

Summit on APEDs and Youth, April 22, 2015 – Ottawa

Summary Report

“Personally, I take protein [supplements] because my parents and coaches tell me to. Youth need to be more aware. I learned a lot today.”

–High-school student participant, CCES Summit on APEDs and Youth

The use of Appearance and Performance Enhancing Drugs (APEDs) among Canadian youth remains a serious and complex issue. While the profile of the typical user has remained consistent over the last 20 years—they are primarily male and more likely to be physically active, to play sports and to lift weights—the environment in which kids are growing up has changed drastically.

Not only are APEDs and unregulated nutritional supplements readily available online, but photo-based social media such as Instagram and Snapchat mean tweens and teens in Canada are now comparing the way they look to their peers around the world. While some young athletes are under pressure from coaches and parents to perform, the use of APEDs among young Canadians is increasingly driven not only by a desire to succeed in sport, but also by a desire to look better.

Research conducted in 2014 by the CCES found that 18% of Canadian youth between the ages of 10 and 17—an estimated 600,000 kids—are at risk of using APEDs, while 200,000 have admitted to using them at least once in the last year. Moreover, 51% of users say steroids will help them look better, while most Canadian youth—users and non-users alike—are largely unaware of the nature and duration of the potentially dangerous side effects associated with the use of these substances.

The purpose of the first CCES Summit on APEDs and Youth, held April 22 in Ottawa, was to bring together people from a range of disciplines—including education, health care, law enforcement, and sport—who are concerned about this issue. The goal was to encourage discussion and explore potential solutions to help young people navigate their teenage years without APEDs, as well as to introduce CCES’s expanded Succeed Clean program.

This report represents a summary of the participatory elements of the Summit, as well as information gleaned from a follow-up survey. (Note: presenter slide decks from the Summit are available at www.cces.ca/en/apedsummit)

Table Discussion 1:

Questions: What's the most interesting, meaningful, or surprising thing you're taking away from the presentations so far? What did you learn this morning that you didn't know before?

Participants as a whole were surprised by the number of Canadian youth at risk of using APEDs and the lack of knowledge about side effects among youth overall; the easy availability of these substances over the Internet; the lack of APEDs education in schools; and the fact that the issue goes far beyond sport.

- One participant said he'd gone online and, as an experiment, easily ordered Human Growth Hormone from Pfizer. It's not just available in back alleys or gym change rooms any more.
- Others noted that for those who work in sport, it's easy to forget that many APEDs are used for image enhancing reasons, and that their use stems from other psychological issues—and stressed the importance of looking at root causes.
- Some also expressed concern at the notion of popular energy drinks as “gateway” substances to the use of APEDs.
- Educators in the audience acknowledged that while they spend a lot of time talking about the dangers of illicit drugs with their students, they don't often discuss APEDs. One high school student participant noted that she learned far more during the Summit about APEDs than she ever had in school.

In their own words:

“If ordering online is the way youth are procuring APEDs, then the demand must be high for so many to be confiscated at the border.”

“Many supplements are spiked. You don't know what's in them. There could be hormones or heavy metals. The labels don't always reflect what's in the thing.”

“What about coaches that encourage 10-year-olds to down a Red Bull before a game? Where does that lead down the road?”

“Students are receiving less health & physical education than before, leading to knowledge gaps about these substances.”

“It's surprising that 50% didn't know that steroids have side effects. Is it not generally accepted that drugs have side effects?”

Table Discussion 2:

Question 1: What are you, or your organization, currently doing to deal with the issue of Appearance and Performance Enhancing Drugs (APEDs)?

