



## ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2017

### DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

*Traffic Injury Research Foundation, December 2017*

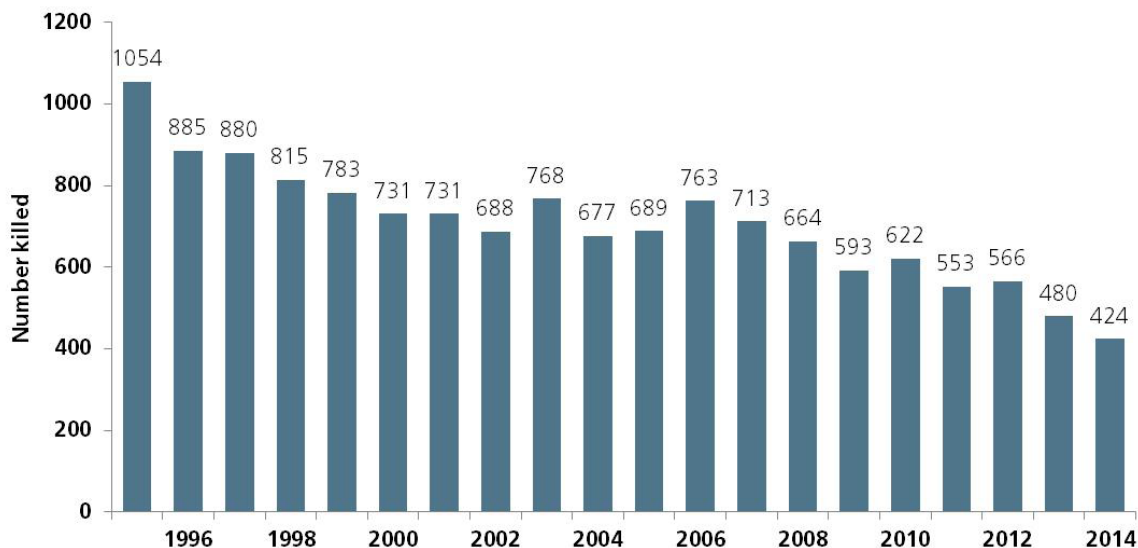
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*ISBN: 978-1-988945-30-9*

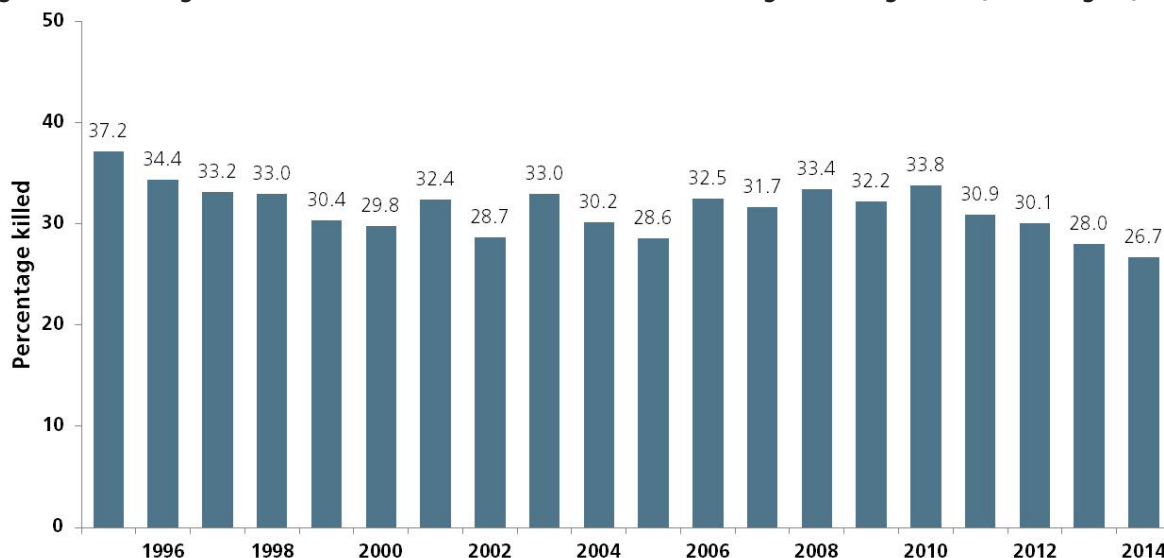
This fact sheet summarizes findings about drinking and driving in Canada from the Road Safety Monitor (RSM), 2017, a national public opinion poll on road safety issues. This annual poll is conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) in partnership with Beer Canada and Desjardins Insurance. The survey takes the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues by means of an on-line survey of a random, representative sample of Canadian drivers.

