

MAY 10 2021

ITEM #11.4.3 PFC21-0618  
Public

CITY CLERK'S DEPARTMENT

Healthy Albertans.  
Healthy Communities.  
**Together.**

## RE: Liquor in City Parks Contradicts the Calgary Mental Health and Addiction Strategy - Supplemental Information

### Enforcement and maintenance considerations

- Harmful use of alcohol requires enforcement or responding to public intoxication, impaired driving, underage consumption, noise, violence, and domestic abuse.<sup>1</sup>
- Any limitations around consumption would require enforcement such as drinking outside of designated areas, sign-up processes, maximum gathering size, and food requirements.<sup>8</sup>
- Increased litter including glass from bottles, which is a safety hazard particularly for children
- Maintenance of signage, waste, and public restrooms.<sup>8</sup>
- Utilizing crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) strategies.
  - In parks, greenery presents challenges. It is difficult to keep users in the public view and affects lighting. Knowing the potential harms from alcohol use it may be harder to create an uncomfortable environment for potential offenders while maintaining the safety and comfort of legitimate users.<sup>8</sup>

### Positive Impacts of Alcohol-Free Parks

- Parks currently support physical activity and mental wellbeing.
- Inherently, the Calgary Mental Health and Addiction Strategy recognizes that parks support mental health. Of the 38 images used in the CMHAS, 15 feature parks or outdoor spaces
- While 79% of Albertans drink alcohol, 21% do not.<sup>2</sup>
  - In Calgary, that's about 205,000 people ages 20 and older. Plus 305,000 youth ages 19 and younger, most of whom are under legal drinking age.<sup>2</sup>
- Alcohol-free parks align with the gold standard policy recommendations to reduce the density of public drinking locations, specifically those where<sup>4,8</sup>
  - Children and youth spend time
  - People go to receive support for alcohol and drug concerns.
- Parks without alcohol provide a space that is<sup>8</sup>
  - Culturally inclusive for communities that never or infrequently consume alcohol.
  - Free of triggers for those in recovery
  - Supportive of activities that promote physical and mental health
  - A safe play space for children and families.
  - Welcoming for youth-focused activities and role models without substances present

<sup>1</sup> Alberta Health Services. (2020). *Alcohol policy for community safety, vibrancy, health and well-being: A practical guide for Alberta municipalities.*

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## Alcohol use in Alberta

- The Canadian Low Risk Drinking Guidelines recommend no more than 10 drinks per week for women, and 15 for men.<sup>3</sup>
- 79% of Albertans report using alcohol in the past 12 months<sup>4</sup>
  - Of those who do, 11% consume enough alcohol to put themselves at risk for short-term effects (ie. drinking and driving)
  - Another 18% drink enough to be at risk for long-term effects (ie. cancers)
- Albertans drink more heavily than the Canadian average.
  - The number of people that reported heavy drinking at least once each month in 2020: 27% for Canadians but 34% for Albertans<sup>5</sup>

## Associated costs and harms

### Economic Costs

- In 2014, the cost of alcohol harms in Alberta were \$2.4 billion while net revenue the same year was \$1.1 billion<sup>6</sup>
  - These costs include healthcare, criminal justice, lost productivity and other direct costs such as fire and motor vehicle damage.
  - Costs from the impacts on others, such as domestic violence, families, and work colleagues were not included in this study

### Health Harms and Costs

- Across Canada, there are as many hospitalizations for conditions cause entirely by alcohol as for heart attacks<sup>7</sup>
- Alberta's overall provincial rate of hospitalizations for conditions entirely caused by alcohol (338/100,000) far exceeds the national rate (259/100,000).<sup>5</sup>
- The harms extend to youth under the legal drinking age.
  - For those aged 15-17, the hospitalization rate for harm caused by alcohol is 110/100,000 compared to 93/100,000 nationally. The Alberta rates are higher for ages 10-14 and 18-24 as well.<sup>8</sup>
  - Of these admissions, 68% involved a concurrent mental health condition.<sup>6</sup>
- Alcohol increases the risk of at least six different types of cancer including breast and colorectal cancer. Reduction of alcohol related cancers is an important component of Alberta's Cancer Strategy.<sup>9</sup>

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## Understanding the effects of a potential pilot

- Any changes to current policy should be accompanied by an evaluation plan to measure intended and unintended effects on both the public and city employees.
- Hard end-points that stop the project early are required. Examples could include any violence towards enforcement officers or park users, a COVID-19 outbreak traced to the picnic site, or alcohol-related traffic incidents.

Office of the Medical Officer of Health - Calgary Zone

## **RE: Liquor in City Parks Undermines the Calgary Mental Health and Addiction Strategy**

On March 22nd City Council unanimously approved the Calgary Mental Health and Addiction Strategy and Action Plan (CMHAS)<sup>1</sup>. The proposal for liquor at Calgary picnic sites would be in direct conflict to all aspects of this strategy and I do not support this proposal.

