



# ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2018

## DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

*Traffic Injury Research Foundation, November 2018*

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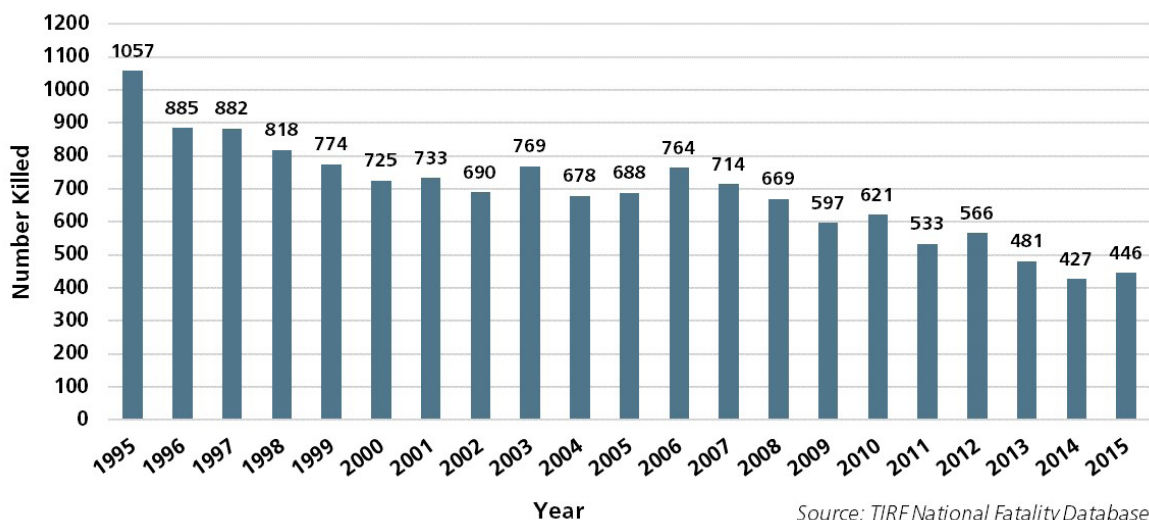
### Introduction

This fact sheet summarizes findings about drinking and driving in Canada from the Road Safety Monitor (RSM), 2018, a national public opinion poll on road safety issues. This annual survey is conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) in partnership with Beer Canada and Desjardins Insurance. It takes the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues by means of an online survey of a random, representative sample of Canadian drivers.

### How many Canadians die in road crashes involving a drinking driver?

In 2015, the most recent year for which data are available, 446 Canadians were killed in a road crash involving a drinking driver. These fatalities occurred within 12 months of crashes on public roadways across the country, excluding British Columbia (BC). Data from BC were not available at the time that the 2018 RSM was prepared; all fatality data from 1995 to 2015 have been recalculated consistently to enable accurate comparisons over time.

**Figure 1: Number of Canadians who died in road crashes involving a drinking driver (excluding BC)**



As illustrated in Figure 1, the number of persons who died in crashes involving a drinking driver between 1995 and 2015 generally decreased (446 compared to 1,057). Further monitoring is necessary to see if the increase in 2015 to 446 fatalities from 427 fatalities in 2014 is a trend.

**Further monitoring is necessary to see if the increase in fatalities in 2015 will continue.**

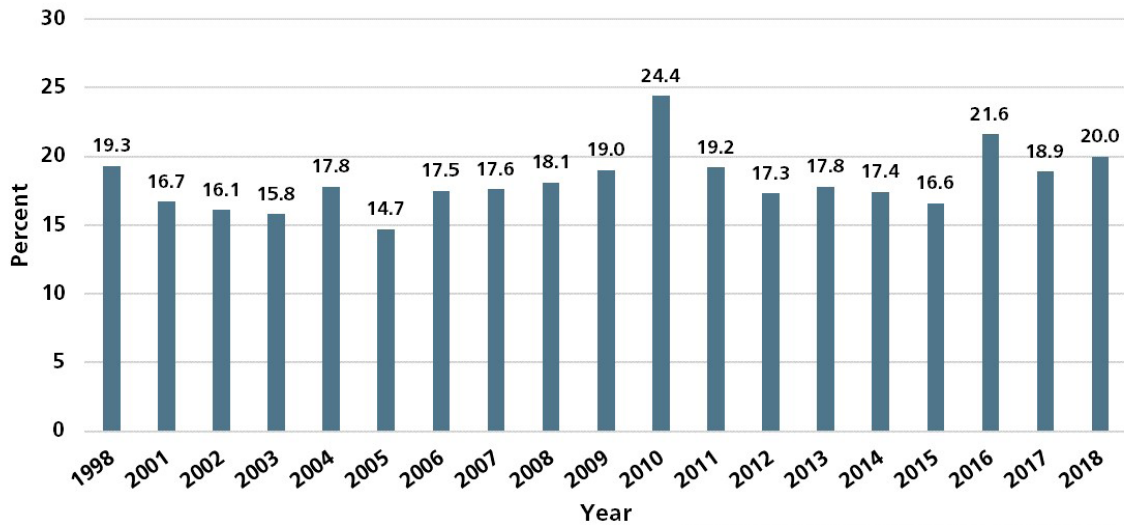
trends that have emerged during this period. From 1998 through to 2005, there was a downward trend (coef.=-0.35, p=0.04) while the opposite occurred from 2005 through to 2011 (coef.=0.55, p=0.003). Between 2011 and 2015, there was another downward trend in the percentage of respondents who admitted to driving after consuming any amount of alcohol (coef.=-0.72, p=0.05) followed by an increasing trend from 2015 to 2018 (coef.=1.2, p=0.07). This percentage rose in 2016, decreased in 2017, and rose slightly to 20% in 2018.