Many of the organizations and disciplines represented at the Summit have taken steps to address the use of APEDs, while others acknowledge that they could be doing more. For example:

- The [Canadian Academy of Sport and Exercise Medicine](#) (CASEM) has developed a curriculum for fellowships in Sport Medicine that includes anti-doping education. The issue is also addressed during its annual general meetings, and the organization is focused on information sharing, as well as setting rules and standards around APEDs education.
- The [Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse](#) (CCSA) has a stream targeting youth athletes and is also doing national longitudinal research to assess which sports are most likely to have youth at risk.
- The [Coaching Association of Canada](#) (CAC) works with partners to train coaches in making ethical decisions through the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP).
- [Cycling Canada](#) has re-launched “Race Clean,” its internal education program for athletes from the amateur level up to the national team. This program intentionally targets the next generation of potential national team athletes, and professional cyclists who are looking to get involved to help educate youth. Cycling has also instituted new policy that gives punitive measures “more teeth”.
- While law enforcement doesn’t currently have the resources or mandate to directly deal with the issue of APEDs—and specifically, doping in sport—it becomes more of an issue when it’s about the proceeds of crime. The RCMP is currently working with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to make larger busts.
- Deaf Sport is raising awareness through education (mostly focused on anti-doping) and doping-control testing at the national and international levels.
- In high schools, outside of the Health & Physical Education Curriculum (which is only mandatory to grade 9), APEDs are examined during Exercise Science classes, but this is an elective class.
- [Whole Child Sports](#) has authored a book, “Beyond Winning: Smart Parenting in a Toxic Sports Environment,” to address some of the pressures that may lead youth to turn to APEDs. WCS advocates a well-rounded approach to sport that focuses not just on physical skills, but psychological and social development as well, and argues that the “command and control” mentality impedes the ability of young people to think for themselves.

Question 2: Based on what you've heard today, is there more you could be doing?

There was a clear consensus at the Summit that more could be done to address the issue of APEDs and youth, and some representatives from participant organizations offered specific ideas about what they would do going forward:

- CASEM will table the issue at its next long-term planning meeting.
- The CCSA is looking at policy renewal around this topic and how to apply it to national best practices, and is working to make connections to disseminate its research.
- The CAC will look at reviewing its curriculum, and targeting high-risk sports to drive this message to youth. It also acknowledged that its promotion to current partners around anti-doping could be better, and may look at including more APEDs information in its newsletter and Sport Leadership Conference-related activities.
- Club Excellence will consider including more APEDs resources on its website and other materials, and is open to bringing together partners for further discussion on the topic. It could also be a vehicle to educate key influencers.
- The RCMP continues to be limited by its mandate, but is open to strengthening partnerships around the issue of APEDs. CCES, for example, is engaging in increased information sharing with law enforcement.

“There’s a distinct lack of teeth in public policy surrounding this, especially with regard to education. Health education can and probably should be mandatory through grade 12, even for those who don’t take Phys Ed. Students, teachers, and organizations can lobby the provincial government to establish a strategy around APEDs—especially supplements. With over a third of students taking multiple supplements regularly, this should be on the Ministry’s radar.”

“It has been shown that connectedness to a school is very important to social development. Schools are the perfect avenue for this ‘community perspective.’”

Question 3: How can we work together to support Succeed Clean and other solutions?

Participants raised a number of ideas and questions that may help foster further collaboration around the issue of APEDs and youth. For example:

- CAC could engage its 87 sport partners around the issue, and partner with CASEM. What can key influencers access to communicate with NSO partners? If Succeed Clean resources were available online, this could help them get the message out.
- Club Excellence could provide a framework for multi-sport standards connecting national, provincial and community leaders around this issue.
- More needs to be done at the high-school level to focus on health risks. The message of “don’t take anything” is heard, but very little information is provided related to the risks of taking APEDs, especially when it comes to consequences that one cannot see (e.g. damage to internal organs).
- Can we lobby to change or influence legislation? Many people assume that if products are sold at a “health” store they must be OK. We need to find a way to provide more accurate information about supplements, or to change laws around marketing that specifically targets youth.
- Can we work with gyms and personal trainers to ensure they have reliable information for themselves, but also to provide to their clients?
- While APEDs education is not part of [Motivate Canada](#)’s curriculum, this is definitely something that it will look into including in the future. The organization works with youth leaders, so it could be a good fit with Succeed Clean and taking that message to different communities.

