Prevent Drunk Driving: Mobilize all the Parties Concerned and Take Action

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Abstract
The mobilization and the coordination of local and regional organizations have favored the implementation of a number of strategies and preventive actions aimed at reducing the number of drunk drivers on the roads in a rural region.

Introduction
In the spring of 1997, a series of traffic fatalities linked to driving while under the influence of alcohol shook the population of Beauce-Etchemin. These dramatic events, widely covered in the media, mobilized the decision-makers of the region. As a result, all the organizations concerned rallied to the initiative proposed by the Direction of Public Health, the Ministry of Transports of Québec and the Québec Police and decided, by common consent, to attack the problem. The Beauce-Etchemin Coordination Committee for the Prevention of Drunk Driving was formed. Its main goal is “reduce the number of deaths in the region caused by people driving while under the influence of alcohol.”

Methods
In order to draw up an effective action plan, the Coordination Committee first made a detailed analysis of the problem and of its different local particularities. In 1997, the region of Beauce-Etchemin had the highest number of deceased drivers with alcohol in their blood of all the regions of Québec. But, in addition, a study of the problem of drinking and driving revealed that in Beauce-Etchemin, as compared to the rest of Québec:

- The population drinks more often in bars;
- Social disapproval of drinking and driving is not very high;
- A greater number of people state that they drink at home “before a social evening out” which puts them doubly at risk, because there are so few alternative means of transportation in the region (taxi, bus, other);
People are more inclined to go along as passengers in a car driven by someone who has had too much to drink and this, mainly, because of the absence of alternative means of transportation.

With this information in hand, a list of the clientele to be addressed was prepared, giving priority to the groups most at risk: those with a liquor license, those who drink and who use a motor vehicle, students, municipalities, social clubs and workers clubs, and the population in general. An action plan was then prepared specifying for each clientele the type of action to be undertaken. This approach reflects the fact that prevention campaigns which have the greatest chance of success with a targeted clientele are those that call on different sectors and use more than one strategy.

**Results**

It is important to note that all the actions undertaken by the Coordination Committee are aimed at reducing the amount of damage caused by drinking rather than reducing the consumption of alcohol. The Permanent Committee in the Battle against Drug Addiction defines this approach of limiting damage as “a collective health approach not aimed at eliminating the use of mind-altering substances, but rather at enabling users to develop ways of reducing the negative effects of their actions.” So rather than hoping that the population of the region of Beauce-Etchemin will reduce its alcohol consumption, the Coordination Committee is counting on a series of strategies and actions to encourage alcohol consumers to reduce the damage that can be caused by drinking, in this case, the number of highway accidents.

The different strategies which form an integral part of the action plan are the development of competent people, education/information, control and local planning. The following examples illustrate these different strategies.

The development of competent people – bar owners, managers of arenas and those in charge of sports groups and activities, are called on to become promoters of the message “If you are celebrating, give your keys to a responsible person!” In addition, municipalities have been called on to do their part by designating a person responsible for the dossier of “drinking and driving.”

Education / information – activities are planned with teachers and organizers of secondary school graduation balls. The organizers of special events and festivals are made aware of the importance of providing for alternative means of transportation for these public festivities. In addition, promotional kits are made available free of charge. Finally, the different media regularly broadcast the slogan of the Coordination Committee “If you are celebrating, give your keys to a responsible person!”

Local planning – support is offered to organizers of special events and festivals to help arrange alternative means of transportation for these events.
Control - collaboration among the different partners of the Coordination Committee allowed for an increase in the police presence at the time of public festivities, graduation balls and parties after the balls. In addition, highway checkpoints set up regularly in the region became another way of making thousands of drivers aware of what was being done to prevent drinking and driving.

Discussion
So far, all these undertakings have given excellent results. One proof of this is the fact that statistics show a steady decrease in the number of deaths related to drinking and driving in the region since the beginning of our campaign. The number of drivers in the Beauce-Etchemin region killed in accidents with alcohol in their blood has gone from 58% to 40%. Our region, which used to have the highest percentage in Québec is now within the provincial average.

One of the factors which accounts for the effectiveness of the Coordination Committee for the prevention of drinking and driving is the choice of partners. Representatives from the field of education, from the municipalities, from the four CLSC (Local Centre of Community Services) of Beauce-Etchemin, the coroner’s office, the Crown Prosecutor, the different police forces (municipal and Québec police), Québec’s Public Automobile Insurance Plan, the Direction of Public Health and the Ministry of Transports of Québec. The Committee is composed of 25 people who are noted as much for the quality of their involvement as for their ability to translate the Committee’s decisions into action. Thus, members are responsible for promoting the orientations of the committee in their respective organizations. Furthermore, such an arrangement allows for a rapid readjustment of the actions to be carried out any time it is deemed necessary.

The Committee is a dynamic group. Members are called upon to take part in different working committees so that the expertise of each may be put to the best possible use. One of the main strong points of this expertise comes from the presence of the representatives from the CLSC in each of the RCM (Regional County Municipalities) involved. It is the role of these representatives to make detailed reports to the Coordination Committee concerning needs specific to their region, thus enabling the Committee to plan actions directly related to these needs.

The efficiency of the actions put forward by the Committee is directly related to the level of the concerted effort being made. The collaboration between the CLSC, the municipalities and the different police forces in the awareness campaign and in the support given to the program of accompaniment set up by those organizing special events and festivals are good examples. And the results are more than satisfying; a large majority of special events and festivals in Beauce-Etchemin in 1999, some 70% in all, offered a service of accompaniment. In the year 2000 this rose to 78%.

Another element the Committee attacked was the low level of social disapproval of drinking and driving. The accent was put on reaching the people around the targeted clientele. In this area, the results are remarkable. Actually, a comparative study shows
that social disapproval of drinking and driving rose from 56% in 1998 to 86% in 2001, an increase of 30%.

Students were also a targeted clientele. The committee undertook to mobilize the graduating students in the high schools, make them responsible and support them in their efforts to put into place concrete means of making their graduation ball safe as concerns drinking and driving. Here again, the results speak for themselves; of all the secondary schools in Beauce-Etchemin, only 38% offered a service of accompaniment for the graduation balls in 1998. But in 2000, 100% of the schools offered this service. By having the students take part in a positive experience in preventing drinking and driving, an experience that can be repeated on other occasions, we are building winning attitudes for tomorrow.

The Coordination Committee of Beauce-Etchemin is an example of a population which, when faced with a problem, chose to take the situation in hand. The mobilization and the concerted efforts of the local and regional partners furthered the implementation of very interesting initiatives. Recipient of the prize “Highway Security 2000” offered by the AQTR (The Quebec Transport and Highways Association), the Committee enjoys increasing recognition and has a growing influence. As mentioned, the number of drivers who died with alcohol in their blood in our region has been constantly decreasing since 1998. Although it is too early to confirm this tendency, these statistics encourage the partners on the Committee to pursue their efforts in the fight against drinking and driving. The Committee also feels that there is a promising potential for the exportation of this project.

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