

November 24, 2005

Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier

Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON, M7A 1A4

Dear Premier,

We are writing to you as a coalition of health organizations with a common mandate of improving the health of the citizens of Ontario. One factor that plays a major role in death, illness, injury and disability in this province is alcohol. Recent research by the World Health Organization indicates that alcohol is the third leading contributor to the burden of disease in Ontario and other economically developed areas. Its impact, in health terms, is similar to that of tobacco and high blood pressure and costs this province many billions of dollars per year. Nationally, alcohol is a factor in about 6,000 deaths per year. The largest numbers of these deaths are from injuries resulting from falls, drunk driving collisions, assaults, drownings, etc., but a very large number also result from chronic diseases like cancer, cardiovascular disease, and cirrhosis of the liver.

Because of the magnitude of alcohol's impact on health and injury in this province, we are writing to seek your assurance that a voice for health will be 'at the table' in any future consideration of alcohol rules and regulations in this province. Moreover, given the global nature of the alcohol beverage market, inter provincial, national and international influences must be considered. We strongly encourage you to invite the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, or a senior member of the health promotion community, to participate in any future consideration of alcohol policies or regulations in Ontario.

Recently, the Beverage Alcohol System Review Panel was constituted to review alcohol distribution in this province. Although alcohol is linked with major health and injury problems for individuals and communities, contributing to substantial costs to our health care system, none of the panel members represented the health perspective. While the panel members undoubtedly did a conscientious job in considering the alcohol distribution system in this province, it is nevertheless alarming that none of the panel members could have been expected to be familiar with the substantial scientific evidence relating to alcohol problems and factors that will act to increase or decrease those problems. For example, Canadian research predicts that a one litre increase in the average consumption of alcohol in this province would increase drinking-driving death rates by 8-14%, suicide death rates by 4%, male ischemic heart disease mortality rates by about 2%, and male cirrhosis mortality rates by 17%.

The scientific evidence makes it very clear that the most powerful way to influence alcohol consumption levels and patterns is through government policies and regulations. It is therefore essential for such policies and regulations to be on the health agenda in Ontario.

We understand that a review of the Liquor Licence Act is being, or will be, undertaken. Given the strong connection between alcohol and health problems and costs, we recommend the involvement of Dr. Sheela Basrur and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in this review.

While we recognize that health concerns are not the only perspective that should be considered, we feel that it is imperative that those who must make decisions about alcohol policies and regulations at least be aware of the health implications of their decisions. We would be delighted to discuss our recommendations with you or members of your staff.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Garry Aslanyan
President
Ontario Public Health Association



Andrew Murie
National Executive Director
Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada



Larry O'Connor
President
Association of Local Public Health Agencies



Dennis Long
Addictions Ontario



Paul E. Garfinkel, MD, FRCP(C)
Chief Executive Officer
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

cc: Honourable Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance
Honourable George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-term Care
Dr. Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health and Assistant Deputy Minister
Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion
Honourable Monte Kwinter, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
Mr. David Gavsie, Chair, Board of Directors, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario
Mr. Andrew S. Brandt, Chair & CEO, Liquor Control Board of Ontario