



# Knowing Your Limit

## *Alcohol and Persons with Disabilities*

**T**HE ACCESS TO RECOVERY (ATR) project is about helping to increase the supports and resources available to people with disabilities who are seeking assistance with a substance use issue. In the spring of 2006, Independent Living Centres across Canada hosted a number of focus groups to gather input from people with disabilities about how substance use affects their lives. When asked why they believe people use drugs (or other substances), consumers used phrases such as “to numb the pain” and “to escape reality.”

In 2002, over 600,000 Canadians were dependent on alcohol.<sup>1</sup> Part of alcohol’s allure is its initial ability to help a person relax. It can relieve tension and reduce inhibitions, making people feel more at ease and outgoing.<sup>2</sup> For many people with disabilities, the opportunity to feel less pain and anxiety (as examples) can make alcohol even more appealing.

Problems arise when unhealthy habits or harmful patterns result from this type of drinking. The Canadian Psychological Association explains that *alcohol abuse* occurs when there are ongoing negative consequences from drinking, while *alcohol dependency* (alcoholism) is more severe and occurs when people have problems stopping drinking.<sup>3</sup>

### Drinking and Depression

According to a Statistics Canada report on alcohol and illicit drug dependence (2002), alcoholism is linked to depression. Heavy drinking can lead to depression, and depression can lead to heavy drinking.<sup>4</sup> As we learn more through the ATR project, this is clearly a cycle that many people with disabilities experience. Depression was identified within the focus groups as both a factor leading to substance abuse, and a factor that resulted from substance abuse.

### An Unhealthy Mix

Another issue of great concern is the danger alcohol poses when mixed with certain prescription medications. In some cases, this can lead to intensified effects of the medication, as well as more severe and additional side effects. For example, a person may become drowsy, dizzy or light-headed, and may have trouble concentrating. Consult your doctor or pharmacist.

### Where to Find Help

If there are issues related to your alcohol consumption that you would like to address, these resources may help:

- **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health’s Information Centre** at 1-800-463-6273. Evaluate your drinking with the questionnaire at [http://www.camh.net/About\\_Addiction\\_Mental\\_Health/Drug\\_and\\_Addiction\\_Information/evaluate\\_your\\_drinking.html](http://www.camh.net/About_Addiction_Mental_Health/Drug_and_Addiction_Information/evaluate_your_drinking.html).
- **Alcoholics Anonymous** offers help in every province. Visit [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org).
- **The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission** has lots of information on their website. Visit [www.aadac.com](http://www.aadac.com).

*For further information about the Access to Recovery project, visit [www.cailc.ca](http://www.cailc.ca), or e-mail [substanceabuse@cailc.ca](mailto:substanceabuse@cailc.ca). To read previous articles, visit [www.abilities.ca](http://www.abilities.ca), select *Abilities Magazine*, then *The Forum*, and then the *Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres*.*

*Note: In the Fall 2006 issue of *Abilities*, the author of the article “Smoke Signals” should have been printed as Donna Greene. *Abilities* apologizes for the error.*



### An Ounce of Prevention

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health offers helpful tips for low-risk drinking:<sup>5</sup>

- Know what a standard drink is: 12 oz. of beer, 5 oz. of wine, 3 oz. fortified wine or 1.5 oz. of liquor (40% alcohol).
- Keep track of how much you drink – daily and weekly.
- Never drink and drive – or ride with a driver who has been drinking.
- Don’t start drinking for health reasons. To keep your heart healthy, eat better, exercise more and don’t smoke.
- Don’t drink if you are pregnant or are planning to become pregnant.
- Be a responsible host – encourage your guests to follow these guidelines.
- Talk to your kids about alcohol.
- Find out about programs and policies that support low-risk drinking.
- Develop an alcohol policy for your home, workplace, school or community organization.

1 Stats Canada (2004) Catalogue 82-003. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/82-003-SIE/2004000/pdf/82-003-SIE20040007447.pdf>

2 CAMH, [http://www.camh.net/About\\_Addiction\\_Mental\\_Health/Drug\\_and\\_Addiction\\_Information/alcohol\\_dyk.html](http://www.camh.net/About_Addiction_Mental_Health/Drug_and_Addiction_Information/alcohol_dyk.html)

3 Canadian Psychological Association, <http://www.cpa.ca/publications/yourhealthpsychologyworksheets/alcoholism/>

4 Stats Canada (2004) Catalogue 82-003, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/82-003-SIE/2004000/pdf/82-003-SIE20040007447.pdf>

5 [http://www.camh.net/About\\_Addiction\\_Mental\\_Health/Drug\\_and\\_Addiction\\_Information/low\\_risk\\_drinking\\_guidelines.html](http://www.camh.net/About_Addiction_Mental_Health/Drug_and_Addiction_Information/low_risk_drinking_guidelines.html)