Alcohol is the most commonly used intoxicating substance in Alberta. Before COVID-19, 28.4% of Albertans reported heavy drinking at least once per month (4 or more drinks in one sitting for women, 5 or more for men)<sup>2</sup>. In a survey conducted during COVID-19, this increased to 33.9%<sup>3</sup>.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, substance use has increased and mental health outcomes have worsened<sup>4</sup>. Without alcohol, parks are important places for lower-risk gatherings and exercise during COVID-19. Alcohol in the parks would jeopardize the physical and mental health benefits that are especially needed now.

Even before COVID-19, Alberta's already high rate of associated alcohol-related costs and harms negated any economic benefits<sup>5</sup>.

The alcohol deficit – the 'hidden' costs of alcohol<sup>5</sup>

- **In Alberta, the costs associated with alcohol use negate the AGLC net revenue**
- In 2014, alcohol cost the Alberta economy \$2.396 billion. This was more than the costs of tobacco, cannabis and opioid costs and harms combined.
- In 2017, alcohol use was the most commonly used intoxicating substance
- Alcohol use accounted for the greatest costs to the criminal justice system at \$2.8 billion or 30.2% of all criminal justice costs.
- Almost 20% of all violent crimes were associated with alcohol use alone

**Currently, municipal parks are accessible and safe spaces for healthy lifestyles – physical activity, social gatherings, and family time. This is integral for supporting the mental health and social connections of Calgarians.** Maintaining current alcohol policies ensures the park system retains this important role.

<sup>1</sup> City of Calgary. (2021) Calgary's Mental Health and Addiction Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2023. <https://www.calgary.ca/csps/cns/mental-health-and-addiction.html>

<sup>2</sup> Alberta, Alberta Health Services. *Healthier Together Community Health Dashboard*. <https://www.healthiertogether.ca> Accessed Oct 21, 2020

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada. (Mar 2021). Alcohol and cannabis use during the pandemic: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 6. *The Daily*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210304/dq210304a-eng.htm>. Accessed Apr 22, 2021

<sup>5</sup> Vallance, K et al. (2019). Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Alberta: A Policy Review. Victoria, BC: Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria

There are many other public spaces where alcohol is available (bars, restaurants, tasting rooms, public events etc.) but it is also important to have public spaces without alcohol. Not only will this proposal lead to new costs for the city, it undermines the critical role of parks in the city's mental health and addiction strategy. **Lower perceived safety of parks, and therefore less use, means the mental and physical health benefits of the park are decreased at the same time that the costs and harms of alcohol consumption are increased.**

During COVID-19, and after, parks without public consumption bring benefits for all:

- A psychologically safe space without triggers for those in recovery
- An inclusive space for lifelong non-drinkers, those choosing healthier beverage options, or have medical reasons to avoid alcohol (pregnancy, medications)
- Promoting activities without alcohol and healthy behaviours for all ages, but particularly for children and adolescents
- Recognition that many fear, and are victims of, alcohol-related abuse or assault
- Bylaw and police not burdened by enforcement of alcohol laws, additional noise and crime complaints, or increased collisions from impaired driving
- A healthcare system overwhelmed by COVID-19 is not further strained by vehicle collisions, other injuries, and illness from overconsumption. In the longer term, less consumption means fewer people with alcohol-related diseases such as cancers, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and liver disease

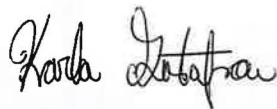
**With all legal substances, increased access and consumption leads to an increase in associated harms and costs.** Alcohol, although often an accepted part of social gatherings in Calgarian culture, is not a benign substance. The behaviour of intoxicated individuals adds strain to justice and health systems already under considerable pressure. Our publicly funded services can ill-afford policies that increase alcohol availability and harms<sup>6,4</sup>.

Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Government and the City of Calgary have identified that addressing addiction and mental health issues is a priority. It is important that policy initiatives and changes support reducing costs and harms. The Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation (CAPE) gave Alberta a "D" letter grade for current policy<sup>5</sup>. However, combining best practices from all provinces could produce an "A".

### Recommendations

- To maintain the current municipal policies regarding alcohol consumption in parks
- For council to invite consultations from key municipal (CPS, Bylaw, Fire, CN, Parks) stakeholders including the CMHAS Stewardship Group

Sincerely,



Dr. Karla Gustafson, MD, MBT, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health  
Alberta health Services Calgary Zone

<sup>6</sup> Sherk A et al. (2018). *Alcohol Consumption and the Physical Availability of Take-Away Alcohol: Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses of the Days and Hours of Sale and Outlet Density*. J Stud Alcohol Drugs.79(1):58-67.