**How many Canadians die in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver?** In 2014, the most recent year for which data are available, 424 Canadians were killed in a traffic 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 2017 RSM was prepared; all fatality data from 1995 to 2014 have been recalculated consistently to enable accurate comparisons over time.

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



**Figure 2: Percentage of Canadians who died in traffic 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 2014 decreased to its lowest point in 2014 (424 compared to 1,054).

**What percentage of Canadians died in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver?** The percentage of persons killed in a traffic crash on a public roadway in Canada (excluding BC) that involved a drinking driver was 26.7% in 2014 (see Figure 2). This percentage declined from a peak of 37.2% in 1995 and has since remained consistently below 35%, although with some fluctuation. Since 2010, there has been a steady decrease in this percentage. The 2014 percentage is the lowest since 1995.

**Has the percentage of drinking drivers on roadways increased?** When asked about driving after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days, 18.9% admitted to doing this in 2017 compared to 21.6% in 2016 (see Figure 3). 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 trends that have emerged over the years. From 1998 through to 2005, there was a downward trend while the opposite occurred from 2005 through to 2011. Between 2011 and 2015, there was another downward trend in the

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

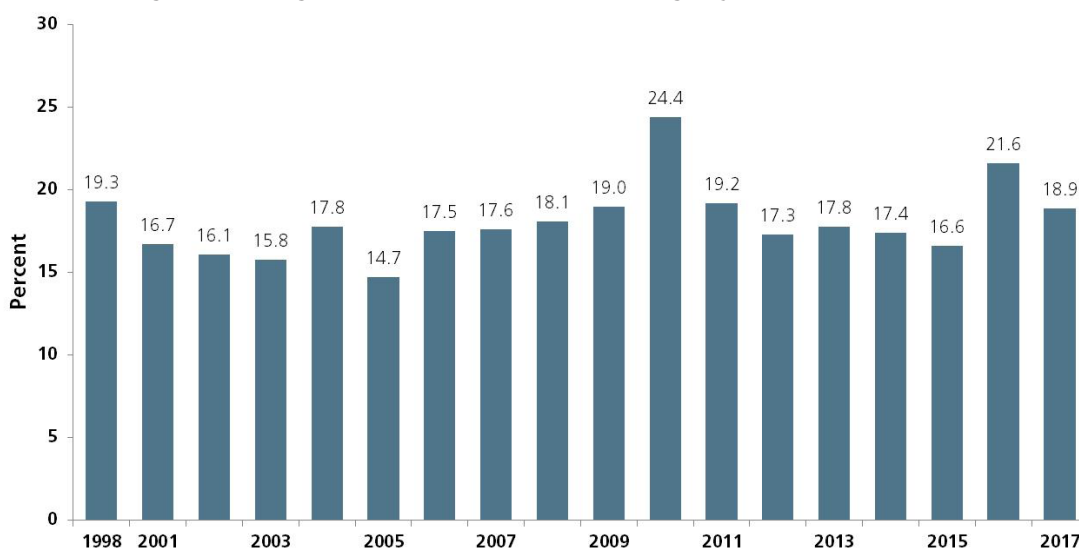
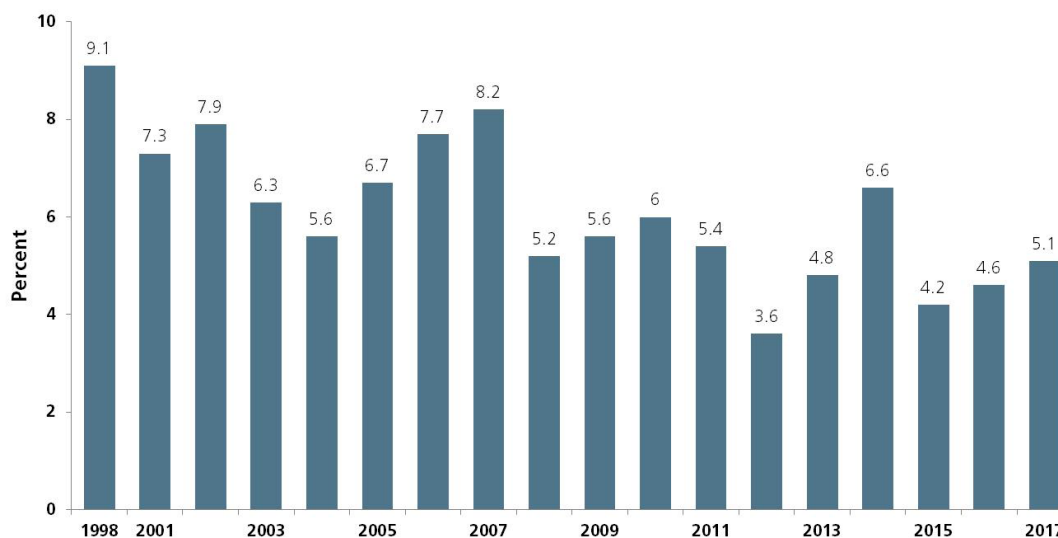


Figure 4: Percentage that drove when they thought they were over the legal limit



percentage of respondents who admitted to driving after consuming any amount of alcohol. This percentage rose in 2016, however, it decreased again in 2017.



In 2017, 5.1% of respondents admitted they had driven when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months (see Figure 4). Of importance, with the exception of 2014, the difference between 2007 and every year until 2017 is significant. In other words, both the consistency in the trend that has been observed and the results of significance tests suggest a continued decline in the percentage of drivers in Canada who admitted to driving while they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months since 2007. Although there has been an increase between 2015 and 2017 in the percentage, this increase is not statistically significant. Future monitoring will be important to see if the increase from 2015 to 2017 will continue or not.

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

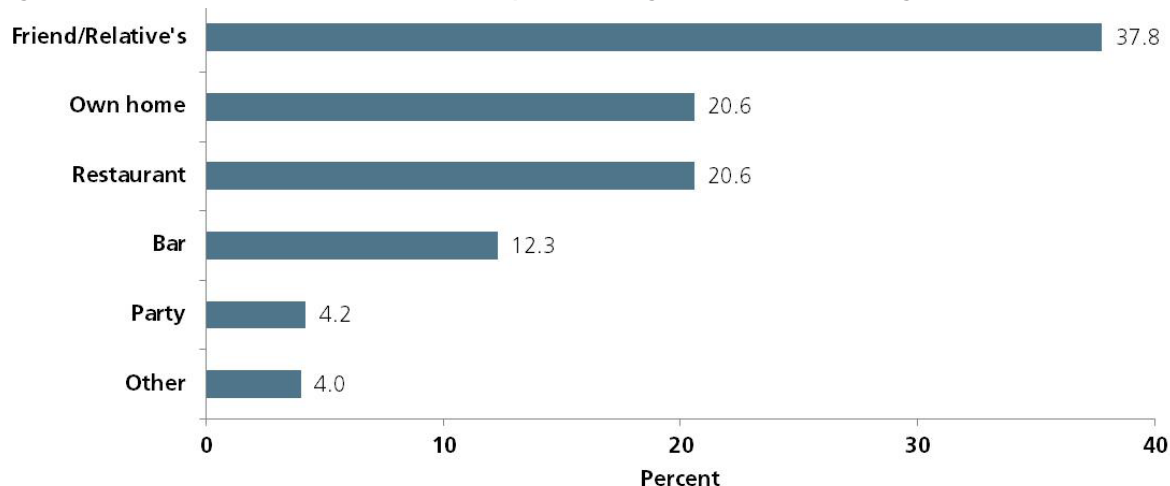
Respondents who admitted to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit were asked where they did most of their drinking. These findings are presented in Figure 5. In 2017, almost two-fifths (37.8%) of these respondents reported doing most of their drinking prior to driving at the home of a friend or relative, compared to 32.3% in 2015 and 30.4% in 2016. Respondents who reported doing most of their drinking at a restaurant or in their own home each accounted for one-fifth of the total (20.6%) in 2017. By comparison, in 2016, 21.6% reported doing most of their drinking in a restaurant while 10.0% did so at their own home. In 2017, 12.3% of those who drove when they thought they were over the legal limit reported doing most of their drinking at a bar, down from the percentage of respondents who reported doing so in 2016 (19.8%).

