

YARMOUTH COUNTY COMMUNITY SUBSTANCE USE PARTNERSHIP

January 25, 2021

The Honourable Karen Lynn Casey

Minister of Finance and Treasury Board
7th Floor, Provincial Building
1723 Hollis Street
P.O. Box 187
Halifax, NS
B3J 2N3

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Yarmouth County Community Substance Use Partnership, I am writing to ask that government **NOT** support plans to allow NSLC home delivery of alcohol.

Our partnership works to help communities understand that health is not solely an individual responsibility. Nova Scotia has a well demonstrated culture of harmful alcohol use that sees residents beginning to drink at earlier ages, drink more heavily with broad health, social, and financial impacts. Home delivery increases ease of access to alcohol and increasing access to alcohol heightens the risk of drinking in a way that compromises the health, well-being, or safety of the individual and community. We have an opportunity, through regulation, to prevent harms and reduce the burden and cost of the health care, social and criminal systems.

Nova Scotia has a problematic relationship with alcohol. This has been demonstrated repeatedly.

- Nova Scotia is challenged by a culture of heavy drinking (Province of Nova Scotia, 2007).
- Harmful alcohol use is a significant burden on the Nova Scotia economy—\$419 million annually—in terms of both its direct impact on health care and criminal justice costs and its indirect toll on productivity resulting from, illness, disability and premature death. (Province of Nova Scotia, 2007).
- One in five current drinkers, or approximately 117,144 Nova Scotians, can be classified as high-risk drinkers ... High-risk drinkers consume alcohol in such a way that it impacts negatively on their own health and well-being, as well as that of their families and communities. (Province of Nova Scotia, 2007).
- Heavy drinking has both a direct and indirect relationship with injury vectors such as falls, suicide, and motor vehicle collisions (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2016).
- Heavy drinking has a negative effect on mental health, can increase violence, exacerbate chronic conditions, and add to health care costs (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2016).

- Hospitalizations due to conditions entirely caused by alcohol equal those due to heart attacks. Nova Scotian hospitalizations due to alcohol in 2018-19 (289 per 100,000) exceeded the national average (CIHI, 2000).

Home delivery will increase the ease of availability of alcohol. This is contrary to well established public health advice on reducing the toll of alcohol harms. (Giesbrecht et al, 2011; CPHA, 2011).

- The NSLC home delivery of alcohol will increase customer access to alcohol
- Expanded alcohol home delivery services have potential to increase harms in the community (Fletcher et al., 1996).
- For children and youth, home delivery can become a more convenient way for underage drinkers to obtain alcohol (Fletcher et al., 2000).
- Strong evidence indicates an increase in access and availability to alcohol leads to more alcohol purchases and therefore more alcohol consumption within a population (Chen et al., 2001)
- Recent research from New Zealand, indicates that customers who purchased their alcohol through online sales reported drinking higher amounts than those who purchased their alcohol from retail outlets (Huckle et al., 2020).

It is increasingly clear that the Coronavirus pandemic has created an environment that is putting the mental wellness of all Canadians at risk. The negative impacts of alcohol consumption on mental wellness, suicide and violence are well established. Interpersonal violence is currently of heightened concern to all Nova Scotians.

- Alcohol misuse and interpersonal violence both act as catalysts for one another... Harmful alcohol use is a risk factor across all types of interpersonal violence... (WHO, 2006)
- Alcohol use directly affects cognitive and physical function, reducing self-control and leaving individuals less capable of negotiating a non-violent resolution to conflicts within relationships (Lancet, 2005)
- Almost half of adolescents who have attempted suicide reported having consumed alcohol at the time of the attempt

Increased alcohol use and unprecedented alcohol sales during the pandemic have been highlighted through a variety of media sources since the lockdown began.

- [Nova Scotia government falling short in addressing alcohol abuse during pandemic: Expert](#) (Chronicle Herald, May 27, 2020)
- [Covid-19 Fuels another “unprecedented” quarter for NSLC](#) (CBC News, August 25, 2020)
- [Drinking our way through the pandemic isn’t a great idea](#) (Halifax Examiner, April 27, 2020)
- [Cannabis and Booze sales still surging in Nova Scotia During Pandemic](#) (Huddle, October 27,2020)

During this unprecedented health crisis, our government-regulated monopoly for alcohol sales has plans to increase access, through home delivery, to a substance that is already causing heightened harms for many of its citizens. The NSLC has a mandate to protect the health of Nova Scotians. **We call on the Nova Scotia government to act on this mandate and say no to home delivery.**

We strongly encourage that government to undertake a thorough health impact assessment. We also encourage that this assessment be implemented with a health equity lens as we know that different groups experience harms more acutely

Looking forward to your response

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