*Did you say?*



## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

*Alcohol brings people together?*

*You need alcohol at social events?*

*Are you sure?*

*Are you sure that alcohol is needed for social connection?*

Alcohol is an option, but not a necessary ingredient of community connectedness.<sup>1</sup>

It's true that there are many benefits of bringing people together in community. Alcohol policy is not designed to detract from those benefits. Policies can be used to make drinking safer so we can all continue to enjoy the connections in our community. We can create even more opportunities where all feel welcome, including those who drink and those who do not.

For some people, there is a long-standing history of including alcohol at social events, perhaps leading to an expectation that alcohol be present. While alcohol might be enjoyed in some places where people come together, let's not lose sight of experiences you may have had in public places where drinking also took away from the connectedness at the occasion or created harms for those in attendance.

Perhaps you've been out somewhere and been concerned about the health of a friend who drinks in many public spaces. Municipal alcohol policy could be a protective factor. Without even realizing it, the drinks at lunch, at the hair salon, at the hockey arena and at the community barbecue can add up and quietly create health harms. Or perhaps you've been out socializing and observed fights between patrons or had embarrassing conversations at your own table where alcohol created disconnect.

So what does drive connection? Connection between people is influenced by open communication, vulnerability, common interest or values, compassion, and the feeling of being welcome or able to contribute. Many environmental factors influence connection too. Think of how the music, food, culture, venue, art, or sport has influenced your experience and ability to connect with others.



**Alcohol policy works to keep the connectedness, the vibrancy, and prevent the harms.**

<sup>1</sup> Connected Communities, Healthier Together. 2017 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario

## ALCOHOL POLICY FOR Alberta Municipalities



To continue the dialogue, email  
AHS Provincial Addiction Prevention  
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Did you  
say?

## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

In Europe  
you can drink in  
more places?

In Europe  
no one drinks  
too much?

Are you  
sure?

Are you sure  
a relaxed stance on  
alcohol in Europe has  
worked well?

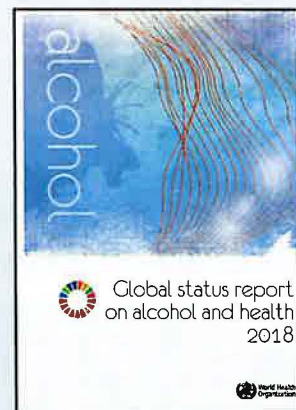
Actually the evidence indicates the opposite is true. People in European countries have high rates of alcohol-related health and social harms.<sup>1</sup>

When you wish your community's alcohol use to be more like another community, have you looked into their alcohol experience as a whole? People in European countries drink alcohol at some of the highest rates in the world. For example, are you aware that within the World Health Organization<sup>1</sup> (WHO) regions that:

- Europe has the highest number of current drinkers
- Europe has the highest per capita alcohol consumption (in litres of pure alcohol and in grams per day)
- Europe has the highest heavy episodic drinking rate in 15+ years and 15–19 year olds among total population

In the world, did you know that WHO's European region (which includes England, France, Italy, the Russian Federation, Norway and more) has the:

1. Highest share of all deaths (in %) attributable to alcohol consumption
2. Highest percentage of all disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) attributable to alcohol consumption
3. Highest global age-standardized alcohol-attributable cardiovascular disease death rates
4. Highest global age-standardized alcohol-attributable digestive disease death rates
5. Highest prevalence (in %) of alcohol use disorders (AUDs) among persons 15+ years
6. Highest prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders in the general population



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Perhaps the “relaxed” approach to alcohol regulation is more complex than it initially appears. The European region is moving to address their harms, and we have that same opportunity here in Alberta. So, although the European region remains the highest alcohol per capita consumption region it has worked to decrease per capita alcohol consumption from 12.3 litres in 2005 to 9.8 litres in 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Global status report on alcohol and health 2018. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.



## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

Alcohol is good for business?

Alcohol sales are good for the economy?

Are you sure increased alcohol consumption is an economic driver?

Alcohol is a unique commodity in our province. In Alberta, the costs associated with alcohol use are higher than the revenue generated by its sales.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence suggests that:

### 1. Reducing alcohol consumption is good for business.

Less alcohol consumed<sup>2</sup>

- less absenteeism
- less impaired job performance
- less long term disability costs for Alberta businesses.

### 2. Alcohol sales creates additional expenses for people who live in Alberta.

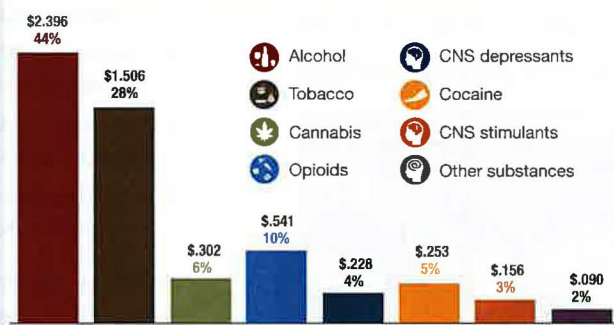
Alcohol has the largest proportion of the \$5.5 billion worth of substance-related costs in Alberta.<sup>3</sup> Explore the data at <https://csuch.ca/explore-the-data/>.

