

Statistical Information on drugs allows the public's questions to be answered

TORONTO—Bob Williams sits in his office on the fourth floor of the Addiction Research Foundation; the carpet around his desk is dotted with piles of paper. If any room ever looked like a place to get information, this one does.

He laughs good-naturedly when you hint that some people might find working with statistics a little dry. "Everybody does," he freely admits, but his passion for his job as supervisor of the ARF's Statistical Information Services is evident as he describes his department's main function.

"All too often, when you read a newspaper, you see the one dramatic statistic—"cocaine-related crimes have doubled in the last ten years"—that sort of thing. The best way that we can serve the public is by giving people a lot of information from a lot of sources. That way they can get a well-balanced picture of what's really happening out there in terms of drug and alcohol abuse."

Williams' department is only one facet of the ARF's overall response to requests for information. Statistical Information Services, the ARF's

Information Centre and the ARF library together process about 60,000 information inquiries a year.

One of the biggest statistical projects that Williams oversees is the production of two publications—one that profiles drug and alcohol abuse in Ontario and the other, across Canada. The national profile is the only one of its kind in Canada, and while Williams admits that the ARF does not have a monopoly on addictions information, he says his department does serve a unique purpose.

"We find that a lot of government agencies collect information on substance abuse but it tends to be all over the place. There are data on alcohol—and drug-related crime in one source, and information about people treated in hospitals for alcohol disorders buried in another. What we do is pull all the information together and put it into volumes.

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