**What percentage of Canadians died in road crashes involving a drinking driver?** The percentage of persons killed in a road crash on a public roadway in Canada (excluding BC) that involved a drinking driver was 26.9% in 2015. This percentage declined from a peak of 37.3% in 1995 and has since remained consistently below 35%, although with some fluctuation. From 2010 to 2014, there was a steady decrease in this percentage. The percentage of persons killed in road crashes that involved alcohol rose slightly in 2015.

**Has the percentage of drinking drivers on roadways increased?** When asked about driving after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days, 20% admitted to doing this in 2018 compared to 18.9% in 2017. It warrants mentioning that this includes drinking and driving after consuming lower levels of alcohol and levels below the legal limit or administrative limits (where they exist). With the exception of 2010 and 2016, there are some clear, albeit only mildly pronounced



**Figure 3: Percentage of drinking drivers who drove after drinking any amount of alcohol**



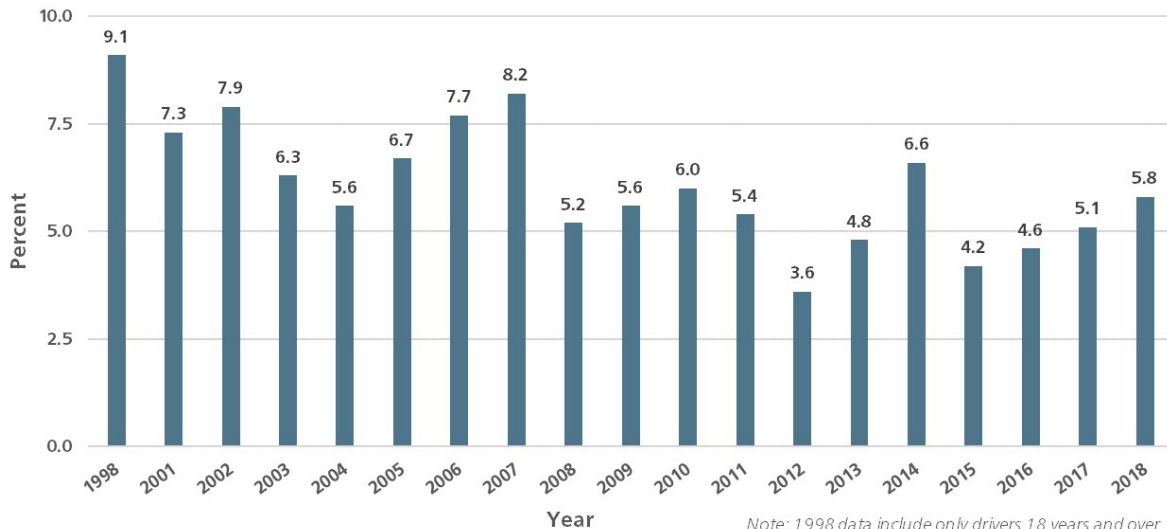
Note: 1998 data include only drivers 18 years and over

**Since 2015, there has been an increasing trend in drivers admitting that they have driven when they thought they were over the legal limit.**

In 2018, 5.8% of respondents admitted they had driven when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months. When comparing the percentage from 1998 to 2018, there is a significant decrease in this percentage (coef.= -0.18, p=0.001). This monitoring period since 1998, however, is marked by increasing and decreasing trends. Most recently, there has been an increasing trend since 2015 (coef.=0.53, p=0.01), but the