### 3. Careful consideration of the costs associated with alcohol use is important.

- municipal governments can consider alcohol-related harms as part of their budget planning and policy building
- taxpayers who want viable economic drivers in their communities may choose to steer away from ones that may bring a net loss as in the case of alcohol.

Communities are always looking for ways to grow businesses, create vibrant communities and reduce harms for their residents. **Accessing accurate and reliable data about alcohol and its impact can help municipalities take a balanced approach to build policies to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms.**

The cost of substance use (in billions) in Alberta



<sup>1</sup> Vallance, K., Chow, C., Wettlaufer, A., Stockwell, T., Giesbrecht, N., April, N., Asbridge, M., Callaghan, R., Cukier, S., Davis-MacNevin, P., Dube, M., Hynes, G., Mann, R., Solomon, R., Thomas, G., Thompson, K. (2019). Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Alberta: A Policy Review. Victoria, BC: Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria.

<sup>2,3</sup> Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Scientific Working Group. (2018). Canadian substance use costs and harms in the provinces and territories (2007–2014). Prepared by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

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*Did you say?*

## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

*Alcohol prevention policies remove the fun?*

*To have any fun you need alcohol?*

*Are you sure?*

*Are you sure alcohol use by you or others in your municipality always creates fun?*

With alcohol policy in place, the fun and the vibrancy can remain for everyone in the community, while reducing the harms.

You may have heard “alcohol-fun” comments in your own life or on social media. These comments over-emphasize that alcohol use leads to fun, creating an imbalance in our perception, as they can ignore the negative impacts that commonly exist. While alcohol use and fun may overlap, it isn’t necessary that they always go together. People can have fun while consuming alcohol, but that is not always the case. Experiences with alcohol can also be neutral, harmful, negative, or isolating too.

Over time, if these kinds of “alcohol-fun” comments made by our peers, family members, or leaders become the social norm:

- Children and youth may grow up without adults who role-model how to have a great time without alcohol or other drugs.
- We may find ourselves unprepared for the social and financial costs of alcohol-related harms when they touch our life, our neighbourhood, our business, our municipality in the form of sexual assault, family violence, lost work productivity, and many other alcohol-related harms.
- We risk excluding a large number of Albertans who prefer not to drink and who want to be welcomed and have fun at neighbourhood and municipal events where they live, work and play. Two in ten (21.2%) Albertans aged 15 and over<sup>1</sup> in 2017 did not drink in the last 12 months – that’s a lot of people who may appreciate settings without alcohol present.



Alcohol policies can be used to create a conversation and plan to encourage safer alcohol consumption, ensuring the fun remains for all. The intended outcome is to enhance well-being and to support fun and inclusive communities with options that are comfortable and safe for everyone.

**In order to create communities where people can truly connect, contribute and enjoy life, we need to ensure that fun can stand separately from alcohol. Alcohol is not a necessary ingredient for fun.**

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey, February – December 2017. Table 18. Alcohol indicators, by province, 2017

Did you say?

## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

Alcohol policies restrict individual freedom?

You are the only person who should influence your drinking behavior?

Are you sure?

Are you sure you prefer to address all the risk from alcohol personally?

Municipal alcohol policies aim to give all people the freedom to safely enjoy their communities, while helping to make healthy choices related to alcohol easier and more accessible.

Municipal alcohol policy allows the individual to make choices about alcohol consumption and it also puts in place policies that protect the health and safety of the whole municipality. Through bylaws and policies, we can “transform the conditions for health and achieve efficiencies and economies of scale that are not possible with one-on-one health education or clinical encounters”.<sup>1</sup> Other healthy public policies have started with low enthusiasm at first, but in the end have been well accepted and have improved the health and safety of the population. Some examples include smoking policies, seat belts, graduated licensing and more.

The alcohol policies you are invited to consider won't take away an adult's individual freedoms to consume alcohol, but rather will discourage people from drinking in ways that are less safe. It's not about removing choice, but about **making the healthy choice the easy choice**. In fact, alcohol policies that are designed to prevent alcohol-related harms for the population may actually create more individual freedom throughout one's life when, for example: impaired driving, domestic violence, or chronic health issues may be averted.

Just as driving a vehicle comes with expectations and safety measures, alcohol use in communities comes with expectations and safety measures. For example, why not consider how *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines* can be applied in the policies for alcohol in your community?

**A range of best practices in healthy public policy to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms are available. Here's a few to get you thinking...**



Reducing the hours of operation of liquor stores and bars can reduce community disruption.



