

Info items
April 12th

BC Coalition for Action on Alcohol Reform



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March 25, 2010

Mayor Bob Turner
Bowen Island Municipality
981 Artisan Lane
Bowen Island, BC V0N 1G0

Dear Mayor Turner:

We are requesting support from the Bowen Island Municipality for the recommendations made by the BC Coalition for Action on Alcohol Reform. This Coalition was created in response to the recently published report by the University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions BC, "Alcohol Pricing, Public Health and the HST: Proposed Incentives for BC Drinkers to Make Healthy Choices" as well as the Provincial Health Minister's (Dr. Perry Kendall) December 2008 report, "Public Health Approach to Alcohol Policy." I have enclosed information about our objectives and fact sheets outlining alcohol-related harms in the general population as well as our youth.

The evidence is overwhelming that these reforms will reduce socio and economic harms of alcohol abuse, including domestic abuse, crime and fatal car crashes in our province. The BC RCMP reports that after 10 pm, one in ten drivers is impaired and one in three fatal car collisions involves an impaired driver. Unfortunately people of all ages consistently underestimate the extent to which alcohol impairs the brain's "executive functioning" (i.e. diminished ability to assess risks and consequences) despite being aware of alcohol affects others.

The BC Coalition is not recommending tax increases across the board for all alcoholic products. Instead, we are recommending that the government targets cheap, high-strength drinks for price increases (see attached Price and Alcohol Content Comparison) and creates incentives for producers, retailers and consumers, in turn, to manufacture, promote and drink low-alcohol content drinks.

At the present time, the Vex – Hard Pick Lemonade with 7 per cent alcohol content does not comply with low-risk drinking guidelines since it is almost 40 per cent more harmful than the lower strength coolers available in our liquor stores. "The cooler illusion," that these drinks are only slightly more intoxicating than non-alcoholic drinks is a very dangerous strategy, especially when the selling price is comparable to non-alcoholic drinks.

Dr. Kendall's study calls for a net 3 per cent reduction in price for low strength alcohol products, no price change for moderate strength alcohol products which includes the majority of Canadian beers (5 per cent alcohol) and BC wines (12 per cent alcohol) and a 3 per cent increase in high strength alcohol products which includes the 7 per cent coolers in the chart after the implementation of the HST.

Furthermore, setting minimum prices for drinks and indexing the price of alcohol to inflation will not have a significant impact on alcohol prices or sales at government or private liquor stores. Nor will these reforms have a negative effect on business in restaurants or bars.

All residents of British Columbia have a vested interest in a policy adopted by the government that will reduce harms caused by alcohol and save money. The shortfall between the annual direct costs associated with alcohol and the direct revenue from its sales and taxes was \$196 million in 2003. As health care costs escalate, this gap will continue to increase unless we start focusing on reducing alcohol-related harms in our province. Regardless of growing concerns in some sectors about the government's regulation of our alcohol policy, it is not acceptable for 2,000 BC residents to die every year because of the consequences of alcohol abuse.

There is considerable interest in this initiative from the District of Chetwynd in northern BC to the City of Victoria in southern BC (see attached motion). A number of organizations, including the BC Alliance on Mental Health, Illness and Addictions, are also asking the government to take action to reduce alcohol-related harms in the interest of public health and safety. This Alliance is a 21-member coalition of health, social service and criminal justice organizations which include: the RCMP and the Vancouver Police Department as well as the Association of Substance Abuse Programs of BC, the BC Psychiatric and Psychological Associations.

We are respectfully requesting that the Bowan Island Municipality also supports this initiative by sending letters to the Provincial Ministers of Health, the Solicitor General, the Finance Minister and Dr. Perry Kendall, asking them to exercise social responsibility by proposing new legislation to reduce the harms caused by alcohol abuse in our communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours very truly,



Lembi Buchanan
Chair, Coalition for Action on Alcohol Reform

Encl.

BC Coalition for Action on Alcohol Reform

There is an urgent need to reduce alcohol-related harms. The risks far outweigh the benefits. The human and economic costs are enormous. The shortfall between the annual direct costs associated with alcohol abuse and the direct revenue from its sales and taxes was \$196 million in 2003.

