



Ontario Public Health Association
 l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
 Established/Établi 1949

The mission of OPHA is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

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Constituent Societies

Alliance for Healthier Communities

Association of Public Health
 Epidemiologists in Ontario (APHEO)

Association of Supervisors of
 Public Health Inspectors of Ontario
 (ASPHIO)

Canadian Institute of Public Health
 Inspectors (Ontario Branch) (CIPHIO)

Community Health Nurses'
 Initiatives Group (RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario (HPO)

Ontario Association of Public
 Health Dentistry (OAPHD)

Ontario Association of Public Health
 Nursing Leaders, (OAPHNL)

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health
 (ODPH)

Ontario Society of Physical Activity
 Promoters in Public Health (OSPAPPH)

Charitable Registration
 Number 11924 8771 RR0001

November 27, 2018

Hon. Christine Elliott
 Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
 10th Floor, Hepburn Block
 80 Grosvenor Street
 Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4

Re: Provincial alcohol strategy urgently needed to mitigate the increase in access to alcohol

Dear Minister Elliott:

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is concerned with the recent and planned changes to the sale and distribution of alcohol in Ontario due to the negative impact alcohol has on people's health and health care system costs. Other provinces are mounting provincial alcohol strategies to mitigate the harms from alcohol use. As we are gravely concerned about the impact on our communities, we urge your government to move quickly to introduce a strategy to control the negative consequences of alcohol liberalization. We would be pleased to work with you and your colleagues to develop an effective public health strategy.

It is well established that increasing alcohol availability leads to increased consumption and alcohol-related harms. With alcohol use being one of the leading causes of disease and death in Ontario, can we afford to increase the already significant human and financial costs? Ontario spent \$5.34 billion in 2014, including \$1.5 and \$1.3 billion for healthcare and criminal justice respectively. Moreover, since 2015, alcohol use has contributed to more than 43,000 emergency room visits and 66 hospitalizations per day, an enormous and avoidable burden on Ontario's healthcare system.

Our association has been alarmed by the policy and regulatory changes that can contribute to increased harms to people's health. These changes have included reductions to the minimum retail price of beer to \$1 (for beers that are ABV 5.6% or lower), halting the annual automatic increase in the provincial beer tax, and extending the hours of sale for alcohol retail outlets. These changes follow on the heels of a fundamental shift in the retail sale of alcohol over the last few years with the introduction of alcohol sales in grocery stores. Your Government's recent announcement to further increase alcohol availability through convenience stores and other private retail outlets will have negative health consequences for Ontario families, and therefore, we call on you to develop a comprehensive alcohol strategy to mitigate the potential harms of alcohol use as you liberalize access.

Such a strategy should include: public education and awareness campaigns aimed at changing attitudes and social norms around consumption; strong policies to minimize harm; rigorous enforcement of marketing regulations; and an improved monitoring system to track alcohol related harms.

We believe that it is possible to create a healthy alcohol culture in Ontario that balances interests in public health, government revenue, economic development, and consumer preferences.

Now is the time for Ontario to take leadership and address the harms of alcohol use. There are models we can draw on as other jurisdictions across Canada have been pursuing such strategies. The OPHA and others in public health want to work with your Ministry and Government colleagues to develop a provincial alcohol strategy. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and/or members of your team to further discuss ways to mitigate the harms from alcohol use and will be following up with your staff to request a meeting before the holiday break.

Thank you for your consideration.



Karen Ellis-Scharfenberg

C.c. Finance Minister Fedeli

Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario

More about the Ontario Public Health Association

We are a member-based charity that has been advancing the public health agenda since 1949. OPHA provides leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthens the impact of those who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. OPHA does this through a variety of means including promoting public dialogue and education on healthy public policy, capacity building, research and knowledge exchange. Our membership brings together many different disciplines and sectors working together to achieve our shared vision of optimal health for all.