Making alcohol less affordable can reduce binge drinking and risky drinking behaviours in young people.



Limiting alcohol advertising can help people – especially youth, gain a realistic and balanced view of drinking alcohol.

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Bayer. (2007). The continuing tensions between individual rights and public health. *Talking point on public health versus civil liberties*, EMBO Rep. 2007 Dec; 8(12): 1099–1103.

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## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

*Did you say?*

*It's those people who are the problem?*

*It's not my problem that other people can't drink responsibly?*

*Are you sure?*

*Are you sure that alcohol problems aren't your problem?*

High levels of alcohol use may create harm across all ages, cultures, and socio-economic communities.

What you might be observing is that some people experience more harms associated with alcohol. Sometimes the risk is from our own alcohol use. Sometimes the risk is from the alcohol use of family, friends or others in our community. Alcohol policy can help keep us safe without us even knowing it exists. And a lack of existing policies can have an impact too, putting us at risk.

You may think alcohol is someone else's problem, but many of us could be one drink away from a bad night or five minutes away from a DUI, or less emotionally available to our partner when they need us most. And, even if you haven't experienced harms related to your own alcohol use, when the population is less healthy, we all struggle. Alcohol policy could help more of us participate in a culture of alcohol moderation versus intoxication, which benefits everyone.

Before going further down the road of seeing others as very different from yourself, consider the following:

- Is it possible that your drinking behavior could result in some of the alcohol-related harms you've seen happen to other people?
- Could the preventative policies that help others some day help you and your family too?
- What perceptions do you have about who drinks within the low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines, who drinks more than the guidelines, and who does not drink at all?

**Even with your unique experiences with alcohol, you can share a common interest in preventing and reducing alcohol-related harms through municipal alcohol policies.**

**Reduce your long-term health risks by drinking no more than:**



0-2

**10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day most days.**



0-3

**15 drinks a week, with no more than 3 drinks a day most days.**

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2018). Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines.

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  - In parks, greenery presents challenges. It is difficult to keep users in the public view and affects lighting. Knowing the potential harms from alcohol use it may be harder to create an uncomfortable environment for potential offenders while maintaining the safety and comfort of legitimate users.<sup>8</sup>

### Positive Impacts of Alcohol-Free Parks

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## **RE: Liquor in City Parks Undermines the Calgary Mental Health and Addiction Strategy**

On March 22nd City Council unanimously approved the Calgary Mental Health and Addiction Strategy and Action Plan (CMHAS)<sup>1</sup>. The proposal for liquor at Calgary picnic sites would be in direct conflict to all aspects of this strategy and I do not support this proposal.

Alcohol is the most commonly used intoxicating substance in Alberta. Before COVID-19, 28.4% of Albertans reported heavy drinking at least once per month (4 or more drinks in one sitting for women, 5 or more for men)<sup>2</sup>. In a survey conducted during COVID-19, this increased to 33.9%<sup>3</sup>.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, substance use has increased and mental health outcomes have worsened<sup>4</sup>. Without alcohol, parks are important places for lower-risk gatherings and exercise during COVID-19. Alcohol in the parks would jeopardize the physical and mental health benefits that are especially needed now.

Even before COVID-19, Alberta's already high rate of associated alcohol-related costs and harms negated any economic benefits<sup>5</sup>.

The alcohol deficit – the 'hidden' costs of alcohol<sup>5</sup>

- **In Alberta, the costs associated with alcohol use negate the AGLC net revenue**
- In 2014, alcohol cost the Alberta economy \$2.396 billion. This was more than the costs of tobacco, cannabis and opioid costs and harms combined.
- In 2017, alcohol use was the most commonly used intoxicating substance
- Alcohol use accounted for the greatest costs to the criminal justice system at \$2.8 billion or 30.2% of all criminal justice costs.
- Almost 20% of all violent crimes were associated with alcohol use alone

**Currently, municipal parks are accessible and safe spaces for healthy lifestyles – physical activity, social gatherings, and family time. This is integral for supporting the mental health and social connections of Calgarians.** Maintaining current alcohol policies ensures the park system retains this important role.

<sup>1</sup> City of Calgary. (2021) Calgary's Mental Health and Addiction Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2023. <https://www.calgary.ca/csps/cns/mental-health-and-addiction.html>

<sup>2</sup> Alberta, Alberta Health Services. *Healthier Together Community Health Dashboard*. <https://www.healthiertogether.ca> Accessed Oct 21, 2020

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. (Feb 2021). How Canada Compares: Results from the Commonwealth Fund's 2020 International Health Policy Survey of the General Population in 11 Countries. <https://www.cihi.ca/en/commonwealth-fund-survey-2020>. Accessed Apr 22, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada. (Mar 2021). Alcohol and cannabis use during the pandemic: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 6. *The Daily*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210304/dq210304a-eng.htm>. Accessed Apr 22, 2021

<sup>5</sup> Vallance, K et al. (2019). Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Alberta: A Policy Review. Victoria, BC: Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria

There are many other public spaces where alcohol is available (bars, restaurants, tasting rooms, public events etc.) but it is also important to have public spaces without alcohol. Not only will this proposal lead to new costs for the city, it undermines the critical role of parks in the city's mental health and addiction strategy. **Lower perceived safety of parks, and therefore less use, means the mental and physical health benefits of the park are decreased at the same time that the costs and harms of alcohol consumption are increased.**

During COVID-19, and after, parks without public consumption bring benefits for all:

- A psychologically safe space without triggers for those in recovery
- An inclusive space for lifelong non-drinkers, those choosing healthier beverage options, or have medical reasons to avoid alcohol (pregnancy, medications)
- Promoting activities without alcohol and healthy behaviours for all ages, but particularly for children and adolescents
- Recognition that many fear, and are victims of, alcohol-related abuse or assault
- Bylaw and police not burdened by enforcement of alcohol laws, additional noise and crime complaints, or increased collisions from impaired driving
- A healthcare system overwhelmed by COVID-19 is not further strained by vehicle collisions, other injuries, and illness from overconsumption. In the longer term, less consumption means fewer people with alcohol-related diseases such as cancers, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and liver disease

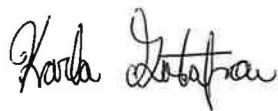
**With all legal substances, increased access and consumption leads to an increase in associated harms and costs.** Alcohol, although often an accepted part of social gatherings in Canadian culture, is not a benign substance. The behaviour of intoxicated individuals adds strain to justice and health systems already under considerable pressure. Our publicly funded services can ill-afford policies that increase alcohol availability and harms<sup>6,4</sup>.

Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Government and the City of Calgary have identified that addressing addiction and mental health issues is a priority. It is important that policy initiatives and changes support reducing costs and harms. The Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation (CAPE) gave Alberta a "D" letter grade for current policy<sup>5</sup>. However, combining best practices from all provinces could produce an "A".

### Recommendations

- To maintain the current municipal policies regarding alcohol consumption in parks
- For council to invite consultations from key municipal (CPS, Bylaw, Fire, CN, Parks) stakeholders including the CMHAS Stewardship Group

Sincerely,



Dr. Karla Gustafson, MD, MBT, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health  
Alberta Health Services Calgary Zone

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<sup>6</sup> Sherk A et al. (2018). *Alcohol Consumption and the Physical Availability of Take-Away Alcohol: Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses of the Days and Hours of Sale and Outlet Density*. *J Stud Alcohol Drugs*.79(1):58-67.



*Did you say?*

## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

*Alcohol brings people together?*

*You need alcohol at social events?*

*Are you sure?*

*Are you sure that alcohol is needed for social connection?*

Alcohol is an option, but not a necessary ingredient of community connectedness.<sup>1</sup>

It's true that there are many benefits of bringing people together in community. Alcohol policy is not designed to detract from those benefits. Policies can be used to make drinking safer so we can all continue to enjoy the connections in our community. We can create even more opportunities where all feel welcome, including those who drink and those who do not.

For some people, there is a long-standing history of including alcohol at social events, perhaps leading to an expectation that alcohol be present. While alcohol might be enjoyed in some places where people come together, let's not lose sight of experiences you may have had in public places where drinking also took away from the connectedness at the occasion or created harms for those in attendance.

Perhaps you've been out somewhere and been concerned about the health of a friend who drinks in many public spaces. Municipal alcohol policy could be a protective factor. Without even realizing it, the drinks at lunch, at the hair salon, at the hockey arena and at the community barbecue can add up and quietly create health harms. Or perhaps you've been out socializing and observed fights between patrons or had embarrassing conversations at your own table where alcohol created disconnect.

So what does drive connection? Connection between people is influenced by open communication, vulnerability, common interest or values, compassion, and the feeling of being welcome or able to contribute. Many environmental factors influence connection too. Think of how the music, food, culture, venue, art, or sport has influenced your experience and ability to connect with others.



**Alcohol policy works to keep the connectedness, the vibrancy, and prevent the harms.**

### ALCOHOL POLICY FOR Alberta Municipalities



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<sup>1</sup> Connected Communities, Healthier Together. 2017 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario

Did you say?

## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

In Europe you can drink in more places?

In Europe no one drinks too much?

Are you sure?

Are you sure a relaxed stance on alcohol in Europe has worked well?

