

# A Systems Approach to Substance Use

## Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy

### REPORT IN SHORT: THE TIERED MODEL OF SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

*A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy* proposes a Tiered Model to support a continuum of services for individuals with substance use problems. The Tiered Model is based primarily on the approach used in the U.K.; variations can also be found in Quebec and Australia.

In this model, tiers represent logical groupings of services and supports according to a number of characteristics (illustrated in Figure 1). This system, premised on a client-centred approach, promotes access to evidence-informed, effective services that respond to individual needs.

#### WHAT ENSURES AN INTEGRATED CONTINUUM?

The Tiered Model is based on eight guiding concepts:

- No wrong door—an individual seeking treatment can access the full continuum by entry at any level and be linked to those services and supports that fit his or her needs.
- Availability and Accessibility—services and supports are available and accessible within a reasonable distance and travel time.
- Matching—services and supports are matched to an individual’s needs and strengths.
- Choice and Eligibility—an individual may select among options should there be more than one available that meets his or her needs.
- Flexibility—an individual should be moved upward or downward through the tiers as needed.
- Responsiveness—effective treatment should ultimately help individuals to move to lower tiers as their needs change.
- Collaboration—there should be collaboration between all levels of those working in services and supports to ensure quality treatment and facilitate the individual’s journey through the tiers.
- Coordination—there should be easy sharing of information between systems.

#### WHAT ARE THE TIERS?

Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the Tiered Model. As can be seen, the level of specialization, cost and intensity of treatment increases across the tiers to ensure a broad range of service options for individuals seeking treatment. An individual is not described as a “Tier 4 client” but as a client receiving treatment that may encompass services across more than one tier.

**Tier 1:** Services and supports in Tier 1 are broad efforts that draw on existing networks of support for individuals, families and communities. They provide a foundation for a healthy population and have broad eligibility criteria, allowing anyone to access them. These services and supports include prevention initiatives.

**Tier 2:** Services and supports in Tier 2 provide the important functions of early identification and intervention for people with substance use problems that have not previously been detected or treated. These may include screening, brief intervention and referral.

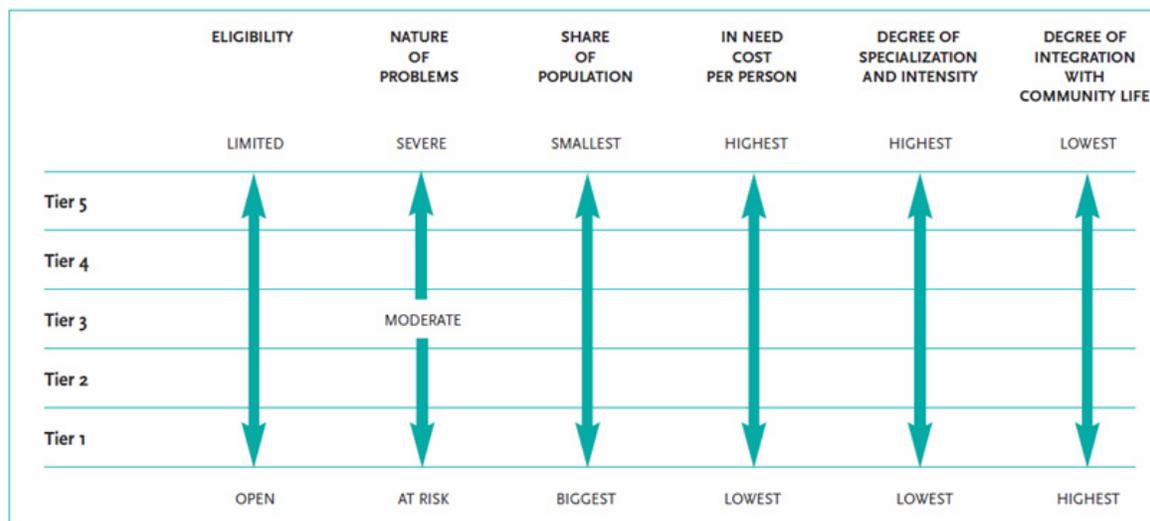


**Tier 3:** Services and supports in Tier 3 are intended to engage people experiencing substance use problems who are at risk of secondary harms (e.g., HIV, victimization). Services can include: general outpatient counselling, withdrawal management, outreach in partnership with other sectors (e.g., housing), or supervised injection sites.

**Tier 4:** Tier 4 comprises services and supports that are more intensive than those in Tier 3. In many cases they offer specialized services for people with substance use problems, such as intensive day programming for early recovery or intensive outreach services in hospitals. People seeking services in this tier may have multiple problems that require support from more than one tier or sector, such as housing, employment, or mental health.

**Tier 5:** Services and supports in Tier 5 are intended to address only the needs of people with highly acute, chronic and complex substance use and other problems for whom lower-tier services and supports are inadequate (e.g., structured residential services).

FIGURE 1: DIMENSIONAL DESCRIPTION OF THE FIVE TIERS



Further Reading: National Treatment Strategy Working Group. (2008). *A Systems Approach to Substance Abuse in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy*. Ottawa: National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harms Associated with Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada.