

TRAFFIC INJURY RESEARCH

FOUNDATION



## THE ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2015

### DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA



The knowledge source for safe driving

# THE 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.

Traffic Injury Research Foundation  
171 Nepean Street, Suite 200  
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0B4  
Ph: (613) 238-5235  
Fax: (613) 238-5292  
Email: [tirf@tirf.ca](mailto:tirf@tirf.ca)  
Website: [www.tirf.ca](http://www.tirf.ca)

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# DRINKING AND DRIVING IN CANADA

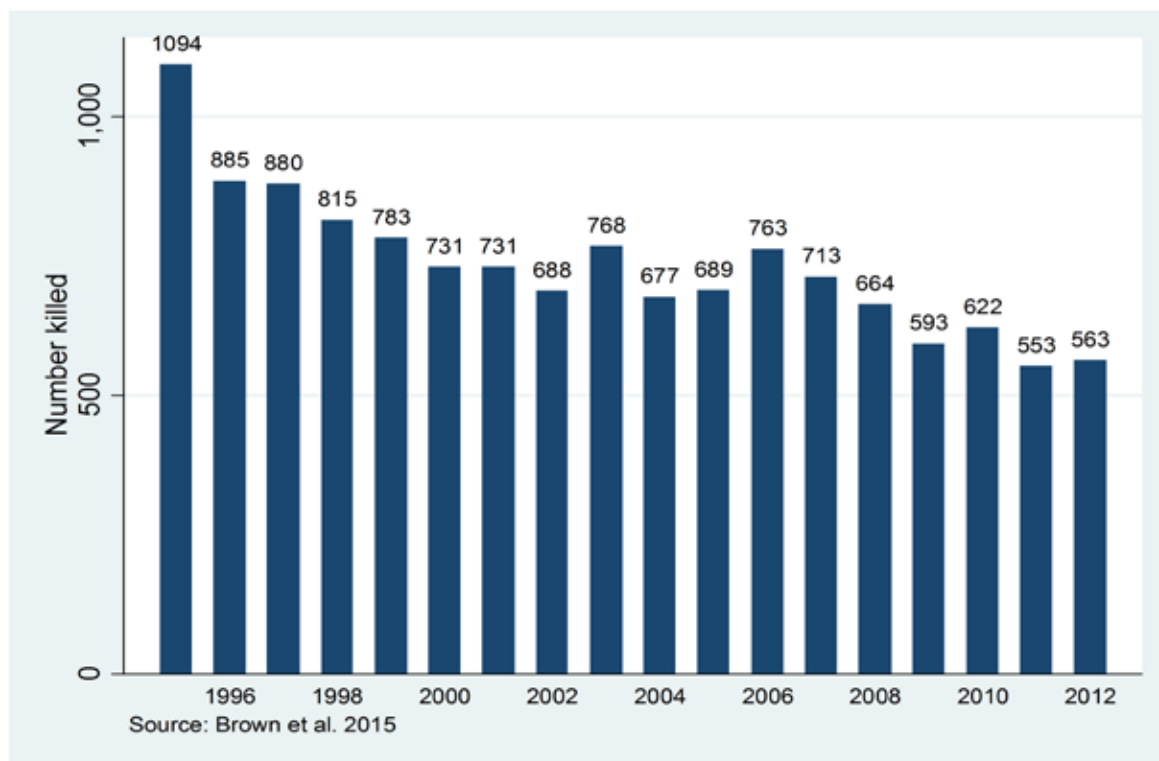
This fact sheet summarizes findings about drinking and driving in Canada from the Road Safety Monitor (RSM), 2015, a national public opinion poll on road safety issues. This annual poll is conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) in partnership with Beer Canada, State Farm and the Toyota Canada Foundation. 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 2012, the most recent year for which data are available, 563 Canadians were killed in a traffic crash involving a drinking driver. These data are based upon fatality data collected from 12 jurisdictions in Canada as the data from British Columbia (BC) were not available at the time that the 2015 Road Safety Monitor was prepared. Thus, all fatality data from 1995-2012 that are reported in this fact sheet excludes this jurisdiction.

The 2012 data reveal a sustained decrease in relation to the number of Canadians who were killed in a crash involving a drinking driver as compared to 2006. There were fewer people killed in 2012 as compared to those who died in 2008 (664), and it was only slightly higher than the number of persons who died in 2011 (553). Of note, the number of persons who died in crashes involving a drinking driver between 1995 and 2012 reached its lowest point in 2011.

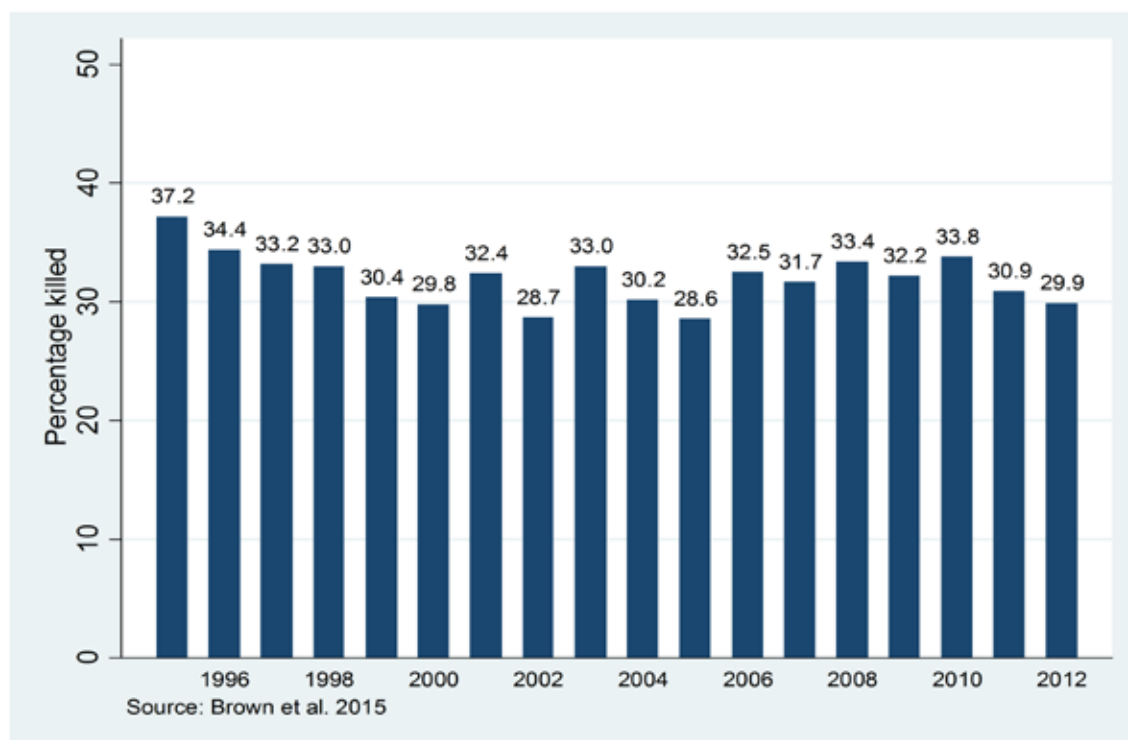
In terms of trends, although there was an overall decreasing trend in alcohol-related road deaths from 2006 through 2009, in 2010 this trend was reversed with a slight increase in the number of alcohol-related deaths. However, this number again declined during 2011 and increased slightly in 2012. Since it is not clear if this trend will continue beyond 2012, further monitoring is required.

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



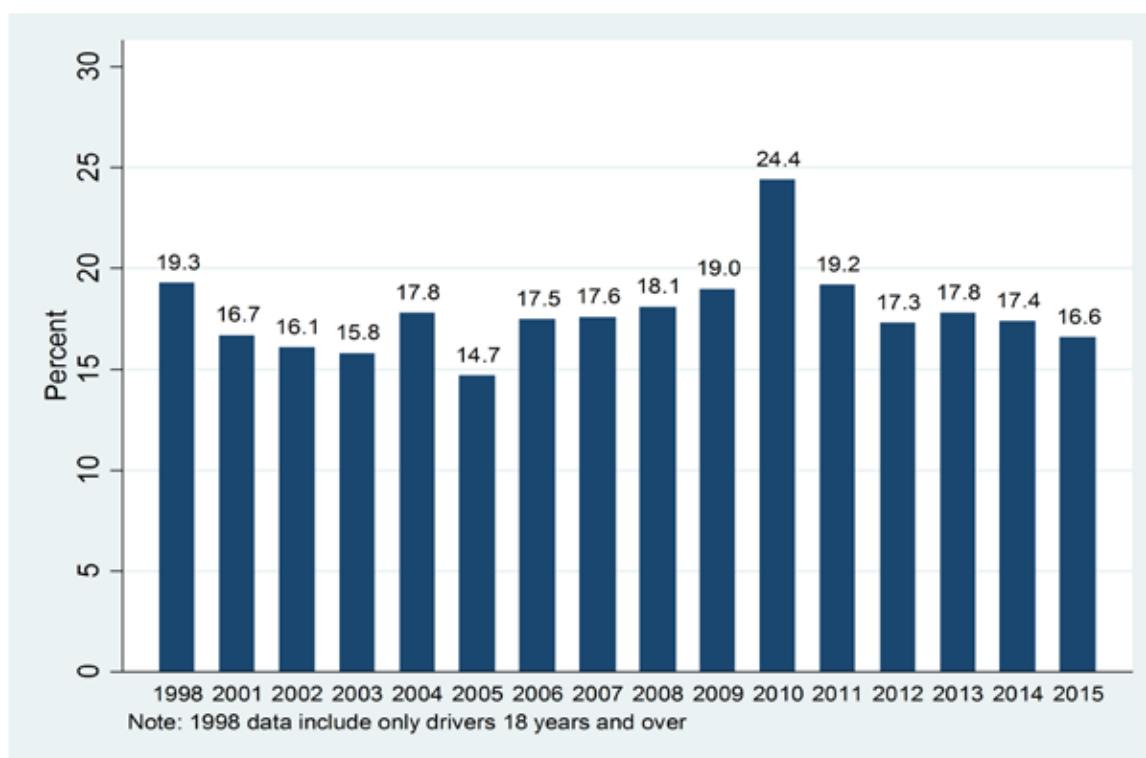
**What percentage of Canadians died in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver?** An examination of the percentage of persons killed in a traffic crash in Canada (excluding BC) that involved a drinking driver among all persons killed in traffic crashes on principle roadways in 2012 revealed that 29.9% of fatal crashes involved a drinking driver. This percentage declined from a peak of 37.2% in 1995 and has since remained consistently below 35%, although with some fluctuation.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Canadians who died in traffic crashes involving a drinking driver (excluding BC)**



**Has the percentage of drinking drivers on roadways increased?** When asked about driving after consuming any amount of alcohol in the past 30 days, 16.6% of Canadians admitted to doing this in 2015. 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). Prior to 2006, this percent had decreased from 19.3% in 1998 to 14.7% in 2005. The percentage then escalated to 24.4% in 2010 and again decreased to 17.3% in 2012; it has stabilized at 16.6% in 2015. In other words, the percentage of respondents who admitted driving after drinking any amount of alcohol between 2006 and 2009 as well as between 2011 and 2014 has been very consistent. This suggests that the higher percentage of respondents who admitted to drinking and driving in 2010 was an anomaly.

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

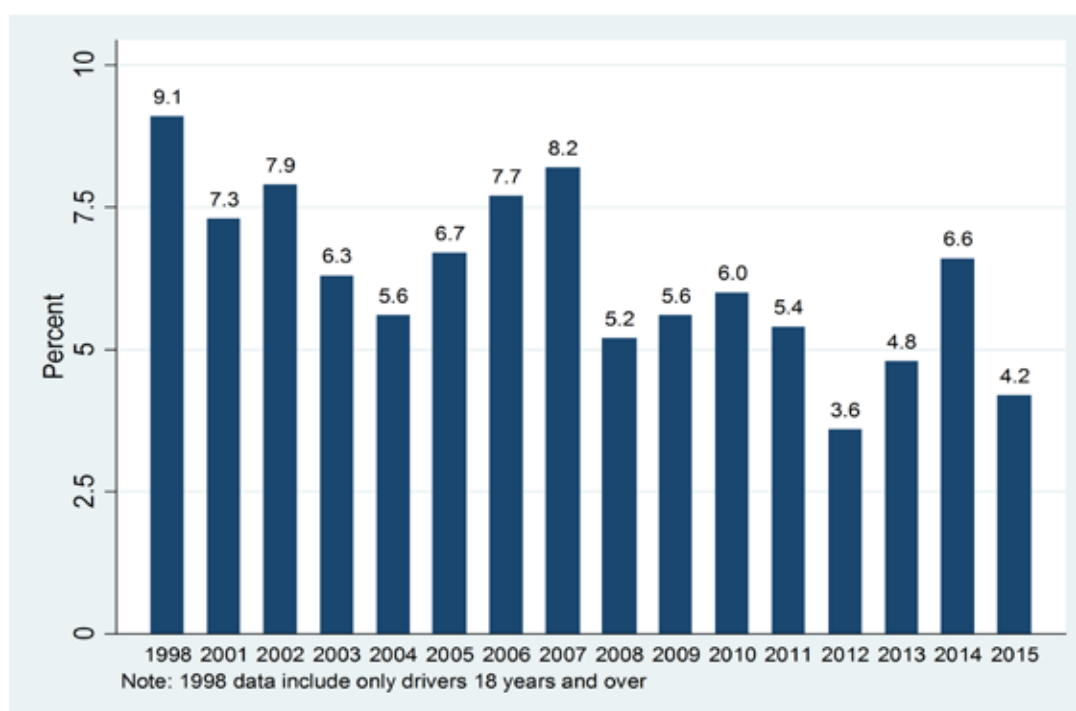


**What percentage of Canadians drive when they are over the legal limit?** In 2015, 4.2% of respondents to the survey admitted they had driven when they thought they were over the legal limit in the past 12 months. Of importance, with the exception of 2014, the difference between 2007 and every year until 2015 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 since 2007 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.

Significance tests also affirmed the increase in more recent years from 3.6% in 2012 to 6.6% in 2014 among respondents who claimed to have driven when they thought they were over the legal limit. While the explanation for this increase is not immediately apparent, more recent data showed a subsequent decrease from 6.6% in 2014 to 4.2% in 2015.



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

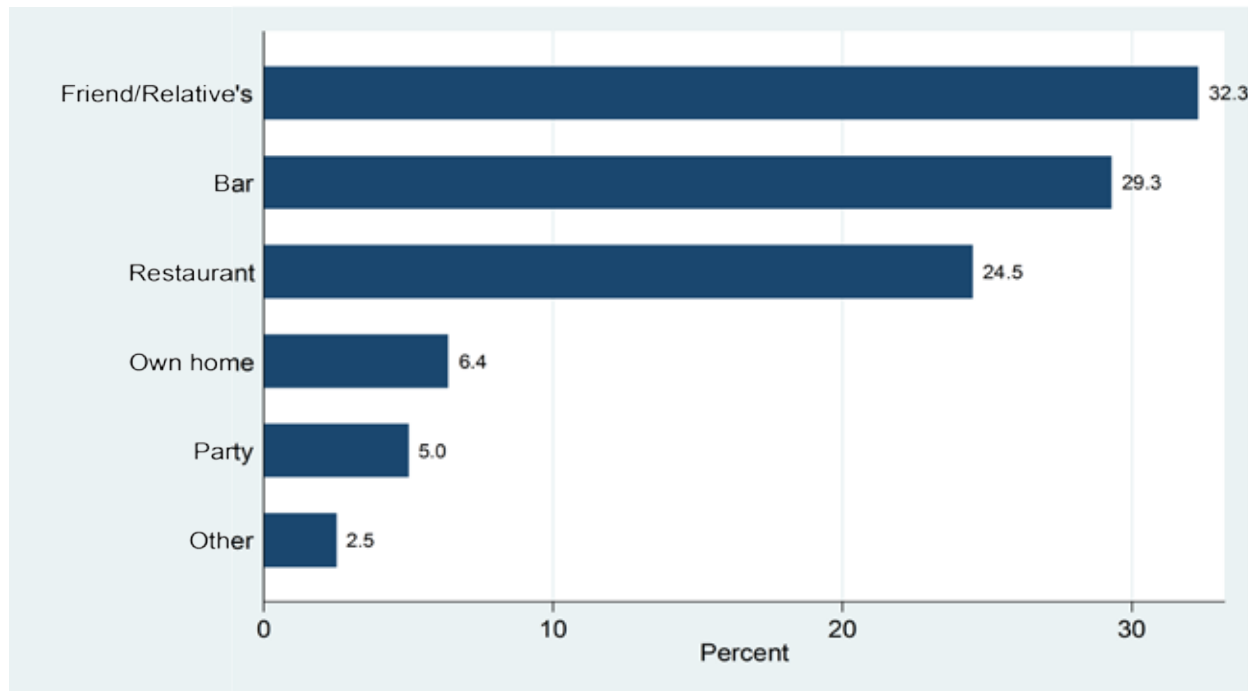


**Where do drivers do most of their drinking?** Respondents who admitted to driving when they thought they were over the legal limit were asked where they did most of their drinking. In 2015, almost one-third (32.3%) of these respondents reported doing most of their drinking prior to driving at the home of a friend or relative, compared to 24.4% in 2013 and 31.1% in 2014. Slightly less than one-third (29.3%) of those who drove when they thought they were over the legal limit report doing most of their drinking at a bar, with even a smaller percentage of respondents who reported doing so in 2013 (25.5%) and 2014 (20.7%). One-quarter of respondents (24.5%) reported doing most of their drinking in a restaurant (21.4% in 2013 and 20.5% in 2014).

In sharp contrast, just 6.4% reported doing most of their drinking in their own home (11.5% in 2013 and 7.9% in 2014); 5.0% reported doing most of their drinking at a party (10.0% in 2013 and 19.1% in 2014); and, 2.5% reported doing most of their drinking at other locations (7.0% in 2013 and 0.7% in 2014).

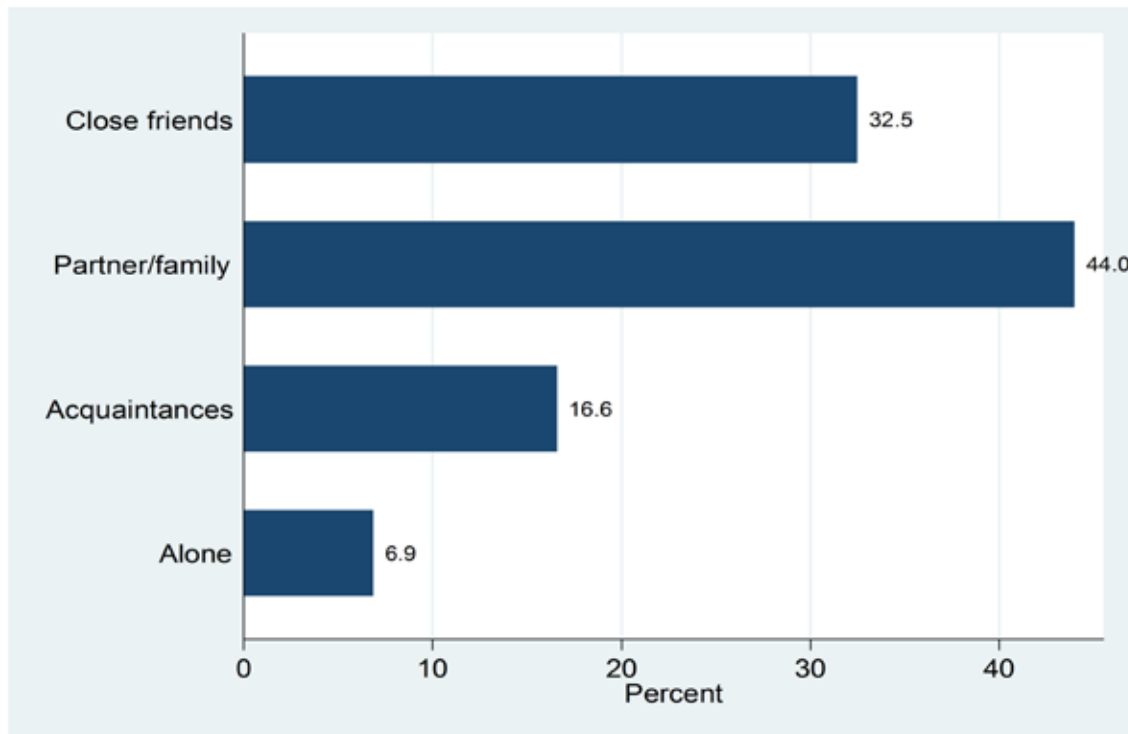
These results suggest that more persons who drive after drinking do so at the home of friends or family, or in a bar or restaurant. Conversely, a much smaller proportion of persons drink at their own home, at a party, or at other locations. As such, key messages to discourage drinking drivers should be tailored to reach and to resonate with persons who consume alcohol in the homes of friends and family, as well as bars and restaurants in an effort to encourage behaviour change.

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



**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. In 2015, almost half (44.0%) of this group reported doing most of their drinking in the company of a life partner and/or family member. In addition, one-third (32.5%) reported doing most of the drinking in the company of close friends; and 16.6% reported doing their drinking in the company of acquaintances or colleagues. Less than 7% of drivers (6.9%) reported doing most of their drinking while alone. These results suggests 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.

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



**Where does the issue of drinking and driving sit on the public agenda?** In 2015, more than two-thirds (69.5%) of respondents cited drinking and driving as the highest ranked issue on the public agenda; this is just slightly lower than the 69.8% of respondents who identified the state of the health care system as being at the top of the public agenda.

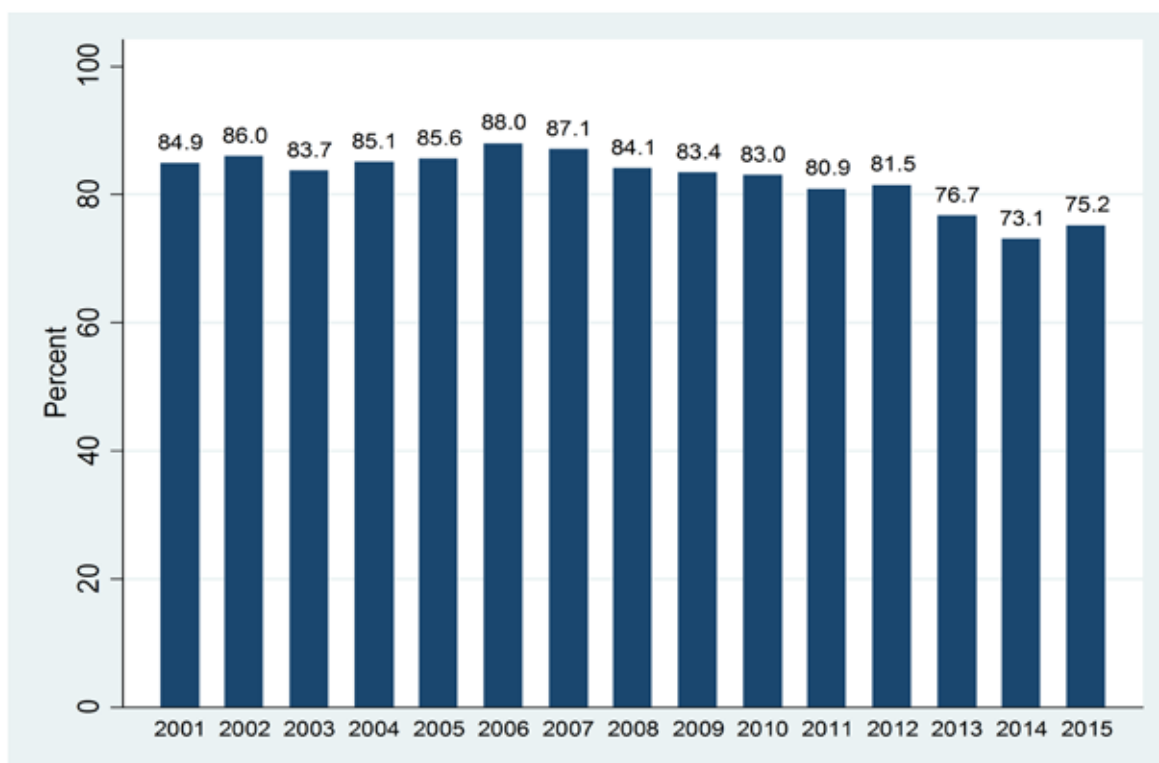
An examination of data over the past few years has revealed that a majority of Canadians continue to regard drinking and driving as an issue of great priority. The percentage of those who said that they were concerned or very concerned about drinking and driving increased from 69.3% in 2011 to 71.6% in 2012, and then decreased slightly to 69.5% in 2015. In six out of 10 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 has always been the second-ranked issue among respondents.

In summary, although the percentage of Canadians who considered drinking and driving to be a priority concern has decreased slightly in recent years, it still 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 2015 revealed that drinking drivers were rated as a very or extremely serious problem by 75.2% of Canadians. This is slightly higher than 73.1%

in 2014, and slightly lower than 76.7% and 81.5% reported in 2013 and 2012 respectively. Although there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who regard drinking and driving as a major road safety issue in 2015 (75.2%) as compared to 2006 (88.0%), a clear majority of Canadians continued to express high levels of concern about drinking and driving. Given the relationship between the levels of concern among the public and their behaviour, it may not be surprising to see the percentage of respondents who drove when they thought they were over the legal limit has not decreased substantially between 2008 (5.2%) and 2015 (4.2%).

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



When asked if the issue of young drivers impaired by alcohol was a very or extremely serious problem, 71.6% of respondents agreed in 2015. This is lower than the 82.2% of respondents who cited that this particular issue was of concern to them in 2010. In 2015, respondents were also asked about how concerned they were about four other road safety issues. Young drivers impaired by drugs (67.9%), drugged drivers (63.3%), older drivers impaired by prescription drugs (50.9%), and wild animals crossing or standing in roadways (26.0%) were considered to be less problematic than drinking and driving and young drivers impaired by alcohol. Although the issue of drinking and driving in general, and drinking and driving by young drivers in particular, appears to be regarded as a less serious problem than in past years, the vast majority of respondents reported that they continue to believe that this issue is an important one.

**About the poll.** These results are based on the RSM, an annual public opinion poll developed and conducted by TIRF. A total of 1,204 Canadians completed the poll in October and November of 2015. 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 2014, all of the respondents completed the survey online.