

The image features a blue background with several white, wavy, horizontal lines that create a sense of movement or depth. A central horizontal band with a gradient from light orange to dark orange contains the text.

Straight Talk on Drugs

Is this book for you?

THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU if you are taking a drug that may alter your moods. Inside you'll find information about:

- how drugs can affect you
- how to decide if it's time to make a change
- how to get help if you want to change or stop your drug use
- how making a change can help you feel better

If you are concerned about someone else, this book will help you understand what you can and cannot do about another person's drug use. It will also help you get the support you need to deal with the situation.

What you say to your clients can have a profound influence on their choices. We are here to support your work by providing information and resources you can use to help your clients. If it's appropriate, you can also guide your clients to us for further assistance. Together, we can make a difference.

Are you a healthcare provider?

HOW TO CONTACT US
Find your local Addiction Services at
www.addictionservices.ns.ca

Contents

1	Why do people take drugs?	4
2	Making choices about drugs	5
3	What are the different types of drugs?	8
4	As we age	12
5	Are you pregnant or breastfeeding?	14
6	Is it time for a change?	16
7	Are you worried about someone else?	18
8	If you want help	24

1

Why do people take drugs?

DRUGS CHANGE THE WAY WE think, act, or feel. They do that by changing the chemical reactions in our bodies and brains.

Sometimes doctors prescribe certain drugs to help our bodies and minds get better.

Other times, people may choose to take a drug to help them relax, have fun, have a shared experience with friends, or celebrate a special occasion. They may find that they take a drug more often when they are around certain people.

People may also take a drug because it offers temporary escape or relief from a difficult, unhappy, or stressful situation – or it may help them cope with boredom, anger, or a lack of confidence.

Why do some drugs seem more “normal” than others?

TV, movies, and advertising often portray certain drugs as if they are everyday parts of life. In movies, people often smoke cigarettes without ever experiencing harm. In many TV shows, people drink with no consequences. When we see enough of these images over time, we may begin to think that other people don’t have problems with drugs. This can create an unrealistic belief that using drugs cannot become harmful. And if we are having problems, we can begin to feel very alone and isolated – as if we are the only ones who “can’t handle it.”

At some point in life, everyone takes a drug. Think about the drugs you take. What are your reasons?

2

Making choices about drugs

HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU should know about drugs (including alcohol) so you can make the best choices for you.

How drugs work Drugs called **stimulants** work by speeding up the body’s systems, such as our pulse and the rate of our thought processes. These drugs can make us feel euphoric, energetic, and confident. They make reality more intense and exciting. Cocaine is an example of a stimulant drug.

Depressants do just the opposite; they slow the body’s systems down. As a result, they make us feel more relaxed and less anxious. Alcohol and Valium® are depressants.

Some drugs (**hallucinogens**) interfere with our brain’s chemical make-up and take us out of reality altogether. They can cause us to hallucinate and see fantastic or terrifying visions. Or they can make us feel as if our minds and bodies aren’t even connected. LSD and PCP are examples of these types of drugs.



Why do drugs work differently from one person to another?

Two people can take the same drug and have very different reactions. One person can take the same drug at different times, and also have different reactions. These are some of the reasons why:

Gender There are physical differences between men and women. For example, women's bodies have less water than men's so they cannot dilute alcohol as quickly and therefore get drunker, faster.

Age In older people, metabolisms are slower and take longer to break down, process, and eliminate drugs.

Tolerance A person who has been using one drug for some time can build up a tolerance to it. That means they will need a higher dosage to feel its effects than someone who has never used that drug before.

HIDDEN RISKS *High blood pressure is often called "the silent killer" because it has no symptoms; most people don't even know if they have it. Taking a stimulant drug will increase blood pressure – leading to risk of heart attack. If you choose stimulant drugs, have your blood pressure measured. Most drug stores have a machine that will do it privately, for free. If your blood pressure is high, see your healthcare provider.*



Dose With illegal drugs, it's impossible to know the strength and purity of the drug. Even buying from the same dealer does not guarantee consistency.

Method How we take a drug affects how quickly we will feel it, and sometimes how long those effects will last.

- **swallowing:** Alcohol is absorbed immediately and goes straight to the brain. Pills or powders need to be partially digested first. This delays their effects.
- **smoking:** Smoked drugs are absorbed into the blood stream from the lungs within seconds.
- **snorting:** Powder drugs inhaled up the nose can take a few minutes to start acting.
- **injecting:** Drugs taken through a needle enter the blood stream, and the brain, right away.

