



# Key Messages about Drug-Impaired Driving in Rural and Remote Areas

## What we did

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) collaborated with road safety teams from the governments of the Yukon and the Northwest Territories to develop impaired driving messages for people living in rural and remote areas. CCSA consulted with stakeholders from the two territories to understand the challenges and needs that should be addressed in such messages.

## The issue

Rural and remote areas lack access to resources like public transportation that are available in urban areas. Such gaps affect a jurisdiction's ability to address impaired driving. For example, although most provinces in Canada have successfully reduced the rates of alcohol-impaired driving, it is still a major issue in Canada's North. For instance, in the Yukon the rate of alcohol-impaired driving is six times the national average (Statistics Canada, 2015). While drug-impaired driving is becoming a concern, rural and remote areas are still struggling to address alcohol-impaired driving.

## Challenges for rural and remote areas

Rural and remote jurisdictions encounter challenges to increasing awareness and concern about impaired driving, which influences the number of impaired drivers on the road. There are a number of reasons for these challenges:

- There are ingrained attitudes and behaviours that influence the perceived acceptability of impaired driving.
- Many rural and remote areas lack alternative transportation options, such as transit and taxis.
- Off-road vehicles are commonly used for transportation and recreation in remote areas. They are seldom used on patrolled roads, but rather on forest trails and private property, where police presence is limited. Police vehicles are slower on these trails than off-road vehicles.
- From a geographical perspective, rural and remote locations face challenges related to personnel for enforcement, resources for educational efforts and available data.
- There is a lack of administrative sanctions related to impaired driving.



## Suggestions for public awareness campaigns

Through consultations, CCSA considered possible approaches to combat the issue of drug-impaired driving in rural areas using public awareness campaigns. Messaging should target specific populations, such as those who rely on off-road vehicles for transportation. The following messages were developed:

- A designated driver is someone who does not drink or use substances before driving.
- Alcohol and cannabis have the ability to impair a driver. You will face the same charges whether it is alcohol, cannabis or other drugs.
- Just because a driver might not look impaired, does not mean he or she is fit to drive. Consider another option home if you are concerned about the sobriety of your driver.
- Impaired-driving charges apply to the operation of all motorized vehicles, including boats and off-road vehicles such as ATVs and snowmobiles.
- Emergency services need ample time to reach remote areas after a crash. In winter, the cold can be just as fatal as the crash, so make sure your vehicle has an emergency kit.

## Summary

Many rural and remote areas are struggling with changing the culture around impaired driving. While discussions with stakeholders included positioning the issue of impaired driving as a community responsibility, barriers still exist to providing practical alternatives to the behaviour. Stakeholders also suggested the need for coordinating efforts among community members and other like-minded organizations to ensure consistent messaging across the board. Progress around such policy issues as administrative sanctions and increased enforcement is required to achieve progress in reducing the number of impaired drivers in rural and remote areas.

## References

Statistics Canada. (2016). *Impaired driving in Canada, 2015*. Retrieved from [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14679-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14679-eng.htm).