In sharp contrast, only 4.2% of respondents in 2017 reported doing most of their drinking at a party (compared to 16.8% in 2016) and 4.0% reported doing most of their their drinking at other locations (compared to 1.3% in 2016).

**Key messages should be tailored to reach those who drink with friends/relatives or at their own home.**

These results suggest that more persons who drive after drinking do so at the home of friends or family, in a restaurant or at their own home, or in a bar. Conversely, a much smaller proportion of persons

Figure 5: Locations where Canadian drivers reported doing most of their drinking



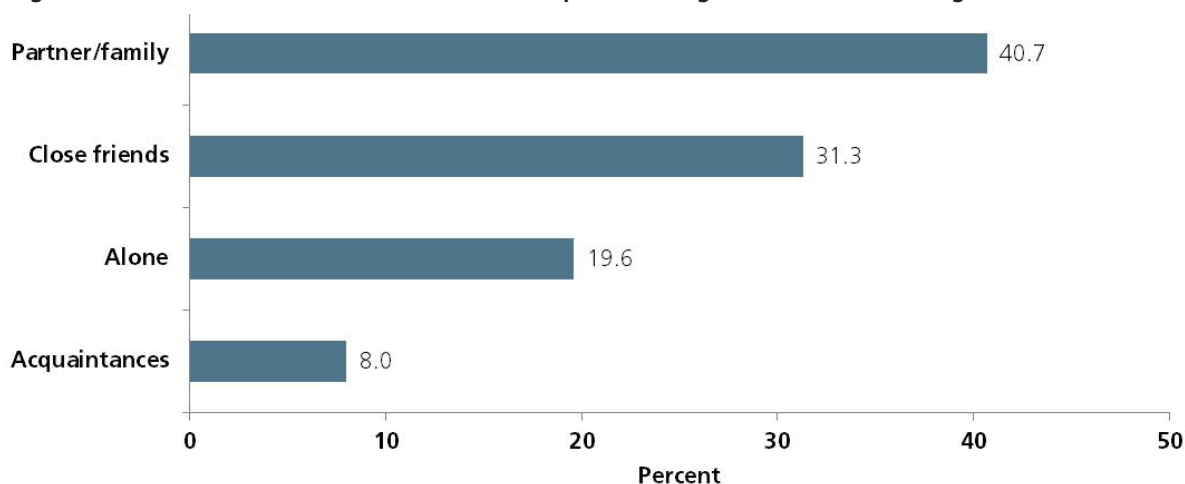
drink at a party. Key messages to reach and influence these different groups should be tailored accordingly, particularly among drivers who drink with friends/relatives or at their own home.

**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 2017, two-fifths (40.7%) reported doing most of their drinking in the company of a life partner and/or family member. In addition, over almost one-third (31.3%) of this group reported doing most of their drinking in the company of close friends and 19.6% reported doing most of their drinking while alone. Only 8.0% 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, 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.