**Figure 4: Percentage that drove when they thought they were over the legal limit**

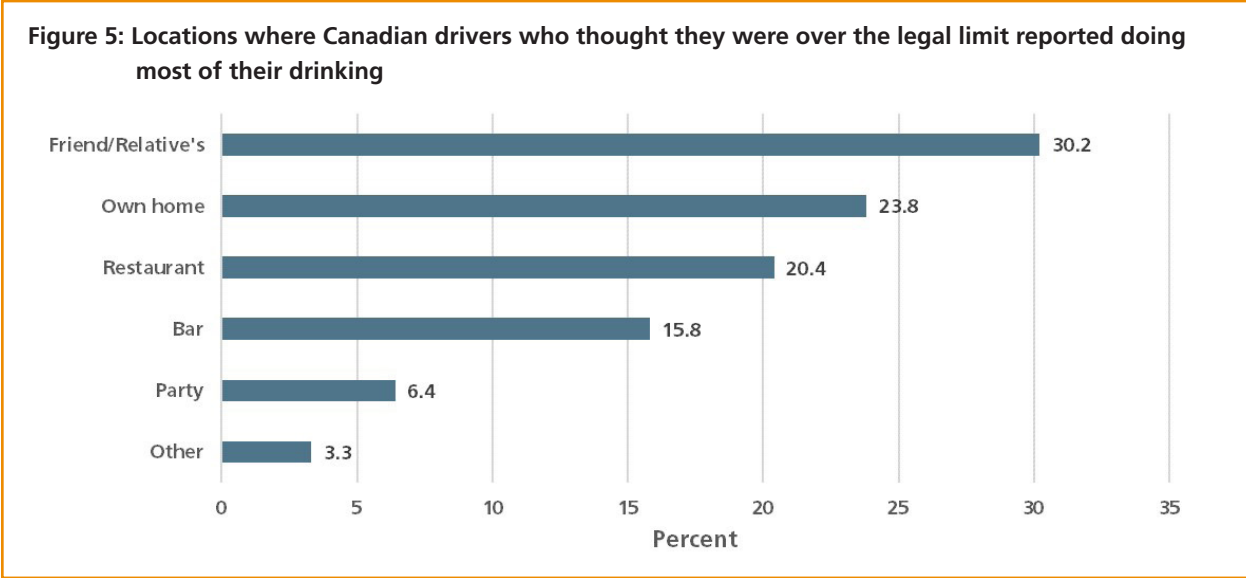


Note: 1998 data include only drivers 18 years and over

percentage in 2018 is still significantly lower than 2014 (6.6%), 2007 (8.2%) and 1998 (9.1%). Continued monitoring is essential to see if the increase from 2015 to 2018 continues or not.

**Where do drivers do most of their drinking?**

Respondents who admitted to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit were asked where they did most of their drinking. These findings are presented in Figure 5. In 2018, almost one-third (30.2%) of these respondents reported doing most of their drinking prior to driving at the home of a friend or relative, compared to 30.4% in 2016 and 37.8% in 2017. Respondents who reported doing most of their drinking in their own home accounted for one-quarter of the total (23.8%) in 2018 compared to 20.6% in 2017. Those who reported doing most of their drinking in a restaurant accounted for one-fifth of the total (20.4%) in 2018 compared to 20.6% in 2017. Almost one-sixth of respondents (15.8%) who drove when they thought they were over the legal limit reported doing most of



their drinking at a bar and this is an increase in the percentage of respondents who reported doing so in 2017 (12.3%).

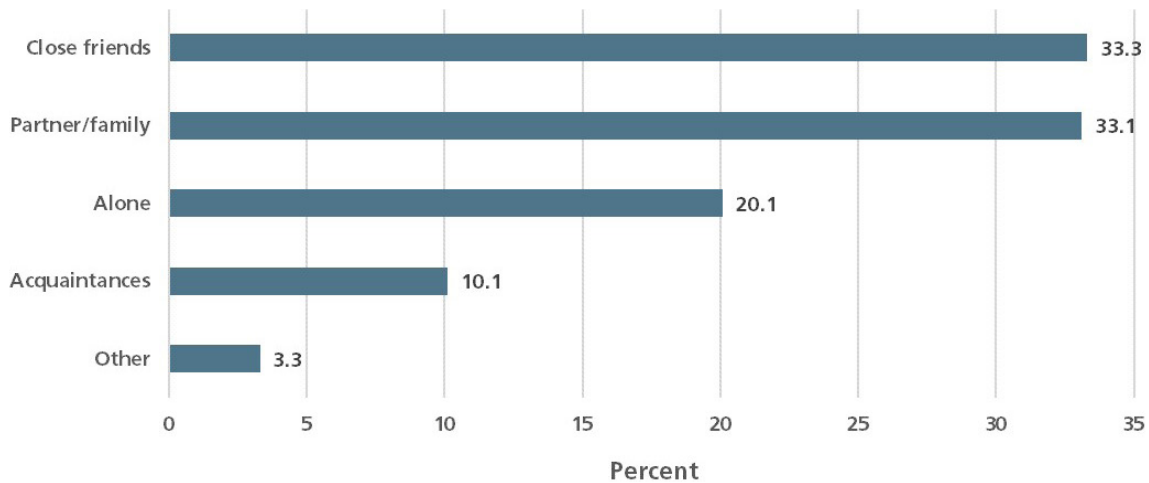
In sharp contrast, only 6.4% of respondents in 2018 reported doing most of their drinking at a party (compared to 4.2% in 2017) and 3.3% reported doing most of their drinking at other locations (compared to 4.0% in 2017).