We are drinking more

- Alcohol consumption has increased at a faster rate in BC than the rest of Canada.
- The people of BC may smoke less but we drink more. Annually, we consume an average of 600 beers or 120 bottles of wine or 36 bottles (750 ml) of spirits per person.
- BC has the second highest prevalence of alcohol dependence in Canada.

Alcohol-related harms in BC are increasing

- The social harms associated with alcohol abuse include violence, sexual assault, crime, alcohol-involved traffic casualties.
- Excessive alcohol use can also have serious negative effects on work, study, and relationships.
- Long-term alcohol abuse increases the risk of certain cancers, including breast cancer, liver disease, heart disease and stroke.

The **BC Coalition for Action on Alcohol Reform** supports recent recommendations made by the University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions Research BC as well as the Provincial Health Officer in its 2008 report, "Public Health Approach to Alcohol Policy." We advocate that the Government of British Columbia implement the following:

1. Reduce the price of low alcohol content beverages and increase the price of high alcohol content beverages.
2. Set a minimum price per standard drink, \$1.50 in the liquor store and \$3.00 in a bar or restaurant. The minimum purchase price for a bottle of wine should be \$7.80; \$9.00 for a six-pack of beer and \$26 for a bottle of vodka, gin or whiskey.
3. Tax wine and beer products sold at u-vin and u-brew outlets.
4. Index the price of alcohol to inflation.
5. Implement a small levy based on a standard drink and use the proceeds to enhance prevention, treatment and research.

We need to do more than promote responsible drinking. We need to encourage politicians and policy-makers to adopt responsible pricing structures on alcohol products to reduce the related harms. Alcoholic beverages should be taxed in relation to alcohol content. The introduction of the HST creates an excellent opportunity for the government to reform its pricing policies to reduce the harms caused by alcohol.

BC COALITION FOR ACTION ON ALCOHOL REFORM

Did you know?

- Residents of BC consume more than 1.4 billion standard drinks per year.
- The annual cost of alcohol abuse in BC is \$2.2 billion or \$536 per person, the highest per capita cost in Canada.
- Alcohol is often associated with violent crimes, including domestic abuse, sexual assaults, homicide and suicide.
- Thirty per cent of all criminal activity is attributed to alcohol.
- Alcohol contributes to a wide range of injuries including motor vehicle crashes, fires, falls and drownings.
- One in 3 fatal car collisions involve an impaired driver.
- After 10 pm, one in 10 drivers is impaired.
- Hospital ER departments face an enormous burden from alcohol-related diseases and injuries.
- As many as 60 diseases are adversely affected by heavy drinking since alcohol affects many of the organs in the body.
- More than 50 per cent of people diagnosed with mental illness abuse alcohol and/or drugs.
- Alcohol abuse often exacerbates symptoms or mental illness or triggers new symptoms.
- Prenatal abuse of alcohol is the leading cause of birth defects including fetal alcohol syndrome.
- Close to 30 per cent of males and 14 per cent of females report regularly drinking above low-risk guidelines (more than one or two standard drinks daily).
- Risky alcohol use is common among under-age youth, with 25 per cent reporting binge drinking at least once a month.
- Alcohol abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for persons with serious mental illness.
- The average, annual cost of homelessness is \$55,000 per person.

BC COALITION FOR ACTION ON ALCOHOL REFORM

Cheaper alcohol, longer bar hours and a rash of private liquor stores have led to higher alcohol consumption and binge-drinking among BC youths

Did you know?

- Alcohol is the number one drug of choice among our youth because many believe it is less harmful than drugs.
- The average age when youth first try alcohol is 11 for boys and 13 for girls.
- The younger a person begins using alcohol, the greater the chances of developing an alcohol or drug problem later in life.
- Heavy drinking during adolescence harms both physical and mental development.
- Risky alcohol use is common among under-age youth, with 25 per cent binge drinking at least once a month (i.e. five or more standard drinks on one occasion).
- Adolescents aged 12 to 17 with severe emotional or behavioural problems are much more likely to be dependent on alcohol compared to others their age.
- Regular heavy drinking is associated with academic failure, illicit drug use, tobacco use and harmful physical effects from hangovers to alcohol poisoning.
- Many teenagers report that drinking has led them to become involved with dangerous behavior, property damage and/or violent incidents. More than half are intoxicated when they commit a crime for which they are serving time.
- Canada's youth incarceration rate is among the highest in the Western world. Almost 80% arrive at a BC youth correctional facility with a substance abuse problem.
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among youth ages 15 to 20 and alcohol is involved in more than half.
- Alcohol abuse is also linked with youthful deaths by drowning, suicide, and homicide.
- Alcohol abuse increases the risk of carrying out, or being a victim of, a physical or sexual assault.
- Consuming alcohol in combination with other drugs, including over the counter or prescription drugs, is dangerous and can lead to an overdose and even death.
- The prevalence of alcohol use and intoxication is even higher among street youth than the general youth population.