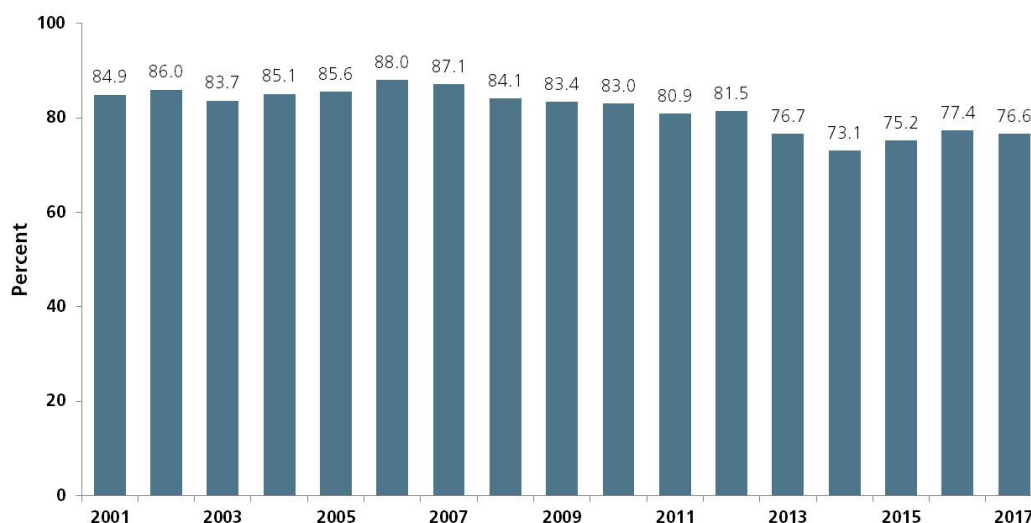
**Where does the issue of drinking and driving sit on the public agenda?** In 2017, more than two-thirds (71.3%) of respondents cited drinking and driving as an issue of concern on the public agenda, the highest percentage of any societal issues that were presented to respondents. The issue that had the second highest level of concern was the price of gas which was identified by 68.5% of respondents.

Figure 6: Persons with whom Canadian drivers reported doing most of their drinking





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



In eight out of 12 years since 2006, 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 three years (2011, 2012, and 2014) 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.

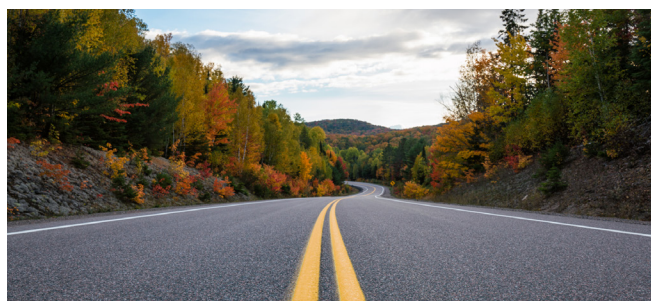
In summary, although the percentage of Canadians who considered drinking and driving to be a priority concern is lower in 2017 compared to 2006 (71.3% versus 81.8%), it consistently ranks prominently on the public agenda.

**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 2017 revealed that drinking drivers were rated as a very or extremely serious problem by 76.6% of Canadians. This is slightly lower than 77.4% in 2016.

In 2017, respondents were more likely to cite drug use among young drivers (89.0%), distracted drivers (80.9%), and drivers using cell phones (76.9%) than drinking drivers as very or extremely serious problems. Furthermore, there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who regard drinking and driving

as a major road safety issue in 2017 (76.6%) as compared 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 2017 and there has been an increase in this percentage since 2014.

**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, at least until 2014, the most recent year for which crash data are available. 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 and its consequences, 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 will be necessary to see which way the trend is going.



## References

Brown, S.W., Vanlaar, W.G.M., Robertson, R.D. (2017). The Alcohol and Drug-Crash Problems in Canada: 2013. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators.

## About the poll

These results are based on the RSM, an annual public opinion poll developed and conducted by TIRF. A total of 2,018 Canadians completed the poll in September of 2017. Results can be considered accurate within plus or minus 2.2%, 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 2014, 2015 and 2016, all of the respondents completed the survey online.

## 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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