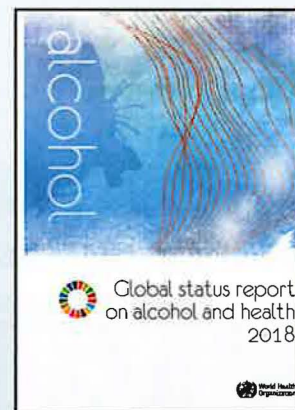
Actually the evidence indicates the opposite is true. People in European countries have high rates of alcohol-related health and social harms.<sup>1</sup>

When you wish your community's alcohol use to be more like another community, have you looked into their alcohol experience as a whole? People in European countries drink alcohol at some of the highest rates in the world. For example, are you aware that within the World Health Organization<sup>1</sup> (WHO) regions that:

- Europe has the highest number of current drinkers
- Europe has the highest per capita alcohol consumption (in litres of pure alcohol and in grams per day)
- Europe has the highest heavy episodic drinking rate in 15+ years and 15–19 year olds among total population

In the world, did you know that WHO's European region (which includes England, France, Italy, the Russian Federation, Norway and more) has the:

1. Highest share of all deaths (in %) attributable to alcohol consumption
2. Highest percentage of all disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) attributable to alcohol consumption
3. Highest global age-standardized alcohol-attributable cardiovascular disease death rates
4. Highest global age-standardized alcohol-attributable digestive disease death rates
5. Highest prevalence (in %) of alcohol use disorders (AUDs) among persons 15+ years
6. Highest prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders in the general population



Perhaps the “relaxed” approach to alcohol regulation is more complex than it initially appears. The European region is moving to address their harms, and we have that same opportunity here in Alberta. So, although the European region remains the highest alcohol per capita consumption region it has worked to decrease per capita alcohol consumption from 12.3 litres in 2005 to 9.8 litres in 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Global status report on alcohol and health 2018. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

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## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

Did you say?

Alcohol is good for business?

Alcohol sales are good for the economy?

Are you sure?

Are you sure increased alcohol consumption is an economic driver?

Alcohol is a unique commodity in our province. In Alberta, the costs associated with alcohol use are higher than the revenue generated by its sales.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence suggests that:

### 1. Reducing alcohol consumption is good for business.

Less alcohol consumed<sup>2</sup>

- less absenteeism
- less impaired job performance
- less long term disability costs for Alberta businesses.

### 2. Alcohol sales creates additional expenses for people who live in Alberta.

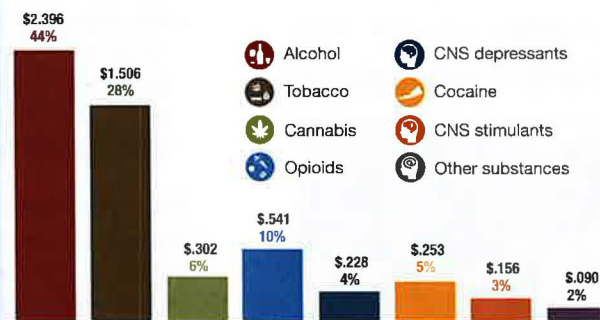
Alcohol has the largest proportion of the \$5.5 billion worth of substance-related costs in Alberta.<sup>3</sup> Explore the data at <https://csuch.ca/explore-the-data/>.

### 3. Careful consideration of the costs associated with alcohol use is important.

- municipal governments can consider alcohol-related harms as part of their budget planning and policy building
- taxpayers who want viable economic drivers in their communities may choose to steer away from ones that may bring a net loss as in the case of alcohol.

Communities are always looking for ways to grow businesses, create vibrant communities and reduce harms for their residents. **Accessing accurate and reliable data about alcohol and its impact can help municipalities take a balanced approach to build policies to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms.**

The cost of substance use (in billions) in Alberta



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<sup>1</sup> Vallance, K., Chow, C., Wettlaufer, A., Stockwell, T., Giesbrecht, N., April, N., Asbridge, M., Callaghan, R., Cukier, S., Davis-MacNevin, P., Dube, M., Hynes, G., Mann, R., Solomon, R., Thomas, G., Thompson, K. (2019). Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Alberta: A Policy Review. Victoria, BC: Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria.

<sup>2,3</sup> Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Scientific Working Group. (2018). *Canadian substance use costs and harms in the provinces and territories (2007–2014)*. Prepared by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

*Did you say?*



*Are you sure?*

## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

*Alcohol prevention policies remove the fun?*

*To have any fun you need alcohol?*

*Are you sure alcohol use by you or others in your municipality always creates fun?*

With alcohol policy in place, the fun and the vibrancy can remain for everyone in the community, while reducing the harms.

You may have heard “alcohol-fun” comments in your own life or on social media. These comments over-emphasize that alcohol use leads to fun, creating an imbalance in our perception, as they can ignore the negative impacts that commonly exist. While alcohol use and fun may overlap, it isn’t necessary that they always go together. People can have fun while consuming alcohol, but that is not always the case. Experiences with alcohol can also be neutral, harmful, negative, or isolating too.

