

PUBLIC HEALTH

The York Region Methamphetamine Strategy

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Since early 2000, the use of methamphetamine has spread from Western to Eastern Canada. The use of methamphetamine is low in the general Canadian population; however, higher rates can be seen within certain groups (see Box 1 for sources of information). The Internet has resulted in easy access to the ingredients and instructions used to produce methamphetamine. Although methamphetamine use is currently less prevalent than the use of marijuana, ecstasy, crack, cocaine and heroin across Canada, its low cost, easy availability and higher dependency levels have led health officials and police to prepare for the dangers that increased use could bring.

According to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, between 1999 and 2004, the highest number of laboratories producing methamphetamine in Canada were located in British Columbia, followed by Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.¹ Table 1 shows the number of identified and dismantled methamphetamine laboratories in Canada in 2005.²

The key criminal incentive to becoming involved in the production and distribution of methamphetamine is profit. The money-making potential of trafficking this drug is attractive to organized-crime groups. By studying trends of methamphetamine and other illicit drugs in communities in Canada and the United States, law enforcement professionals anticipate the use and production of the drug will increase in Ontario in coming years.

The experience of the police in the York Region, a jurisdiction of about 1 000 000 people in the Greater

Key points

- The York Regional Police and the York Region Health Services Substance Abuse Prevention Program have developed the York Region Methamphetamine Strategy to reduce the production and use of methamphetamine in this region.
- This strategy is based on prevention, treatment, enforcement and harm reduction.
- In addition to promoting realistic prevention and education programs, this strategy requires that treatment services be readily available and should help reduce harm to communities and individuals.
- The York Region Methamphetamine Strategy includes 27 initiatives, including a federal crown presentencing package, community forums, curriculum and intervention consultations, emergency service partner training, retail training and parent workshops.

Toronto Area, puts the emerging societal impact of methamphetamine laboratories into perspective. In 2001, York Regional Police made 3 seizures of small amounts of methamphetamine that were intended for personal use. In 2007, the York Regional Police made 25 seizures of methamphetamine totalling 3445 g. This includes methamphetamine seized from drug dealers associated with criminal organizations. In contrast, in 2007 the York Regional Police executed search warrants at 83 indoor marijuana grow operations and seized 36 844 marijuana plants and 200 kg of marijuana. One large-scale ecstasy seizure, coupled with several laboratory and street-level seizures, led to the removal of 958 318 ecstasy pills from the streets.

In 2006, as part of the York Regional Police's overall war against illicit drugs, the Drugs and Vice Enforcement Unit executed 246 search warrants, arrested 338 people, laid 960 charges and seized \$1 091 133 related to drug trafficking and production. This represents a substantial increase in drug enforcement activities by this unit compared with 2005. Specifically, there was a 41% in-

crease in the number of search warrants, 36% increase in arrests, 25% increase in charges and a 237% increase in cash and securities seized from drug manufacturers and traffickers.

A number of police units across Canada are preparing to combat an increase in methamphetamine use. In York Region, we have recognized that criminal behaviour is only 1 element of methamphetamine use and production. In order to achieve real success, we have adopted a multipronged approach to address predisposing conditions and concerns associated with health, child welfare and access to treatment, education and awareness.

Working as partners, the York Regional Police and the York Region Health Services Substance Abuse Prevention Program jointly developed the York Region Methamphetamine Strategy to proactively address the production of methamphetamine and reduce its use within this region. This partnership supports the sharing of perspectives along the harm-reduction continuum ranging from abstinence to abuse. Key stakeholders include elected officials, school boards, the courts, at-risk communities and private industry.

The York Region Methamphetamine Strategy is based on the 4-pillar approach of prevention, treatment, enforcement and harm reduction in *A Framework for Action, A Four-Pillar Approach to Drug Problems in Vancouver*.³ This strategy ensures a contin-

Box 1: Sources of information about methamphetamine use in Canada

- Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse: www.ccsa.ca/ccsa
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: www.camh.net
- Toronto Drug Strategy: www.toronto.ca/health/drugstrategy

Table 1: Identified and dismantled methamphetamine laboratories in Canada in 2005

| Province | No. of dismantled laboratories |
|------------------|--------------------------------|
| British Columbia | 20 |
| Ontario | 6 |
| Alberta | 2 |
| Saskatchewan | 1 |
| Total | 29 |

Source: Department of Justice.²

uum of care for those suffering from substance addiction and for affected communities. In addition to promoting realistic prevention and education programs, it insists that treatment services be readily available and helps to reduce harm to communities and individuals. The framework recognizes that enforcement is crucial to reduce drug-related criminal activity and to coordinate a response to the negative effects of the drug trade on local communities by supporting public health programs and referring offenders to drug services. The strategy advocates a balance between public order and public health. The York Region Methamphetamine Strategy includes 27 initiatives including a federal crown presentencing package, community fo-

rums, curriculum and intervention consultations, emergency service partner training, retail training and parent workshops.

Preventing crime, assisting victims of crime and working with the community are core policing values and responsibilities. Production and distribution of methamphetamine and its use as a commodity by members of organized crime is of great concern. In addition, the physical and psychological dependency it creates will increase demand for methamphetamine, which will lead to many associated health issues. The most effective means of fighting this is by working collaboratively with the community and health service professionals to educate potential methamphetamine users and dependent indi-

viduals about its highly addictive properties, providing treatment to those who have become addicted and to suppress the supply of methamphetamine through active and intelligence-led strategic police enforcement.

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The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and not of the Regional Municipality of York.




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