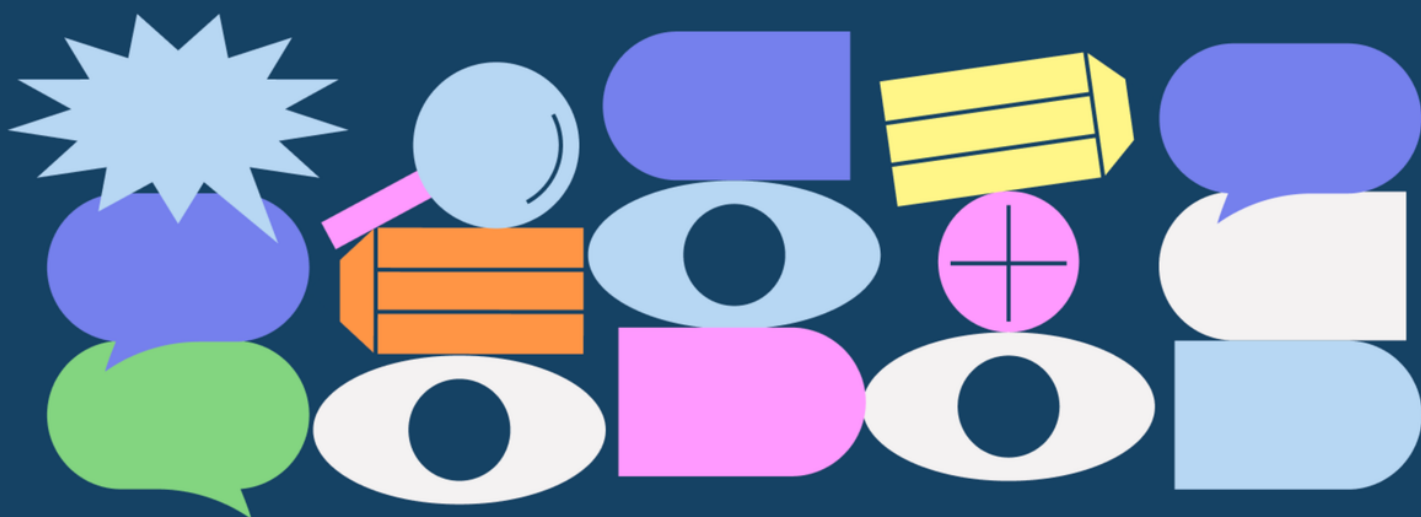


ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2025





Our vision is to ensure that all young people live their lives free of problematic substance use.

The Reality Behind our Work

The work we do at Substance is grounded in a deep awareness of what families are facing. These are not distant statistics - they describe the young people in our schools, our neighbourhoods, and our homes. Understanding the scale of what families are navigating is an important step toward having the conversations that can make a difference.



In 2023, street drugs became the leading cause of death among youth age 10-18 in Western Canada.

Canadian Paediatric Society, August 2023.

Young people (aged 15 to 24) are the segment of the population with the largest increase in hospital care related to substance use and overdoses in the country.

Public Health Agency of Canada 2024



21% of grade 7-8 students reported using non-prescribed opioids to get high, even before tobacco, alcohol or cannabis.



Ontario Student Drug Use & Health Survey 2023

Non-medical use of sedatives among youth in grades 7-12 has quadrupled.

Ontario Student Drug Use & Health Survey 2023



Over one third of youth in Canada living with a mental health issue reported an unmet need for healthcare.

Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth (CHCSY) 2024



11% of post-secondary students report using illegal drugs in the past 12 months.

CPADS 2024-2025

The use of over the counter medicines to get high among youth in grades 7-12 increased three-fold between 2014 and 2024 to 10.2%.

Ontario Student Drug Use & Health Survey 2023



A message from our Board Chair



The impact of substance use on young people and their families remains one of the most pressing challenges facing our communities. At the Board level, our conviction has never been stronger: when the adults in young people's lives are well-informed, young people are better equipped to make safer choices.

