



HEALTH OFFICERS COUNCIL OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Dr. Ingrid Tyler, Chair

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Ph: 604-587-3828; Fax: 604-930-5414

January 29th, 2024

Premier Honorable David Eby

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Honorable Ministers

Minister of Finance Katrine Controy

Minister of Health Adrian Dix

Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Jennifer Whiteside

Minister of Municipal Affairs Anne Kang

Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General Mike Farnworth

Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport Lana Popham

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Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry

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Re: Position Statement on Alcohol

Dear Honorable Premier, Honorable Ministers and Dr. Henry,

Please accept this letter on behalf of the Health Officers Council (HOC) of British Columbia. We are writing to the Premier and those Ministers who share responsibility for the regulation of and revenue from alcohol or addressing the health and social impacts of alcohol consumption.

Health Officers Council is a registered society in British Columbia of public health physicians who, among other activities, advise and advocate for public policies and programs directed to improving the health of populations. HOC provides recommendations and works with a wide range of government and non-government agencies, both in and outside of BC.

In 2013, HOC made a submission to the Liquor Policy Review that proposed a public health framework for regulating alcohol. Specific recommendations were proposed for comprehensive regulation to achieve a coherent and balanced approach to alcohol in BC (Health Officers Council of BC, 2013).

Alcohol policy changes which increase access to and availability of alcohol are known to result in increases of alcohol-related health harms. Ten years after the 2013 submission, alcohol consumption rates in BC have been trending upwards while Canadian consumption rates have remained relatively stable. In 2020, alcohol health harms included 160,413 ER and hospital visits, and 2600 deaths. As of 2020/21, alcohol revenues in the province were \$2.04B, while harms cost the province \$2.81B, a total deficit of \$768M (Naimi et al., 2023).

The 2023 Canada Guidance on Alcohol and Health recommends a significant reduction in alcohol consumption to reduce alcohol related harms and reflects that there are risks associated with all alcohol consumption (Paradis et al., 2023). In applying the 2023 Canada Guidance on Alcohol and Health to alcohol consumption in BC, an estimated 56% of the population 15 years of age and older are in the “increasingly high risk” category (7+ drinks per week). At the October 2022 HOC, membership adopted

Resolution #156-02 that BC alcohol policy changes made since the start of COVID-19 which increase access and availability of alcohol be reversed, in the interests of protecting public health.

Following that meeting, members of HOC developed a position statement on alcohol policy in BC based on updated evidence. At the October 2023 HOC, membership passed Resolution #158-01 that the HOC BC Position Statement on Alcohol be adopted, and that it would be distributed to relevant federal, provincial and local government and decision makers to inform broader policy direction on alcohol. The position statement is appended to this letter.

We welcome the Premier and Ministers' responses to this position statement and encourage further dialogue with the public health community to help keep British Columbia healthy.

Sincerely,



Dr. Ingrid Tyler
Chair, Health Officers Council of BC

cc: Maryna Korchagina – ADM – Population and Public Health Maryna.Korchagina@gov.bc.ca
Stephen Brown – Deputy Minister of Health hth.dmoffice@gov.bc.ca
David Hume – ADM and GM – Liquor and Cannabis Regulation Branch David.Hume@gov.bc.ca
Senator Patrick Brazeau – Senate of Canada Patrick.brazeau@sen.parl.gc.ca
Dr. Ariella Zbar – Medical Health Officer – Fraser Health Ariella.zbar@fraserhealth.ca
Dr. Charmaine Enns – Medical Health Officer – Island Health Charmaine.enns@islandhealth.ca

bcc: Gerald Thomas – Director – Alcohol, Tobacco, Cannabis and Gambling Policy and Prevention
Gerald.Thomas@gov.bc.ca

References

Health Officers Council of BC. (2013). Submission to the British Columbia Liquor Policy Review By The Health Officers Council of British Columbia. <https://healthofficerscouncil.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/liquor-review-hoc-sept-9-2013.pdf>

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