These results suggest that more persons who drive after drinking when they thought they were over the legal limit do so at the home of friends or family, in a restaurant, at their home, or in a bar.

Conversely, a much smaller proportion of persons who drive when they thought they were over the legal limit did their drinking at a party. Key messages to reach and influence these different groups should be tailored accordingly, particularly among drivers who drink with friends/relatives or at their own home.

**Key messages should be tailored to reach drivers who drink at homes of their friends/relatives or at their own home.**

**Figure 6: Persons with whom Canadian drivers reported doing most of their drinking when they thought they were over legal limit**



**With whom do drivers do most of their drinking?** Respondents who reportedly drove when they thought they were over the legal limit were also asked with whom they did most of their drinking. Figure 6 shows that in 2018, one-third of respondents reported doing most of their drinking in the company of close friends (33.3%) or a life partner and/or family member (33.1%). One-fifth of respondents (20.1%) reported doing most of their drinking while alone. Only 10.1% reported doing their drinking in the company of acquaintances or colleagues. Similar to the data presented in Figure 5 which illustrated where drivers do most of their drinking when they thought they were over the legal limit, these data show a large percentage of drivers drink in the presence of close friends and family members. These results suggest that a focus on messages and approaches aimed at targeting life partners and/or families as well as close friends may reach and influence the behaviours of the largest portion of drinking drivers.

**A large percentage of drinking drivers drink in the presence of close friends and family members. Messages targeting this portion of the population could influence their behaviour.**

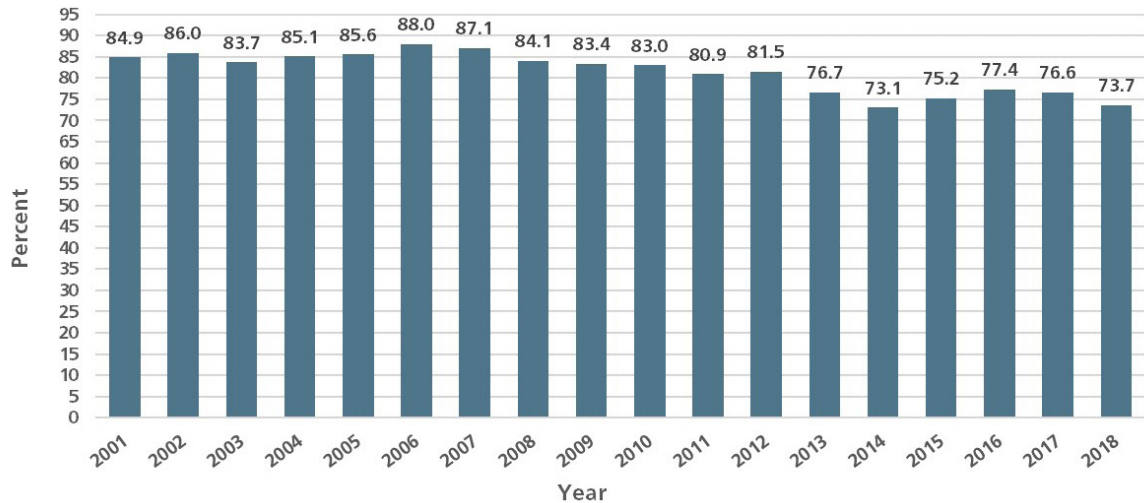
**Are certain groups of drivers more likely to drive after drinking than other drivers?** As mentioned earlier, in 2018, 20% of respondents admitted to driving after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days. Male respondents

(26.2%) were almost twice as likely to drive after drinking than female respondents (14.2%). This corresponds with data about fatally injured drivers that show males have historically been far more likely to test positive for alcohol than female drivers (Brown et al. 2017). Among survey respondents in 2018, 5.8% admitted to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months. A larger percentage of males admitted to this behaviour than females but the difference was not statistically significant.