Price and Alcohol Content Comparison: BC Liquor Stores

*In BC, 65% of the coolers contain 7% alcohol.
Many are cheaper than lower-alcohol content coolers.*

Vex-Hard Pink Lemonade	Woody's Pink Grapefruit	Mike's Light Hard Lemonade
7 % alcohol	5.3 % alcohol	4.1 % alcohol
\$1.59 per bottle	\$2.38 per bottle	\$2.38 per bottle
\$9.55 for 6 x 341ml bottles	\$9.50 for 4 x 330 ml bottles	\$9.50 for 4 x 330 ml bottles
19 grams of alcohol / bottle	14 grams of alcohol / bottle	11 grams of alcohol / bottle
\$1.14 per standard drink	\$2.22 per standard drink	\$3.03 per standard drink

Centre for Addictions Research of BC recommends a minimum price of \$1.50 per standard drink of alcohol.

Low-risk drinking guidelines

Centre for Addictions Research of BC recommends no more than 4 standard drinks per day (20 per week) for men and 3 per day (10 per week) for women.

One standard drink

United Kingdom: 8 grams of pure alcohol

Australian & New Zealand: 10 grams

Canada: 13.6 grams

United States: 14 grams

Victoria, British Columbia February 4, 2010

Motion to have mayor and council write a letter of support re: alcohol reduction strategy to the Provincial Government.

1. Whereas:

- Residents of BC consume more than 1.4 billion standard drinks per year.
- The annual cost of alcohol abuse in BC is \$2.2 billion or \$536 per person, the highest per capita cost in Canada.
- The government relies on its most vulnerable and high-risk drinkers to pay its bills. Twenty per cent of the drinking population consumes 73 per cent of the beer, wine and spirits sold in the province. Most of them would qualify for treatment.
- Alcohol abuse is often associated with domestic abuse, crime and violence, including homicide and suicide.
- Thirty per cent of all criminal activity is attributed to alcohol.
- Every year, one in four of fatal motor vehicle accidents are alcohol-related.
- Long-term alcohol abuse puts you at risk for developing a number of cancers, including breast cancer, as well as liver and heart disease.
- More than 50 per cent of people diagnosed with mental illness abuse alcohol and/or drugs.
- Alcohol abuse often exacerbates symptoms or mental illness or triggers new symptoms.
- Prenatal abuse of alcohol is the leading cause of birth defects including fetal alcohol syndrome.
- Close to 30 per cent of males and 14 per cent of females report regularly drinking above low-risk guidelines.
- Risky alcohol use is fairly common among under-age youth, with 25 per cent reporting binge drinking at least once a month.
- Alcohol abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for persons with serious mental illness.
- The average, annual cost of homelessness is \$55,000 per person.

Let it be passed that in response to a request for a letter of support from the *BC Coalition for Action on Alcohol Reform* mayor and council send a letter to the Provincial Ministers of Health, the Solicitor General, Dr. Perry Kendall and VIHA supporting the following recommendations made by the Centre for Addictions Research of B.C. and Dr. Perry Kendall to reduce the public safety and health concerns associated with problematic alcohol use in our society:

1. Reduce the price of low alcohol content beverages and increase the price of high alcohol content beverages.
2. Set a minimum price per standard drink, \$1.50 in the liquor store and \$3.00 in a bar or restaurant. The minimum price for a bottle of wine would be \$ 7.80; \$9.00 for a six-pack of beer and \$26 for a bottle of spirits.
3. Tax wine and beer products sold at u-vin and u-brew outlets.
4. Index the price of alcohol to inflation.
5. Implement a small levy based on standard drinks and use the proceeds to enhance prevention, treatment and research.