Physical and mental health. Any weakness or vulnerability in a person's physical or mental health can cause a change in the way a drug affects them.

Where you are/who you are with. In a familiar place surrounded by trusted friends, a person is likely to be in a good mood – and that will lessen the risk of having a bad "trip." However, if a person is uncomfortable or nervous, the drugs can amplify those feelings of paranoia and anxiety.

HIDDEN RISKS *Some people have a genetic predisposition to a mental health problem, but this may not be diagnosed. For example, taking a drug that interferes with the brain's serotonin levels could trigger depression. If you experience anxiety or depression from your drug use, call Addiction Services to find out how to get help.*

3

What are the different types of drugs?

This is a list of common legal, illegal, and prescribed mood-altering drugs and a very general description of the way they can affect us. Each drug's effects depend on many factors. You can learn more about why drugs affect us differently in section 2: *Making Choices About Drugs*.

Some drugs can be more harmful than others, but taking any drug carries some risk with it.

If you'd like more detailed information about each of these drugs, contact Addiction Services. Find your local office at www.addictionservices.ns.ca

Withdrawal from many drugs can be physically uncomfortable and mentally stressful. In some cases, it can even be life-threatening. It's a good idea to get professional support if you are going to cut down or quit.

DRUG	LOOKS LIKE	EFFECTS
alcohol	liquid	Slows down the body's systems: breathing, heart rate, etc. Lowers inhibitions. Makes people feel "relaxed." Impairs judgment and reaction time. This can result in slurred speech and loss of coordination. Withdrawal can be a medical emergency for people who have developed a chemical dependency on alcohol.
cannabis	dried leaf or oil or chunk of brown/black resin	Can either stimulate or slow down the body's systems, depending upon the person. Makes people feel "relaxed." Can also cause feelings of paranoia and anxiety.
cocaine/crack	cocaine: fine white powder crack: small rocks or lumps	Speeds up the mind and body processes. May cause excessive talking or repetitive behaviour. Delivers a "rush" of positive feelings. May cause feelings of agitation, anxiety, paranoia, and aggressive behaviour. An overdose can cause death.
Ecstasy	pill, capsule or tablet; infrequently a powder	Speeds up the body processes and alters a person's perceptions. Creates a feeling of being "in love" with everyone. Negative experiences include panic, feeling faint and dizzy, and losing consciousness. This drug can increase the body's temperature making the person feel very thirsty. Water should be taken (not alcohol or pop) to avoid dehydration although too much can lead to 'water intoxication', which is very serious and can even result in death.
methamphetamine (crystal meth)	pill, powder, or glass-like crystals	Stimulates chemicals in the brain to create a "rush" like cocaine. Negative experiences similar to cocaine. Overdosing can cause death.
LSD	small tablet, or liquid "blot" on a piece of paper	Affects chemicals in the brain to create a "trip" that includes hallucinations.
mescaline	brownish powder	Alters the state of consciousness. Can be pleasant and dream-like or panic-filled.

DRUG	LOOKS LIKE	EFFECT
psilocybin (Magic Mushrooms)	dried-up mushrooms, often crushed to a powder	Distorts reality, causes dream-like states. Bad trips are possible. It takes an expert to tell the difference between a poisonous and a non-poisonous mushroom. Eating the wrong kind can be fatal.
PCP/ketamine	powders, pills	Creates “out of body” experiences. Can result in coma or stupor.
tobacco (nicotine)	dried leaves most commonly used in a cigarette form	Raises the heart and breathing rate, causes an increase in chemicals in the brain, intensifying feelings of pleasure and alertness. Deprives the blood of oxygen, releases poisonous cancer-causing chemicals into the body, ages the skin, reduces stamina, and dulls the senses of smell and taste.
PRESCRIPTION DRUGS		
OxyContin® and other opioide pain relievers	pill – often crushed	Creates a euphoric rush. Overdose can be fatal.
Valium® and other central nervous system depressants	pill	Slows down the body’s systems leading to sedation. Increases risk of loss of consciousness and death.
Ritalin® and other stimulants	pill	Speeds up the body’s systems. Creates a feeling of excitement.

