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Tips for Writing an Abstract

What Is an Abstract?

An abstract is a brief summary of your work. Its purpose is to inform the reader about your work in a concise manner. This work could be a research project, a workshop, a program or intervention, or information or lessons learned about an experience, process or policy.

Steps for Producing an Abstract

Step 1 is to choose a title. The title should be simple, descriptive and not too long. It should include the idea behind the work or the result or purpose of the work.

Step 2 is to choose a format for the abstract that suits the work you are describing. Abstracts typically have a certain structure to convey their information. Although the format may differ slightly depending on the type of work (i.e., research, program or policy), the main components are largely the same. The exception is when the work will be presented in the form of a workshop (rather than a presentation or poster). In this case, the format for the abstract is quite different.

The following table presents examples of the different formats for an abstract. It contains the questions you will need to answer before you write the abstract, as well as the headings that will be expected in your abstract for Issues of Substance.

Research Abstract	Program or Policy Abstract
What will the audience learn from it?	
Learning Objectives: What will the people who attend your presentation or poster learn?	Learning Objectives: What will the people who attend your presentation or poster learn?
Why did you do it?	
Background: What is the problem being studied? Objectives: What is the goal of your work?	Background: What are the problems that motivated your work? How was the need identified? Objectives: What is the goal of your work?
How did you do it?	
Methods: Describe the details of how you did your research (e.g., conducted focus groups, interviewed 23 students, performed a statistical analysis of data, etc.).	Methods: Describe the project, process, intervention, experience, service or policy that was created, designed or implemented.
What did you find out?	
Results: Provide a summary of your main findings.	Results: Outline your key points or findings. Describe what was learned from this work.
How is this useful and to whom?	
Conclusion: What impact does your work have? Describe the relevance and implications of your results.	Conclusion: What are the next steps? What are the recommendations based on this work?



Workshop Abstract
What will the audience learn from it?
Learning Objectives: What will the people who attend your workshop learn?
Why are you doing it?
Description: What are the problems that motivated your workshop? How was the need identified? What is the goal of the workshop?
How will you do it?
Interactive Formats or Processes: Describe the details and structure of the workshop.

Step 3 is to read the evaluation criteria before you start writing your abstract. The criteria can be found in the [Call for Submissions](#).

Step 4 is to write the abstract.

Examples of Effective Abstracts

Example 1 (Research Abstract)

Title

Life in Recovery from Addiction in Canada: Examining the Different Pathways to Recovery

Learning Objectives

To increase understanding about the experiences of individuals in recovery from addiction.

Background

Recovery is unique to the individual and very little evidence exists about the experiences of individuals in recovery in Canada.

Objectives

The aim of the current study was to address this gap by conducting the first-ever survey of Life in Recovery from Addiction in Canada.

Methods

The current study used an online survey that comprised both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Results

There were 855 individuals ($M_{age} = 47$ years) who completed the survey; 45.7% were male, 53% female and 1.3% other. Of respondents, 78.9% identified as Caucasian; other ethnicities were also reported, including 8.4% of individuals who identified as Indigenous. Among participants, 82.5% indicated that they experienced one or more barriers to initiating recovery, such as not knowing where to go for help (35.8%), long delays for treatment (25.0%) and the costs of recovery services (21.6%). Once beginning recovery, 51.2% of participants reported never relapsing back into addiction, 14.3% reported a single relapse, 19.4% two to five relapses and 15.0% reported six or more relapses. Approximately 20% of participants reported using mediation-assisted treatment and 91.8% reported using a 12-step mutual support group to assist with recovery. Qualitative responses about participants' definitions of recovery and experiences of stigma or discrimination will be presented.



Conclusions

This survey will be used to educate healthcare practitioners, decision makers and the public about the experiences of individuals in recovery. The Implications of this research will be discussed.

Example 2 (Policy Abstract)

Title

Regulating Cannabis: Through a Public Health Lens

Learning Objectives

Increase awareness and understanding of the public health implications of the different regulatory models for cannabis distribution at municipal, provincial/territorial and national levels, and provide a model for their evaluation.

Background

The commercialization and promotion of cannabis use is a key concern within the public health community as Canada moves toward legalization. The public health impact will be strongly determined by the distribution model(s) adopted at the jurisdictional level.

Objectives

- To understand non-profit and public health oriented models for cannabis distribution and access under a legal regulatory framework;
- To explore the potential application of these models in a Canadian context; and
- To evaluate the public health implications of the models currently being put forward.

Methods

The analysis of non-profit distribution models was informed by a review of relevant literature. Implications within the current Canadian context were developed via additional analysis of the literature, including available international data on cannabis regulatory systems and best practices in the regulation of other substances, as well as consultation with experts and key stakeholders.

Results

The anticipated regulations do not reflect or support a purely non-profit distribution model. However, a for-profit retail system can incorporate components of the non-profit models reviewed in order to reduce negative public health impacts.

Conclusions

Anticipated impacts will vary according to model implemented and level of government (municipal, provincial/territorial and federal). A moderated panel representing municipal, provincial/territorial and national perspectives will provide an evaluative comparison of proposed regulatory models across Canada vis-à-vis the anticipated public health implications.

Example 3 (Workshop Abstract)

Title

Becoming Gender and Trauma Informed (Part 1 of a 2-Part Workshop)



Learning Objectives

Participants will have the opportunity to:

- Learn about exemplars of trauma- and gender-informed approaches being integrated into health promotion, harm reduction and substance use treatment settings across Canada;
- Discuss with researchers, substance use system planners and service providers the process of co-developing materials, programming and training that incorporates these approaches in their work; and
- Engage in the hands-on development of an information sheet on why gender-transformative and trauma-informed principles are important to integrate in substance use field in Canada.

Description

In the midst of a serious opiate crisis, cannabis legalization, ongoing binge drinking patterns, and new nicotine delivery mechanisms, there is an immediate need in Canada to understand the sex and gender related implications of these trends, and how to mitigate these, and other equity-related issues, in our work in substance use practice and system design. The presenters and facilitators of this workshop are researchers, service providers and health system leaders engaged in a pan-Canadian project (funded by Health Canada) with the goal of developing and testing how trauma informed and gender informed/transformational principles and practices that can be integrated into existing substance use treatment, harm reduction, and health promotion/prevention materials and programs. This workshop provides the opportunity to learn about the content of this cutting edge work.

Interactive Formats or Processes

Using posted research and practice snippets, in a small group exercise participants will co-create a Q&A sheet on trauma and gender informed approaches to share with their colleagues when they return to their work settings.