Over time, if these kinds of “alcohol-fun” comments made by our peers, family members, or leaders become the social norm:

- Children and youth may grow up without adults who role-model how to have a great time without alcohol or other drugs.
- We may find ourselves unprepared for the social and financial costs of alcohol-related harms when they touch our life, our neighbourhood, our business, our municipality in the form of sexual assault, family violence, lost work productivity, and many other alcohol-related harms.
- We risk excluding a large number of Albertans who prefer not to drink and who want to be welcomed and have fun at neighbourhood and municipal events where they live, work and play. Two in ten (21.2%) Albertans aged 15 and over<sup>1</sup> in 2017 did not drink in the last 12 months – that’s a lot of people who may appreciate settings without alcohol present.



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Alcohol policies can be used to create a conversation and plan to encourage safer alcohol consumption, ensuring the fun remains for all. The intended outcome is to enhance well-being and to support fun and inclusive communities with options that are comfortable and safe for everyone.

**In order to create communities where people can truly connect, contribute and enjoy life, we need to ensure that fun can stand separately from alcohol. Alcohol is not a necessary ingredient for fun.**

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey, February – December 2017. Table 18. Alcohol indicators, by province, 2017

## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

Did you say?

Alcohol policies restrict individual freedom?

You are the only person who should influence your drinking behavior?

Are you sure?

Are you sure you prefer to address all the risk from alcohol personally?

Municipal alcohol policies aim to give all people the freedom to safely enjoy their communities, while helping to make healthy choices related to alcohol easier and more accessible.

Municipal alcohol policy allows the individual to make choices about alcohol consumption and it also puts in place policies that protect the health and safety of the whole municipality. Through bylaws and policies, we can “transform the conditions for health and achieve efficiencies and economies of scale that are not possible with one-on-one health education or clinical encounters”.<sup>1</sup> Other healthy public policies have started with low enthusiasm at first, but in the end have been well accepted and have improved the health and safety of the population. Some examples include smoking policies, seat belts, graduated licensing and more.

The alcohol policies you are invited to consider won't take away an adult's individual freedoms to consume alcohol, but rather will discourage people from drinking in ways that are less safe. It's not about removing choice, but about **making the healthy choice the easy choice**. In fact, alcohol policies that are designed to prevent alcohol-related harms for the population may actually create more individual freedom throughout one's life when, for example: impaired driving, domestic violence, or chronic health issues may be averted.

Just as driving a vehicle comes with expectations and safety measures, alcohol use in communities comes with expectations and safety measures. For example, why not consider how [Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](#) can be applied in the policies for alcohol in your community?

**A range of best practices in healthy public policy to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms are available. Here's a few to get you thinking...**



Reducing the hours of operation of liquor stores and bars can reduce community disruption.



Making alcohol less affordable can reduce binge drinking and risky drinking behaviours in young people.



Limiting alcohol advertising can help people – especially youth, gain a realistic and balanced view of drinking alcohol.

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Bayer. (2007). The continuing tensions between individual rights and public health. Talking point on public health versus civil liberties, EMBO Rep. 2007 Dec; 8(12): 1099-1103.

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*Did you say?*



*Are you sure?*

## An Opportunity for Dialogue on Preventing and Reducing Alcohol Related Harms

*It's those people who are the problem?*

*It's not my problem that other people can't drink responsibly?*

*Are you sure that alcohol problems aren't your problem?*

High levels of alcohol use may create harm across all ages, cultures, and socio-economic communities.

What you might be observing is that some people experience more harms associated with alcohol. Sometimes the risk is from our own alcohol use. Sometimes the risk is from the alcohol use of family, friends or others in our community. Alcohol policy can help keep us safe without us even knowing it exists. And a lack of existing policies can have an impact too, putting us at risk.

You may think alcohol is someone else's problem, but many of us could be one drink away from a bad night or five minutes away from a DUI, or less emotionally available to our partner when they need us most. And, even if you haven't experienced harms related to your own alcohol use, when the population is less healthy, we all struggle. Alcohol policy could help more of us participate in a culture of alcohol moderation versus intoxication, which benefits everyone.

Before going further down the road of seeing others as very different from yourself, consider the following:

- Is it possible that your drinking behavior could result in some of the alcohol-related harms you've seen happen to other people?
- Could the preventative policies that help others some day help you and your family too?
- What perceptions do you have about who drinks within the low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines, who drinks more than the guidelines, and who does not drink at all?

**Even with your unique experiences with alcohol, you can share a common interest in preventing and reducing alcohol-related harms through municipal alcohol policies.**

### Reduce your long-term health risks by drinking no more than:



0-2

**10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day most days.**



0-3

**15 drinks a week, with no more than 3 drinks a day most days.**

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2018). Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines.

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