SMOKER’S HELPLINE
Need to speak one-to-one to someone who knows what you are going through with nicotine? Call 1-877-513-5333.
Monday to Thursday, 9 am to 10 pm
Friday, 9 am to 7 pm AST
Weekends, 10 am to 6pm AST

For help 24/7, go to: www.smokershelpline.ca

SAFETY TIP

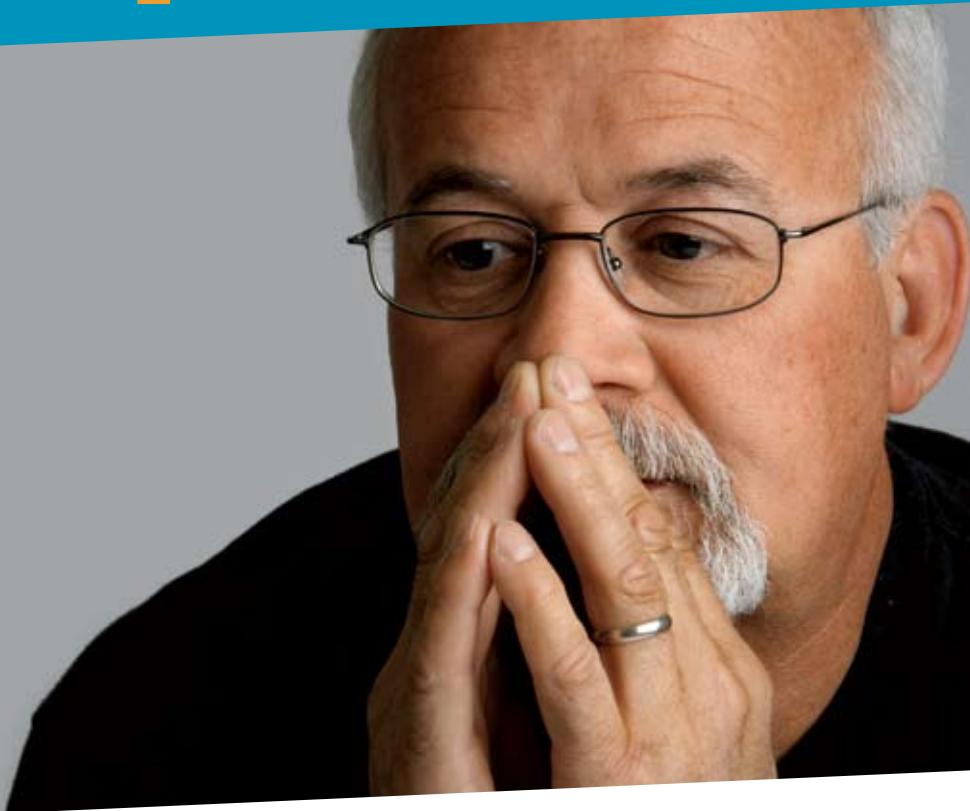
It’s best not to take drugs with other drugs, including alcohol. Mixing drugs can lead to accidental double-dosing. For example, alcohol and Valium® are both depressants; taking both at once can slow down the body’s systems to a dangerous level.



CALL 911 IF THE PERSON...
has passed out and cannot be woken
is sweating, shaking, has a fever and/or rapid pulse
is having difficulty breathing
is having a severe reaction

< **The Recovery Position** ~ If someone has passed out after taking drugs or alcohol, turn them on their side like this, so they won’t choke if they vomit.

4 As we age...



AS OUR BODY AGES, OUR metabolism slows down. That means our body takes longer to process anything put in it, such as food, alcohol, or other drugs.

That's the reason why a younger adult may have no problem having two drinks in an evening. But for an older person, with a slower liver, those two drinks can feel more like three or four. So, as a person ages, it's a good idea to:

- slow down the drinking pace
- take fewer drinks over all
- keep some alcohol-free days each week
- eat food when drinking

The same advice applies for other drugs, too.

Getting the most from prescriptions

Doctors prescribe drugs to help us achieve better health. To get the maximum benefit from that drug, it is important to take it only as directed. That means not mixing it with other drugs, including other prescriptions or alcohol. Some drugs can cancel out or reduce the effectiveness of another. It's also possible that the combination of the two drugs can result in an accidental double-dose, which could make you feel very sick or even be fatal.

It can be difficult to make changes, especially as we get older. If you would like some support or advice about how to make safer choices, or need help to make a change, just call us. Our services are free, confidential, and available everywhere in the province. Visit www.addictionservices.ns.ca for the Addiction Services office nearest you.