A comparison of respondents who drove after drinking or when they thought they were over the legal limit was performed for different age groups. Drivers aged 60 years and older were less likely (OR=0.2, p=0.001) than younger drivers to drive when possibly over the legal limit.



**Figure 7: Percentage of Canadians who regard drinking drivers as a 'very' or 'extremely' serious problem**



**Where does the issue of drinking and driving sit on the public agenda?** In 2018, almost two-thirds (64.5%) of respondents cited drinking and driving as an issue of concern on the public agenda, the second highest percentage of any societal issues that were presented to respondents. The issue that had the highest level of concern in 2018 was the price of gas which was identified by 67.6% of respondents.

In 13 of the past 18 years, when compared to other societal issues such as crime, the economy, and global warming, drinking and driving has been mentioned as the societal issue of greatest concern by Canadian drivers. The price of gas was identified as the societal issue of greatest concern in four years (2011, 2012, 2014, 2017 and 2018) while the state of the health care system was mentioned as the top societal issue of concern in 2015. During the four years when drinking and driving was not mentioned as the foremost societal issue of concern, it was always the second-ranked issue among respondents.

In summary, although the percentage of Canadians who consider drinking and driving to be a priority concern is considerably lower in 2018 compared to 2005 (64.5% versus 81.0%), it consistently ranks prominently on the public agenda.

**Is drinking and driving a major road safety issue for Canadians?** A comparison of drinking and driving to other road safety issues (rather than societal issues) in 2018 revealed that drinking drivers were rated as a very or extremely serious problem by 73.7% of Canadians. This is somewhat lower than 77.4% in 2016.

In 2018, respondents were more likely to regard drivers texting messages on their phones while driving (86.2%), distracted drivers (75.9%), and drivers using cell phones (74.0%) as very or extremely serious problems than drinking drivers. Furthermore, there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who regard drinking and driving as a major road safety issue in 2018 (73.7%) as compared to 88.0% in 2006 (the highest recorded percentage) and 84.9% in 2001 (the earliest recorded percentage). Nonetheless, a clear majority of Canadians continued to express high levels of concern about drinking and driving in 2018.

## Conclusion

Based upon recent trends in the number of alcohol-related road deaths and the percentage of total road deaths that are attributed to drinking drivers, progress has been made in Canada to combat drinking and driving. However, self-reported data on drinking and driving from this RSM beyond 2014 may indicate that such gains may be lost. While there is no perfect correlation between self-reported drinking and driving behaviour on the one hand and alcohol-related fatalities on the other<sup>1</sup>, an increase in alcohol-related crashes might occur following an increase in the proportion of drivers admitting to driving while they thought they were over the legal limit. Continued monitoring is necessary to see which way the trend is going.

## About the poll

These results are based on the RSM, an annual public opinion poll developed and conducted by TIRF. A total of 1,203 Canadians completed the poll in September of 2018. Results can be considered accurate within plus or minus 2.8%, 19 times out of 20. The majority of the questions were answered using a scale from one to six where six indicated high agreement, concern, or support and one indicated low agreement, concern or support. Similar to surveys conducted from 2014 to 2017, all of the respondents completed the 2018 survey online.

## References

Brown, S.W., Vanlaar, W.G.M., & Robertson, R.D. (2017). The Alcohol and Drug-Crash problem in Canada 2014 Report. CCMTA Road Safety Research Report Series. Prepared by Traffic Injury Research Foundation of Canada. Ottawa: Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators.

<sup>1</sup> A medium to strong, significant correlation coefficient ( $\rho=0.63$ ,  $p=0.01$ ) exists between the number of alcohol-related fatalities from TIRF's National Fatality Database and self-reported drinking and driving when probably over the legal limit from TIRF's RSM. When assessing this correlation's strength, it must be considered that the monitoring periods for both indicators do not completely overlap. To illustrate, 2015 fatalities covers January to December 2015 whereas the 2015 RSM self-reported drinking and driving covers October 2014 to September 2015.

## Traffic Injury Research Foundation

The mission of the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) is to reduce traffic-related deaths and injuries. TIRF is a national, independent, charitable road safety institute. Since its inception in 1964, TIRF has become internationally recognized for its accomplishments in a wide range of subject areas related to identifying the causes of road crashes and developing programs and policies to address them effectively.

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