2025 was a year of meaningful growth and significant change. After careful deliberation, our Board supported the decision to evolve our name and identity from Drug Free Kids Canada to Substance. This change reflects our confidence in the depth of expertise our team has built over the years and our commitment to remaining relevant and credible to the families we serve and the professionals we work with. We're proud of how thoughtfully this transition was managed.

The numbers in this report speak to an organization with real momentum. A **236% increase in audience reach** through our education sessions, **219,000 active website users (up 38%)** and **\$1.89 million in earned media value** are not small achievements for an organization of our size. They reflect disciplined stewardship of the resources our donors and partners entrust to us and a team that consistently delivers more with what it has.

To our donors, partners, and media supporters: your belief in this mission makes our impact possible. The Board is deeply grateful and equally committed to ensuring that every dollar is directed where it creates the most impact for youth and families across Canada.

As we move into the next chapter, I would like to thank Chantal Vallerand for her passion and dedication to Substance as she passes the role of Executive Director to Betsy Chaly. Betsy brings a wealth of experience and fresh perspectives that we are thrilled to have guiding the organization forward.

We look forward to entering 2026 with a strong foundation, a clear identity, and a great deal still to do

Regards,
Tom Kennedy, Board Chair

Our Commitment to Lasting Change



This year marked an important step in the evolution of our organization with the introduction of our new name, Substance.

More than a rebrand, it reflects what has always guided our work. Substance is about talking about substance use with clarity, credibility, and purpose. It is about ensuring that families and educators have access to current, evidence based information so they can have informed, meaningful conversations about substance use and support young people in making healthy decisions.

Over the past year, we continued to see the impact of that approach. Through our workshops, presentations, and online resources, we reached more than 15,000 people. Behind that number are parents looking for guidance, educators seeking the right words, and families working to navigate complex realities with confidence.

This work is only possible because of the people who stand behind it. My sincere thanks to our staff, Board of Directors, Advisory Council, donors, and partners for their ongoing commitment and trust.

As I step into my next professional chapter, I do so with great confidence in the future of the organization. I am pleased to pass the reins to Betsy Chaly as Executive Director. Her leadership, insight, and dedication to this work will ensure that Substance continues to grow and serve communities across the country.

With gratitude,
Chantal Vallerand, Executive Director

A New Name. A New Look.

Drug Free Kids Canada becomes Substance. Learn about it. Talk about it.



2025 marks a defining moment in our evolution. This year, we introduced a new name and modern visual identity that better reflect the core focus of our mission and the depth of our expertise. This transformation was thoughtful and intentional.

Working closely with **FCB Montreal** and **MauBau**, we built the new brand from the ground up—from strategy and language to design and early rollout. We are incredibly grateful for their creativity, dedication, and belief in our mission. Their partnership turned a bold idea into a brand we are truly proud to put into the world.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1XgbgkMyeY>

Our new name is a true double entendre: Substance refers not only to the substances themselves, but to the depth, credibility, and relevance of what we offer. Warmer and more approachable in tone, the brand is designed to ease the hesitation many parents feel and support more open, confident conversations with the young people in their lives.

Our approach remains grounded in three core pillars—inform, engage, and support—ensuring that youth, families, and professionals have access to credible information, meaningful connection and compassionate guidance.

Expanding Our Digital Reach

We introduced new digital initiatives in 2025 that are designed to meet parents and families where they are—online, in real time, and in ways that feel relevant and engaging.

Together, these initiatives expand how we inform and engage—offering accessible, evidence-based content that supports informed decision-making and encourages ongoing, open dialogue.



Real Talks, our e-learning modules, create an interactive space for parents to explore real-life scenarios and practice open, relatable, and non-judgmental conversations with their teens about substance use.

