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*Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001*

July 20, 2016

Hon Charles Sousa
Ministry of Finance
7th Floor, Frost Building South
7 Queen's Park Crescent
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Y7

Dear Minister Sousa,

The Ontario Public Health Association applauds the Province's strengthening of Ontario's alcohol pricing structure by raising the price of wine and phasing in an adjustment to the minimum price over the next three years. Pricing is an important policy lever in our collective effort to reduce alcohol-related harms to society and is supported by a strong evidence base.

Of particular note, an increase in price is especially effective for high-risk drinkers, such as youth. Approximately half of Ontario's youth in grades 7-12 reported drinking alcohol in the past year, representing about 440,000 students (Boak et al., 2015). One in six of those students reported at least one episode of binge drinking (five or more drinks in one day) in the past month (Boak et al., 2015). As these statistics demonstrate, strategies that work to protect youth from the harms of alcohol continue to be necessary.

The recent increase in wine pricing is clearly a step in the right direction to reduce alcohol-related harms. To increase its impact, the OPHA encourages the provincial government to consider other evidence-based strategies. One such strategy is to adjust minimum prices to keep pace with inflation. Ontario is currently ranked 8th out of 10 provinces for progress made in minimum pricing, primarily because pricing has not kept up with inflation (Giesbrecht et al., 2013). In 2010, Saskatchewan implemented a strong minimum pricing strategy. Through mandated minimum price increases for higher strength alcohol products, the province of Saskatchewan decreased alcohol consumption by 135,000 litres (measured in pure ethanol), while increasing revenue by more than nine million dollars (Thomas, 2012).

The World Health Organization has identified pricing policies including linking prices to alcohol content, as a "best buy" recommendation. As alcohol content rises, prices should also increase (WHO, 2011). While the government currently has strong pricing policies in place, we encourage the province to raise minimum prices across all beverage categories and adopt a model like Saskatchewan that ties pricing to alcohol content. For a summary of these "best buy" strategies and the Ontario context, please refer to [OPHA's Issue Series on alcohol pricing](#).

Once again, congratulations on your recent decision to increase the price of wine and thank you for considering our feedback. We look forward to the release of Ontario's comprehensive Alcohol Policy to further coordinate efforts to minimize the impact of alcohol on the population. Through effective policy interventions, like the aforementioned recommendations, Ontario will advance in its efforts towards achieving the goal to make "Ontario the healthiest place in North America to grow up and grow old."

Sincerely,



Pegeen Walsh
For: Ellen Wodchis
President, OPHA



Cathy Edwards
Chair, OPHA Alcohol Workgroup

cc: Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long Term Care
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health