-Addiction-Report-2017-en.pdf>
⁵ <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD012880.pub2/full>

^a Addiction Helpline at 1-866-332-2322

^b 211 Alberta: <https://ab.211.ca/>

^c Treatment available: Virtual Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (V-RAAM)