

Reporting on Addictions Trends Using an Established Current Awareness Service

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As Information Professionals, we spend much of our time working on routine tasks (responding to information requests, managing current awareness services, reporting, etc.). It can be valuable to reflect on what information is gathered during such tasks and leverage this work for monitoring and reporting on trends. The author demonstrates how the results from a current awareness service (Addiction News Daily) is being used to report on recent and emerging trends in the substance use and addiction field.

Keywords

Monitoring, Reporting, Media, Substance Use

Introduction

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we

provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives. Addiction News Daily (AND) is CCSA's news service; a compilation of stories pulled from various sources and focusing on

topics concerning alcohol, drugs and their related harms (including alcohol and drug prevention, treatment and recovery, addiction, and substance use policy and political dialogue). Articles are identified by scanning the results of a search string submitted to a media monitoring service (Meltwater) as well as additional content received via RSS feeds and Google News Alerts.

AND can be accessed via [website](#) or by subscribing to an email distribution list which currently has over 2800 subscribers. The posts consist of hyperlinked headlines that lead to the original story on the publisher's website, as well as a listing of the article's publisher and date of publication. In the process of managing and curating AND, an impressive amount of information is gathered in the form of headlines. Over 2000 headlines a year are posted to the service and subsequently archived internally.

Monitoring Drug Trends

Part of CCSA's mandate is to monitor the drug situation in Canada. CCSA has a history of informing Canadians about emerging drug use trends through initiatives such as the Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use ([CCENDU](#)).

Since AND monitors stories from all across Canada, it was determined that the existing information we already gather for the news service could be applied to monitor developing trends relating to alcohol and other drugs.

Tracking Trends

The first step in establishing this new monitoring system was to create a tracking sheet of topics covered by stories posted in AND. The tracking sheet is composed of broad themes (main topics) and specific subjects within those themes (sub-topics).

When a story is selected for AND it is sorted into the proper sub-topic in the tracking sheet. If no matching sub-topic exists, a new one is created and that topic is highlighted to indicate that it is an emerging topic for further reporting. Data from the tracking sheet is analysed every six months and is published in the internal, biannual Emerging Trends Report.

Reporting

The goal of the Emerging Trends Report is to inform the organization on how our current priorities align with reported trends in the media, particularly in relation to strategic directions and business planning. The focus of the report is on general trends (the most reoccurring broad themes) and specific trends (sub-topics with ten stories or more). Geographical distribution of general trends, trends by population, and emerging trends (topics that were not included in previous reports) are also covered.

The report is then distributed internally and feedback is requested. Individuals can also suggest additional areas of interest to include in subsequent reports. The first Emerging Trends Report was published in 2014 as an annual report; in 2018 the frequency of publication was changed to twice a year to increase the relevance of the information.

Results

Feedback received so far by CCSA staff has been very positive. It is encouraging to know that the reports are consulted when assessing the corporate alignment of the organization's priorities with reported trends. The Emerging Trends Report also helps inform the planning of our priorities moving forward and provides insight into public and media perceptions of emerging issues. In addition, the report is also used to identify topics for some of our

products such as [Substance Use in Canada](#) and [CCENDU bulletins](#).

Conclusion

The Emerging Trends Report is a valued product and an important component of CCSA's ongoing monitoring work. There is an increased desire for monitoring initiatives in the field of substance use and addiction and Information Professionals are well equipped with the necessary skills and access to information to assist in that work. Information Professionals are encouraged to examine the information they gather on a regular basis to assess if it has the potential to be developed into similar monitoring products that will be of benefit to the substance use and addiction field.

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