5

Are you pregnant or breastfeeding?

PREGNANCY CAN BE AN EXCITING, and sometimes frightening, time for a woman. If you are pregnant, you are probably wondering how the choices you make in your life will affect your baby's development.

Unless a drug has been prescribed to you to help your pregnancy and baby, it's best if you do not use any drug, including alcohol, during your pregnancy or while you are breastfeeding. Drugs taken by a pregnant or breastfeeding woman may reach and affect her baby.

Find out more about what may or may not be safe for you and your baby at www.Motherisk.org or call Mother Risk at 1-877-327-4636 to learn about alcohol and substance use.

It's perfectly normal to be pregnant and not realize it for a while. If this happened to you, and you took a drug during this time, you may be worried about whether or not that drug has reached and affected your baby. Chances are that your baby will be fine, especially if you stopped taking the drug as soon as you knew you were pregnant.

Talk to your healthcare provider as soon as you know or think you are pregnant. Discuss all the drugs you use, including prescriptions, over-the-counter, vitamins, herbal/naturals, alcohol, and any others, including illegal drugs. Your healthcare provider can give you the best advice on how to have a healthy pregnancy and baby.

We understand it might be difficult to talk about drugs with your healthcare provider. We are here to provide information, support, and advice. If you do decide that you want to make a change, we can help. Just call the Addiction Services office nearest you. Services are free and confidential. Find an office near you at: www.addictionservices.ns.ca.

LOVING CARE

Babies come with lots of questions. You'll find many of the answers in the Loving Care series of booklets. Help your baby get the best start in life – visit www.gov.ns.ca/hpp, click on Healthy Development, and follow the links from the Resources and Publications section.

6

Is it time for a change?



ONLY YOU CAN DECIDE IF it's time to make a change in the way you use alcohol or other drugs. You'll know when the time is right for you because you'll begin to think that your use is harming your lifestyle, and that definition of harm will be yours and yours alone. You don't have to wait until you hit "rock bottom." In fact, choosing to make even small changes as early as possible can go a long way to keeping you safe.

The important thing is to talk to someone as soon as you get the feeling that "it's time." The sooner you get support, the sooner you'll be able to feel back in control.

THE BENEFITS OF CHANGE

- Having more money
- Having more time for family and friends
- Not feeling sick as often
- Doing better at work or school
- Looking better and healthier
- Being able to participate in sports and other activities again
- Feeling like you're in control

Some questions that may help you decide whether "it's time" for you:

- Are you having relationship problems with your spouse, children, or parents because of your drug or alcohol use?
- Are you having problems at school or work, or missing time, because of drugs or alcohol?
- Are you having financial problems because so much of your money goes to drugs or alcohol?
- Has your physical health declined because of your use?
- Do you feel guilty, hopeless, depressed, or suicidal?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it could be your time to make a change.

Making a change doesn't happen overnight. It takes a series of small steps that eventually lead you to a different place. And it's not something you have to do alone. In fact, making a change takes a lot of courage and support – and that's why we are here.

We are not here to make you change. We are here to help you make the changes you want to make, whether that is reducing your use of one drug, or several. And if you do want to stop altogether, we can help with that, too.

Getting support costs you nothing and nobody will know that you called or came to us. Addiction Services offices are all over Nova Scotia. Find the one nearest you at www.addictionservices.ns.ca.



Heather is 50 years old and has a good job. Every day after work, she comes home and has one glass of wine. For the past year or so, Heather has found herself rushing home with an urgent desire to have that glass. If there is no wine in the house, she feels upset, and makes a trip to get some. Nobody else thinks Heather has a drinking problem. Friends and family even tell her how good wine can be for her health. But Heather feels she has a problem. And if she thinks it's time to make a change, even though she doesn't appear to be dependent or in trouble, then she's right: it's time.



ARE YOU WONDERING IF SOMEONE you care about is dealing with a problem with alcohol or drugs?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does the person
- use drugs/alcohol on a regular basis?
 - fail to meet commitments?
 - hide or lie about drug/alcohol use?

Look at the questions on page 17 of this book (*Is it time for a change?*). Do you think the person would answer “yes” to any of them?

Talk about it.

If you think the person does have a problem, the first thing you need to remember is that **you cannot make them change**. They will only change when they are ready. But you can talk to them about what you are seeing. By sharing your feelings, and offering your support, you may be able to plant the seed that will lead to change.