In regards to the lack of APEDs education in schools, there was also a consensus that making more resources available to educators is crucial to making sure kids are informed about the dangers of these substances earlier—ideally in grades 6 and 7. This could be done through something as simple as providing anti-APEDs posters to schools, or as part of health and physical education classes, in a way that gets students actively involved in researching different substances and their side effects.

It could also be woven into marketing classes (where students could discuss supplement advertising), or mandatory classes like biology and chemistry. [PHE Canada](#) could collaborate with CCES and others to develop resources that would provide reliable information about APEDs to teachers and students. This could be offered in concert with Succeed Clean presentations in schools, or independently. (One participant pointed out that teachers have the ability to vet and use materials without school board approval.)

Participants overall were enthusiastic about Succeed Clean as a viable means to address the issue of APEDs and youth, and offered the following suggestions as the program looks to expand throughout Ontario and, ultimately, across the country:

- It's important to find role models who are in different "categories"—not just sport. It could be someone who struggled with something else, and people with different body types, who can relate to kids who are not interested or involved in sport. This would ensure that the message expands beyond sport.
- Be constantly on the lookout for opportunities and partners. Have NSOs and PSOs consider how they could get involved with the program (perhaps to have their National Team athletes deliver the message to those newer to their sport). Do more outreach at events to bolster athlete support.
- Once teachers have notice that Succeed Clean is coming, there should be information/materials/media/lesson plans sent out so that teachers can deliver prior instruction to the students so that there's a context for the presentation. Also: consider digital technologies when developing materials for educators.
- Continue to seek feedback from and evaluate peer mentors in order to understand what is working and what isn't so the message remains relevant to the target audience; consider bringing mentors together to learn from each other.
- Consider adding high-school peer mentors. There are enough AAA and pro students at the high-school level to close the age gap and have students' peers bring the issue directly into the classroom with them.
- Present Succeed Clean to the Federal Provincial/Territorial Sport Committee to support PSO involvement in the program.
- Other potential funders/supporters could include:
 - Ottawa Senators Foundation
 - Ottawa Sports & Entertainment Group
 - Tony Greco
 - Gov. Gen. David Johnston (former President, U of Waterloo)
- How do you deliver the program to smaller communities? Can you try to find organizations that will create a program that pays to send peer mentors there? In small communities that have sport organizations, but aren't home to PSOs, you may need to find a local entity to spearhead it.

"The toughest part with Succeed Clean is that you're still thinking sports. The addition of the 'A' [appearance] brings it back. Sometimes getting bigger, looking better is the goal."

"The way they make the presentation interactive is really good, because with me and my friends, when you're sitting down and looking at a presentation you get the concept but you're not engaged in it. If university students were talking to me, I'd be more inclined to listen to them rather than someone else who doesn't know where we're coming from."—High-school student participant

Follow-up Survey

A survey sent to participants in the days following the CCES Summit on APEDs and Youth found that 100% of respondents found the event either relevant (48%) or highly relevant (52%) to their professional challenges. Most found the Summit valuable not only because of the expert speakers, but also because of the ability to discuss the issue with stakeholders from other organizations and disciplines. Many wished there had been more time allotted to both plenary and table discussions.

Several respondents also shared the specific actions that they plan to take or have taken as a follow-up to the Summit, including:

- Presenting an overview of the Summit to colleagues and working some aspects of APEDs research and education into the National Team Handbook, as well as tying it into coach education and domestic events.
- Sharing the information with teaching colleagues and cohorts in the subject area throughout the school board.
- Looking for opportunities to promote the Succeed Clean program with clients.
- Offering assistance to be involved, or as a point of contact, for the rollout of a local Succeed Clean program.
- Sharing the experience with WADA's education department, which has expressed interest in learning more about the Succeed Clean initiative and other data presented at the Summit.
- Developing a one-week health unit based primarily on the details learned at the Summit.

“We (schools) do a detailed job covering your typical illegal street drugs, and we do cover anabolic steroids. After attending the Summit, I feel that the category of APEDs needs more attention.”