



**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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June 2, 2006

Premier Dalton McGuinty,

On May 15, 2006, the Ontario government announced plans to open another 20 privately-owned LCBO "agency stores", as reported by the Canadian Press. This will bring the total number of agency stores to approximately 215 throughout Ontario.

The Ontario Public Health Association strongly feels that these proposed expansions require an immediate public review of the agency store program before taking effect. This review needs to take into consideration the potential impact on public health, community safety, the LCBO's social responsibility mandate, and the LCBO's future as Ontario's public alcohol retailer.

Research from the World Health Organization shows that one of the most effective ways to minimize alcohol-related harm is to maintain a public alcohol retail distribution system with a strong duty of social responsibility (Babor et. al., 2003). Such systems are typically more restrained than their private counterparts in promoting alcohol sales and more likely to aggressively challenge and refuse to sell alcohol to underage youth and the already intoxicated. Public monopolies also moderate the political influence of private corporate alcohol sellers who have a vested interest in boosting alcohol sales (Room, 2002). Finally, publicly owned retailers can be held more directly accountable to the public (CAMH, 2004).

Unlike staff at LCBO outlets, private agency store operators have a direct interest in maximizing alcohol sales. This interest will always be in potential conflict with the community's stake in reducing alcohol-related problems. The risk is compounded by the fact that the LCBO has no effective way to ensure that agency stores do not sell to minors, people who are intoxicated, or those who may drink and drive (OPSEU, May 15, 2006).

Essentially, the only potential benefit of providing alcohol through agency stores is to increase customer convenience through increased number of outlets, outlet density, and hours of operation, all of which have been shown to increase alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems (Babor et. al., 2003). In 2002, the social cost of alcohol use in Canada was conservatively estimated to be \$14.6 billion (CCSA, 2006). In addition, recent studies have shown that increased customer convenience is not a high priority for the public as 80% of respondents to a 2003 survey believed that "the number of places where you can buy alcohol in your community" is "about right" (Anglin et al, 2004). And furthermore, 50% of adult residents in Ontario say they can get to the nearest beer or liquor store in 5 minutes or less while over 90% can make it in 15 minutes or less (Anglin et al. 2004).

Before the last election, your government promised to stop expansion of the agency stores program. For the safety of Ontarians, we urge your government to keep this promise.

We look forward to receiving your positive response.

Sincerely,



Dr. Garry Aslanyan  
President  
Ontario Public Health Association

Copied to: David Caplan, Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal;  
George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care;  
Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion;  
Philip J. Olsson, Acting Chair and CEO, LCBO

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