

BC Coalition for Action on Alcohol Reform

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April 27, 2010

Mayor Sharon Shepherd
City of Kelowna
1435 Water Street
Kelowna, BC V1Y 1J4

Dear Mayor Shepherd:

We are requesting support from the City of Kelowna 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 social and economic harms of alcohol abuse, including domestic abuse, property damage, violent assaults 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. Women are at greater risk of becoming impaired more quickly than men because they metabolize alcohol differently.

Certainly education is the key as far as reducing alcohol-related harms but government agencies and educational institutions have failed to take on the responsibility. The same can be said about the alcohol industry. And it has become obvious that we can not always rely on the parents to educate their children about safe drinking guidelines. Therefore, there is no choice but to ask the mayors and councillors of each municipality to appeal to our elected representatives in provincial government to act in the interest of public health and safety. We believe that it is our collective responsibility to take whatever action is required to reduce the social and economic harms of alcohol abuse in our communities.

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

CITY OF KELOWNA

APR 30 2010

ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT

Original to: Communications
Copied: Mayor
 City Manager
 Councillors

File Number: 0700-01
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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 to 60 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 that is potentially very harmful to our young people, especially when the selling price is comparable to non-alcoholic drinks.

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.

Setting minimum pricing may actually strengthen the BC wine industry by reducing the gap in price of wines produced in our province and cheaper imported wines. Saskatchewan has already implemented changes to their pricing charges of alcoholic beverages to reflect the amount of alcohol in these products effective April 1st, 2010.

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 increasing regulation by the government of our alcohol policy, it is not acceptable for 2,000 BC residents to die every year because of the consequences of alcohol abuse.

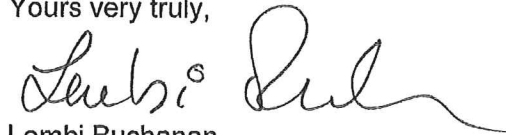
There is considerable interest in this initiative from the District of Chetwynd in northern BC to the City of Victoria in southern BC (see attached motion). A number of organizations, including the BC Alliance on Mental Health, Illness and Addictions, a 21-member coalition of health, social service and 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.

Some communities have expressed concerns that taxation of alcohol is the jurisdiction of the provincial government rather than municipal councils. Nevertheless, the Honourable Ida Chong, Minister of Healthy Living and Sport, and other senior government officials, are looking for input from the residents across British Columbia regarding recommendations to reduce social and economic harms of alcohol abuse in our communities.

We are respectfully requesting that the City of Kelowna also supports this initiative by sending letters to the 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 public safety and health concerns associated with problematic alcohol use in our province.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours very truly,



Lembi Buchanan
Chair, BC 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 out weigh 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.

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. We need to do more than promote responsible drinking. We believe that it is our collective responsibility to take whatever action is required to reduce the social and economic harms of alcohol abuse in our communities. We need to encourage politicians and policy-makers to adopt responsible pricing structures on alcohol products in the interest of public health and safety.

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.
- Vandalism is more often than not related to excessive alcohol consumption.
- Alcohol also 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 of 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 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.