



Pulse

Canada's tipplers cutting back

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse says the amount of alcohol consumed in Canada has declined substantially over the last decade. Based on sales of alcoholic beverages, the 10.9 L of absolute alcohol consumed by the average Canadian adult in 1981/82 fell to 7.6 L in 1992/93. More than half of the alcohol consumed in 1992/93 (56.5%) was found in beer.

The Yukon recorded the highest level of consumption

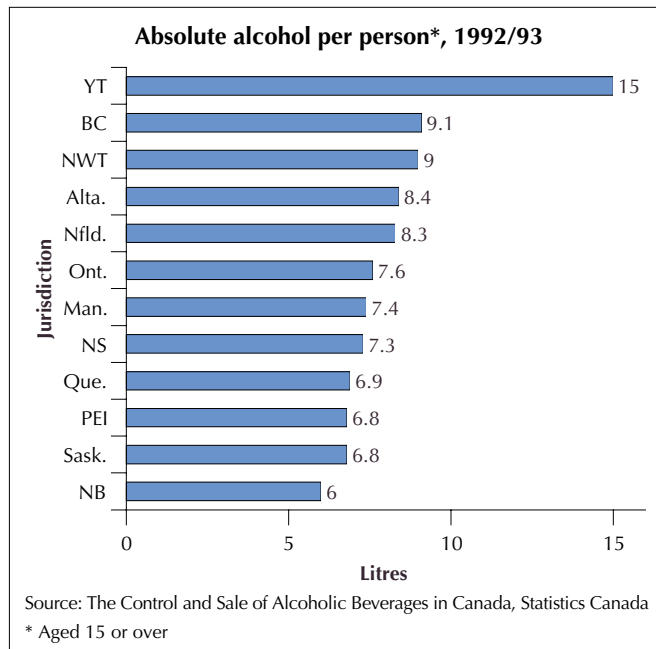
in 1992/93, with annual sales of 15 L of absolute alcohol per person aged 15 and older. However, this number may be misleading because of the army of tourists that invades the Yukon every year, increasing the amount of alcohol sold but not the base population. Next on the list were British Columbia (9.1 L) and the Northwest Territories (9 L). The lowest consumption level was found in New Brunswick, 6 L annually.

Surveys of individual Canadians usually point to lower overall consumption rates, primarily due to underestimation of consumption by heavy drinkers. The 1992/93 sales figures set average consumption at 8.6 drinks per week, compared with the self-reported level provided by the 1993 General Social Survey, 4.2 drinks per week.

That survey also showed that men consume twice as much per week as women (5.9 drinks versus 2.3) and that the heaviest drinking is done by those aged between 18 and 24, with an average of more than 5 drinks consumed per week.

By employment group, the 1993 survey indicated that those who are seeking work drink the most (5.9 drinks per week) followed by unskilled workers (5). Students recorded a low average number of drinks per week (3.8), but tended to drink heavily when they did imbibe: 63% of current drinkers had consumed 5 or more drinks on at least one occasion in the past year, compared with 40% of professional workers.

A 1994 survey indicated that Canadians in the highest income group were most likely to be drinkers (86.1%), compared with 64% for lower-middle and low-income groups. — *Lynda Buske*



New money injected into bone marrow registry

The recent doubling of the budget for Canada's Unrelated Bone Marrow Donor Registry to \$3 million annually was long overdue, the chair of the registry's national advisory committee says.

Dr. Campbell Hobson notes that funding had remained the same for the past 7 years, despite a threefold increase in the demand for service.

The registry, which is part of Canadian Blood Services (CBS), operates worldwide as an electronic DNA matching service for bone marrow donation requests. Close to 175 000 Canadians are registered and 3 million potential donors are linked worldwide. About 300 Canadians,

twice as many as 4 years ago, now donate bone marrow each year. When a match is requested, the registry's national coordinating centre in Vancouver receives DNA profiles from donor centres in every major Canadian city.

Although Hobson says children are the most common recipients of bone marrow, increasing numbers of adults with acquired and hereditary diseases are approaching the registry as well. With this kind of growth, says Hobson, the registry "definitely has to have a dedicated, specialized management." A study 2 years ago found a "very significant disproportion in the size and function of the

registry compared to blood services."

Hobson would like to see the registry become a semi-autonomous or free-standing, not-for-profit agency. He argues that it doesn't make sense for bone marrow services to be part of the CBS because the registry does not deal with blood products. Last June, the registry's request for separate status was rejected by the CBS board. However, the Krever inquiry into Canada's blood system recommended that CBS concern itself solely with blood services. "I suspect that it will be necessary for them . . . to justify retention of the bone marrow registry," says Hobson. — *© Heather Kent*