Find a time when you can be alone together in a calm environment. Prepare yourself so you can speak clearly and in a non-judgmental way. Stick to the facts. For example:

“We weren’t able to pay all the bills this month because you took money out of the household budget to buy alcohol.”

“You missed three days at work this month because of drugs.”

“There are illegal substances in this house and I am worried the police will find out.”

“You seem more irritable lately.”

“When you drink, it’s always to the point of passing out.”

Don’t be surprised if the person gets angry or denies what you are saying. That’s a normal reaction. The important thing is that you said what you had to say and by doing that, may have opened the door to further discussion.

Stop hiding the problem.

When you cover up a problem for someone else, you only help it continue. Tell the person you will no longer “call in sick” for them or make other excuses.

Be there for them.

If the person says they are ready to make a change, give them the number for Addiction Services and tell them that you will be there for them emotionally throughout the recovery process. If the person has developed a financial problem because of their substance use, do not offer to “bail them out.” Instead, offer to help them make a plan to resolve it – or suggest they ask their Addiction Services counsellor for a referral to a financial counsellor.

Get help for yourself.

Chances are this person’s problem is affecting you (and other members of your family) too. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you worry about how much they use drugs/ alcohol?
- Do you have money problems because of their drug/ alcohol use?
- Do you ever lie to cover up for them?
- Have you ever threatened to leave or hurt yourself in order to scare them into quitting?

Even if the person chooses not to get help, you can still get support, information, and advice on how to make this situation better for you. Contact the Addiction Services office nearest you to get the help you need and deserve. By helping yourself, you will help the other person.

Find the Addiction Services office nearest you at www.addictionservices.ns.ca

Are you worried about your child?



IF YOU THINK YOUR CHILD is experimenting with drugs, including alcohol, becoming more informed is the first important step.

Right now, your child is developing his or her own identity. Part of building that new identity includes coming up with coping strategies – those are the methods your child will use to deal with problems and challenges. Many young people will experiment with alcohol or other drugs at this time. While experimental use is not risk free it does not necessarily mean your child will develop a lifetime problem or dependency.

What if your child is under the influence?

You can help by

...knowing the signs. Be on the lookout for changes in your child's behaviour that don't seem like normal growing pains. Watch for grades slipping, disengagement, the child giving up once-favourite activities, weight/eating/sleeping changes, or your child falling in with a new group of friends whose influence worries you.

...talking – and listening – about alcohol and drugs. Speak openly, honestly, and factually about the risks of getting involved with drugs. Take advantage of advertisements and news stories as conversation openers. Encourage your child to talk by asking questions. Let them know that you care about them and are concerned for their health and safety.

...setting rules. Make sure all of the child's guardians, including parents, grandparents and any other caretakers, are united in a clear, consistent position on drugs and alcohol. If the child does not follow the rules, set consequences and stick to them. At the same time, be sure to acknowledge and reinforce positive behaviour. That can be more effective than punishment!

...getting involved in your child's life. Plan some regular healthy leisure activities you can enjoy together or as a whole family. Go skating or bowling. Have a regular boardgame night. Support their interests by showing up at games, recitals, and events. Get to know their friends and their friends' families.

...being a good role model. Take a good hard look at your own behaviour. Are you silently sending the message that it's normal to use drugs or alcohol to cope with problems?

Do not have a confrontation when your child is under the influence. When they are sober and straight, ask them what happened and listen to their answer. Do not accuse them of lying. Instead, address the specific behaviour – for example:

“You were two hours past curfew.”

“I could smell alcohol on your breath.”

“You were unable to walk straight.”

“You were throwing up.”

Reinforce your expectations and boundaries and tell them what the consequences are. Be sure to tell your child that you are doing all of this because you care about them.

Need help?

Whether you think your child is just experimenting or are convinced they have a problem, Addiction Services can help you both. Call us today. The service is free and 100% confidential. Find the office nearest you at www.addictionservices.ns.ca.



**TOP 3 SUBSTANCES
Nova Scotia youth
experiment with:**

*alcohol
cannabis
tobacco*

8

If you want help...

IT'S NEVER TOO SOON OR too late to call us to talk about your situation. Even if you don't want to make a change, or just aren't ready yet, we can give you some information to help you reduce or avoid risk. And if you are ready to change, we have many ways to help, including:

Counselling in your own community

We can help assess how substance use is affecting you and your family. Addiction Services can provide you with counselling, treatment, and education as close as possible to where you live.