MindBlowing! is a series of short, animated videos created with Savoir Media. This engaging series builds substance use awareness through compelling, easy-to-understand content that breaks down complex topics and challenges common misconceptions about substances, engaging both youth and adults and supporting family conversations.

talksubstance.org The website's growing reach reflects the role it has as a trusted digital hub - bringing together clear, credible information and practical tools in one accessible place.

In 2025, our website reached 219,000 users
and generated over 330,000 pageviews.

Designed for both desktop and mobile, the Substance website offers up-to-date stats and evidence-based content on youth substance use and its impacts on the mental and physical health of young people. It also translates complex information into practical guidance, helping parents and other trusted adults feel more confident about starting and continuing conversations with the young people in their lives.

Webinars/Live Presentations

Reaching more families through Education & Outreach

Over the year, we delivered **220** in-person presentations, virtual webinars, and community events, reaching **15,881** students, parents, educators, and professionals across the country, including British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.



A 236% year-over-year increase in audience reach signals a growing need by for information and support.

Growing impact through education and connection

These sessions provided practical, evidence-informed guidance on youth substance use, along with tools to support open, informed conversations about substance use with young people.

We are very grateful to our key partners for their support of these community initiatives:

BMO Bank of Montreal
Canada Post Community Foundation
McCain Foundation
Odlum Brown
Slaight Family Foundation

What participants
are saying

"I liked that there was a focus on harm reduction, person-centered language, and was facilitated with empathy."

"The presentation did a good job of having an honest conversation about substances, without bringing in judgment or negativity."

"Very informative. Clear and concise, with strong data and engaging delivery. You can tell there is genuine care for young people."

The Parent Support Hub

Compassionate, direct support for families when it's needed most.

When a parent suspects their child may be struggling with substance use, the moments that follow can feel isolating and overwhelming. The Parent Support Hub exists for exactly those moments—a steady, compassionate presence available whenever families need it most.

Powered by **TELUS Health** and made possible through the generous support of **Power Corporation of Canada** and the **TD Ready Commitment**, this free, confidential service connects parents and caregivers across Canada with a dedicated support team and professional counsellors available by phone or online chat, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This year, 178 parents connected with care representatives through the chat or phone line. And 45 counselling sessions supported families navigating substance use concerns.

For a confidential service supporting families at their most vulnerable moments, each connection represents meaningful impact. Like a first aid kit, its greatest value isn't measured only in how often it's used—it's in knowing it's there. For the families who did reach out this year, the support they received was personal, timely, and grounded in real expertise. Every one of those conversations represents a parent who chose to reach out rather than face it alone.

We are committed to ensuring this resource remains available, accessible, and ready for every family that needs it.



Impactful Initiatives

Collaborating with community partners to create safer environments for youth

For more than a decade, we have worked alongside community and corporate partners to deliver initiatives that help families create safer home environments. Our flagship initiative, **Together for Safer Homes**, raises awareness about the importance of safely storing and disposing of medications to reduce the risk of harm to youth.



We are grateful for the ongoing support of our partners for this year's campaign, including **Rexall**, the **Health Products Stewardship Association**, and **Innovative Medicines Canada**.

We also thank pharmacists, health professionals, our media partners, police services, and behind-the-scenes contributors whose collaboration extended the reach and impact of this work.



Raising Awareness

Valued media partnerships: supporting families together

In 2025, Substance maintained strong national visibility across broadcast and digital channels, driven by three major communications moments: the launch of the Together for Safer Homes campaign, the rollout of our new brand identity, and the release of the Mind Blowing! video series.

These initiatives were widely amplified thanks to our media partners, helping connect parents, caregivers, and professionals with the information they need most.

“Not Everyone Knows”

As part of the Together for Safer Homes initiative, Substance launched a national 13-week radio campaign, which ran from September 8 to December 7, 2025, reaching families across Canada in both official languages.

The 30-second PSA aired across English and French radio networks, timed strategically to coincide with our rebrand from Drug Free Kids Canada to Substance. The campaign gave us an opportunity to introduce our new identity, while reinforcing the importance of drug safety at home.

