

alPHa's members are
the public health units
in Ontario.

alPHa Sections:

Boards of Health
Section

Council of Ontario
Medical Officers of
Health (COMOH)

**Affiliate
Organizations:**

Association of Ontario
Public Health Business
Administrators

Association of
Public Health
Epidemiologists
in Ontario

Association of
Supervisors of Public
Health Inspectors of
Ontario

Health Promotion
Ontario

Ontario Association of
Public Health Dentistry

Ontario Association of
Public Health Nursing
Leaders

Ontario Dietitians in
Public Health

January 31 2019

Hon. Vic Fedeli
Minister of Finance
Room 281, Main Legislative Building,
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1

Dear Minister Fedeli,

Re: Alcohol Choice & Convenience and a Provincial Alcohol Strategy

On behalf of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) and its member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health, and Affiliate organizations, I am writing to provide our input to your Government's plans for modernizing the rules for the sale and consumption of alcohol in Ontario. We are especially interested in helping you achieve the stated goal of ensuring safe and healthy communities by reiterating our call for a Provincial Alcohol Strategy.

Over the past few years, Ontario has been steadily increasing the availability of and access to beverage alcohol by relaxing long-standing controls over its sale and distribution, such as expanding the number and type of retail outlets, extending hours of service, allowing online ordering with home delivery and reducing over-the-counter prices. Your Government's plan to expand the sale of alcohol to corner stores, additional grocery stores and big-box stores would be a significant move towards further loosening these controls.

While we understand the consumer convenience aspect of these decisions, we are very concerned that the negative societal and health impacts of increasing the availability of alcohol continue to be overlooked.

Alcohol is no ordinary commodity. It causes injury, addiction, disease, and social disruption and is one of the leading risk factors for disability and death. Its contributions to liver disease, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, acute alcohol poisoning and various injuries owing to intoxication are well known and evidence of its links to mental health disorders and a range of cancers continues to mount. In fact, a recent study by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) estimated that there were over 25,000 hospitalizations in one year in Ontario that were entirely caused by alcohol¹.

In addition to the personal health impacts, alcohol is a significant factor in the public costs associated with health care, social services, law enforcement and justice, and lost workplace productivity.

We have expressed our opposition to expanding the nature and number of retailers permitted to sell alcohol in the past, based on clear evidence that increasing access is detrimental to public health, and this remains our position. Given that such expansion continues to proceed in Ontario however, we must reinforce the importance of developing a comprehensive, provincially led alcohol strategy that can help mitigate the otherwise entirely preventable negative impacts of increased alcohol availability, which include increasing hallway medicine and waste of taxpayers' money.

It is well-established that increasing alcohol availability is directly related to increased consumption and alcohol-related harms. A comprehensive, evidence-based approach to alcohol policy is therefore critical to limiting these harms.

We would be pleased to meet with you to further discuss our views on the public health impacts of alcohol availability and to lend our expertise to the development of a made-in-Ontario alcohol strategy. To schedule a meeting, please have your staff contact Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, aPHa, at loretta@alphaweb.org or 647-325-9594.

Sincerely,



Dr. Robert Kyle,
aPHa President

COPY: Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health

Encl.

TITLE: Conduct a Formal Review and Impact Analysis of the Health and Economic Effects of Alcohol in Ontario and Thereafter Develop a Provincial Alcohol Strategy

SPONSOR: Middlesex-London Board of Health

WHEREAS There is a well-established association between easy access to alcohol and overall rates of consumption and damage from alcohol; and (Barbor et al., 2010)

WHEREAS Ontario has a significant portion of the population drinking alcohol (81.5%), exceeding the low risk drinking guidelines (23.4%), consuming 5 or more drinks on a single occasion weekly (11.2%), and reporting hazardous or harmful drinking (15.6%); and (CAMH Monitor)

WHEREAS Ontario youth (grades 9-12) have concerning levels of alcohol consumption with 69.4% having drunk in the past year, 32.9% binge drinking (5 or more drinks), and 27.5% of students reporting drinking at a hazardous level; and (OSDUHS Report)

WHEREAS Each year alcohol puts this province in a \$456 million deficit due to direct costs related to healthcare and enforcement; and (G. Thomas, CCSA)

WHEREAS Billions of dollars are spent each year in Canada on indirect costs associated with alcohol use (illness, disability, and death) including lost productivity in the workplace and home; and (The Costs of Sub Abuse in CAN, 2002)

WHEREAS Nearly half of all deaths attributable to alcohol are from injuries including unintentional injuries (drowning, burns, poisoning and falls) and intentional injuries (deliberate acts of violence against oneself or others); and (WHO – Alcohol and Injury in EDs, 2007)

WHEREAS Regulating the physical availability of alcohol is one of the top alcohol policy practices in reducing harm; and (Barbor et al., 2010)

WHEREAS The World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) has indicated that alcohol is the world's third largest risk factor for disease burden and that the harmful use of alcohol results in approximately 2.5 million deaths each year. Alcohol is associated with increased levels of health and social costs in Ontario and is causally related to over 65 medical conditions;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) petition the Ontario government to conduct a formal review and impact analysis of the health and economic effects of alcohol in Ontario and develop a provincial Alcohol Strategy.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE: Resolution **CARRIED**