We know that some people, particularly women, can face special challenges when trying to get help. These include being at risk of violence, and having poor support for recovery, such as access to child care and transportation. Our women's services can help you overcome these barriers so you can get the treatment and attention you need.

Are you the family member, friend, or significant other of someone who has a problem, but refuses to attend counselling? Come get the support you need. Our services are available for you, too.

Withdrawal management

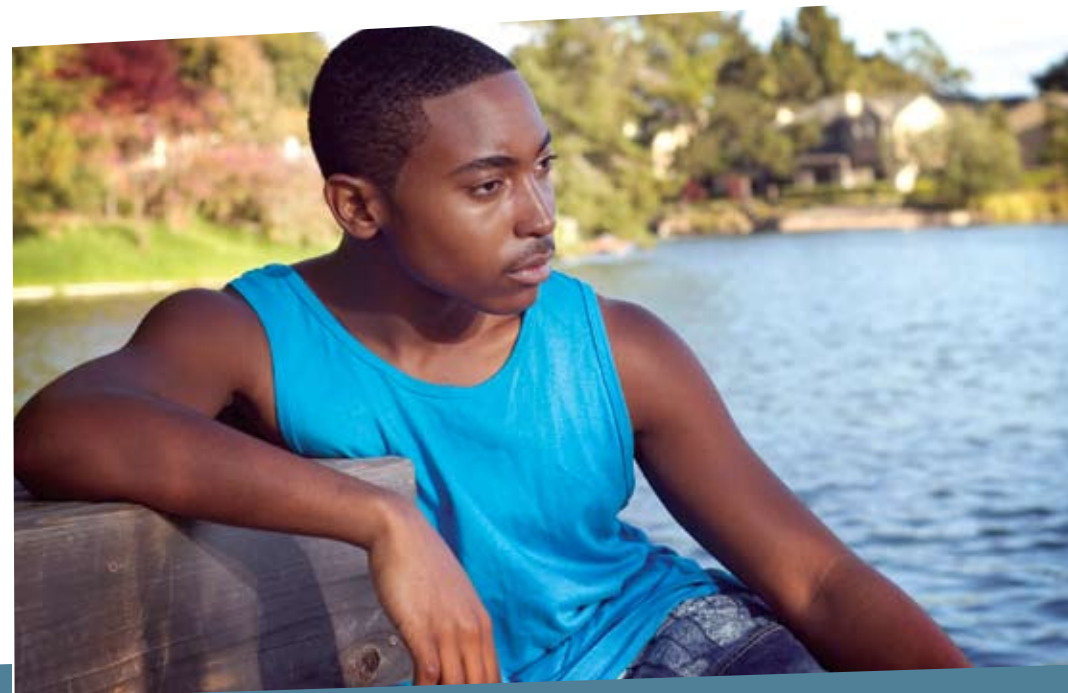
If you need assistance to deal with the physical and psychological stages of withdrawal, we are here. Depending upon your situation and location, you may stay in a detoxification facility (detox) for a while, or be helped through your withdrawal as a day patient in "daytox." Once the immediate detoxification period is complete, you'll be ready to enter counselling.

Structured treatment programs

These are for people who have successfully completed a withdrawal treatment program and need some extra structure and intense support to help them succeed. It is a residential program: you stay in a safe environment with others who have shared a similar experience to yours. It's a chance for reflection and recovery planning. You'll learn new ways to explore problem areas and set new goals.

Adolescent services

This is an age-appropriate program for youth aged 13–19 and their families. Services are community and school based across the province. In addition, there is a specialized residential program called CHOICES for youth requiring extra structure and support. You can find out more about the CHOICES program by going to www.iwk.nshealth.ca, and typing CHOICES in the search box.



ADDICTION SERVICES is part of the total health-care services provided free of charge to all Nova Scotians. And just like any medical record, your information is kept private and confidential. Getting help is as simple as picking up the phone and calling. There are Addiction Services offices throughout Nova Scotia. Find the one nearest you by going to www.addictionservices.ns.ca.

Some of the offices are able to provide services in French. Please enquire when you call.

TO ORDER MORE COPIES of this booklet or to **VIEW IT ONLINE**, go to www.gov.ns.ca/hpp. Choose Addiction Services then follow the links to "Resources and Publications".

