

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**How Ontario's potential plan to make it easier for consumers to buy alcohol  
would be bad for your health**

**Hamilton, Ontario** - As the government of Ontario conducts consultations to explore continued “modernization” of the alcohol marketplace, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is raising serious concerns regarding the health implications that increased alcohol access could have for Ontarians. “The government’s ‘commitment to expanding choice and convenience for beverage alcohol consumers’ will undoubtedly be at the expense of Ontarians’ health”, says John Atkinson, OPHA’s Executive Director. OPHA has recently taken action [to inform the government](#) of the threats to the health of Ontarians of various potential policy changes including ongoing expansion of retail outlets and hours of sale, as well as lowering alcohol prices. While options are being considered, OPHA is urging the government to walk away from any intended changes that jeopardize health. They’re also urging the media, the public, and concerned citizen groups to raise their voices concerning the health impacts further liberalization of alcohol sales will bring.

[Alcohol is already more widely available](#) in Ontario due to recent provincial policy changes. The number of alcohol outlets increased by 22% between 2007 and 2017. Access to alcohol expanded even further during the COVID-19 pandemic [through take out and delivery](#) means. These changes have now become permanent. According to Atkinson, “Unlike other substances, it appears that recent and potential upcoming policy decisions around alcohol in Ontario are being driven by growing small business, alcohol industry revenues, and consumer choice, rather than protecting the health of Ontarians”.

Research and real-world evidence show that when alcohol becomes cheaper and more available, consumption increases, and so does alcohol-related harm. Alcohol is the most widely used substance in Ontario, yet most people are not aware of the harm it can cause to their health. Earlier this year, updated [alcohol guidance](#) was released for all Canadians who drink alcohol. The guidance does not prescribe specific limits on how much a person should drink per week, but it does advise that people should drink less for their health. The more a person drinks, the greater the risk to their health. In 2020, there were 6,202 deaths and 319,580 emergency room and hospital visits in Ontario [tied to alcohol](#).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), alcohol is a Group 1 carcinogen (the agent is carcinogenic to humans) along with tobacco smoke and asbestos. Each year in Canada, [7,000 cancer cases](#) are attributed to consuming alcohol. Most Canadians are not aware of the link between alcohol and cancer, or the other [200 plus health harms related to drinking alcohol](#). And alcohol doesn’t just impact the individual, says Samantha Wells, a scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. “Alcohol can have devastating consequences to communities through increased crime and added burdens on health and community services”. Neighbourhood disturbances, street parties, noise, property damage, assaults and public intoxication are a few of the repercussions of alcohol use impacting communities, local police and emergency services according to Wells.

The [Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation](#) (CAPE) research project reports how provincial, territorial and federal governments are doing with implementing policies to reduce alcohol harms. [Ontario’s most](#)

[recent alcohol policy report card](#) was downgraded to an F. This is not acceptable according to Atkinson which is why OPHA is urging the government to take the following steps to improve their alcohol policy score and mitigate alcohol harms and costs for the benefit of all Ontarians:

- Reduce retail outlet density, especially in low socio-economic status (SES) neighbourhoods
- Maintain or decrease hours of sale, with no exceptions
- Strengthen Ontario's alcohol pricing policies through taxation, minimum pricing, or other means.
- Stop further privatization of alcohol sales (e.g., convenience stores, more grocery / big box stores)
- Apply a whole of government, health-in-all-policies approach to alcohol modernization

According to the [latest Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms](#) report, alcohol is at the top of the list for criminal justice, healthcare and other societal costs and harms among eight controlled substances; and it is trending upwards. In a recent [tweet](#) from Premier Ford he shared, "As crime continues to rise in communities across Ontario, we're taking action to get more boots on the ground...to address crime and keep people safe." OPHA wishes to inform the government that increasing access to alcohol is in direct opposition to this goal.

Atkinson says we should learn from the tobacco example. "The costs and harms of tobacco are starting to decrease, in large part due to strong public health policies controlling access and availability, yet alcohol costs and harms are increasing." In 2020, alcohol harms cost the province [\\$7.1 billion](#), while alcohol revenues were \$5.2 billion. These figures point to a net deficit of almost \$2 billion, which could grow higher if the government were to move forward with policies that increase availability and lower prices.

"The people of Ontario deserve to live in communities that support, not undermine their health and well-being. When it comes to alcohol sales, the government must forego the objective of expanding consumer choice and convenience in favour of the health of Ontarians", says Atkinson. OPHA hopes that people and organizations will get informed about the consequences of loosening alcohol control policies that prevent and reduce harm by reading [OPHA's concerns that were shared with the government regarding their potential plans for "continued modernization of the alcohol marketplace](#) in Ontario". It is vital that Ontarians also express their concerns regarding impacts to health of potential policy changes, directly to the government.

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#### **About the Ontario Public Health Association:**

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a non-partisan, charitable, non-profit organization that brings together a broad spectrum of groups and individuals concerned about people's health. OPHA's members come from various backgrounds and sectors - from the various disciplines in public health, health care, academic, non-profit to the private sector. They are united by OPHA's mission of providing leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthening the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.



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