The response from our media partners was overwhelmingly positive, with many providing additional on-air mentions to promote the Together for Safer Homes activation event at Rexall pharmacies across the country on September 19.

Campaign Reach - Over 13 weeks:

- 212 radio stations across Canada
- 32,909 English-language airings
- 8,764 French-language airings

\$1.89 million
in media value

Beyond the Airwaves

Through our digital platforms, including social media and e-newsletters, we connected families and youth-serving professionals with practical, timely information. Also, Chantal Vallerand, Executive Director, was interviewed by national and regional news outlets about substance use by youth throughout the year, further elevating public awareness of the issues and the importance of early, open family conversations.

Financial Highlights

Year ending December 31, 2025

Revenue	
Donations, grants, and sponsorships:	\$ 695,998
Interest and other income:	16,195
Total	\$712,193
 Expenses:	
Program expenses*:	\$ 946,730
Administrative Expenses:	93,031
Total	\$ 1,039,761

* includes expenses related to organizational rebranding

[Download the 2025 audited financial statements here.](#)



Thank you to our generous supporters

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our generous sponsors and donors whose unwavering support made our impact in 2025 possible.

Your contributions fueled our mission, strengthened our programs, and helped us reach more youth, families, and communities.

From the steadfast commitment of our monthly donors to the invaluable support of our philanthropic and corporate partners, your belief in our mission continues to drive every milestone we achieve.

Thank you for standing with us and playing a vital role in creating lasting, positive change in the lives of young people across Canada. We are truly honoured to have you as part of our community.

BMO Bank of Montreal

Canada Post Community Foundation

Donald K. Johnson

Le Germain Hotels

The Godin Family Foundation

Health Products Stewardship Association

iA Financial Group

Innovative Medicines Canada

The McCain Foundation

Odlum Brown

Off to Market

Power Corporation of Canada

Rexall

The Slaight Family Foundation

TD Ready Commitment

Telus Health

The Westmont Foundation



Governance

Board of Directors

We are proud to recognize the leadership and commitment of our Board of Directors. These distinguished Canadians bring a breadth of expertise, experience, and perspective that guide Substance in fulfilling its mission.

Tom Kennedy – Board Chair
Paul Allison – Director
Nicolas Caprio – Director/Finance committee
Dr. Matthew Chow – Director
Nancy Cleman – Director
Lucie Dutil – Director/ Governance committee
Dave Friesema – Director/Finance committee
Debra A. Doucette OBC – Director
Alex Girling – Director
Jacob Homel – Director
Raymonde Lavoie – Director/Chair, Marketing committee
Christophe Lecomte – Treasurer
Kelly Mitchell – Director
Giuseppe Papia – Director
Danielle Perron – Advisor to the Marketing Committee
Guillaume Girard – Advisor to the Marketing Committee

Governors

France Chrétien Desmarais
James McCoubrey
Eloise E. Opheim
Richard Pound Q.C.

Advisory Council

Substance is supported by subject matter experts with deep experience in youth substance use, addiction, and prevention. Their collective expertise helps ensure our work and public-facing content reflect current, evidence-based knowledge in the field. This guidance strengthens the accuracy and relevance of the information we share with families, caregivers, and professionals.

Thank you

The work highlighted on these pages reflects something larger than any single campaign, session, or conversation. It reflects a growing recognition among parents, educators, professionals, and partners that speaking openly with young people about substance use is not only possible, it is essential.

We are grateful to every person and organization that made our work in 2025 possible. Your belief in this mission shows up in every parent who felt less alone, every educator who found new words, and every young person who is better equipped to make informed decisions because a trusted adult showed up for them.

We enter 2026 energized. Our new name, our growing reach, and our deepening partnerships give us a stronger platform than ever to do this work. There is more to do—and we are ready.



talksubstance.org