



Annapolis Valley Health Alcohol and Healthy Communities: Position Statement

Annapolis Valley Health (AVH) has a responsibility to be a leader in health and advocate for policy change that can contribute to better health. Through stating our position on alcohol use and its related societal and health harms, AVH will influence healthy public policy to create a culture of moderate alcohol consumption and improve the health of our communities. Position statements are based on best current evidence. They will be reviewed and updated every three years.

A public health approach to healthy alcohol policy is well established. In 2007, the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection (now Department of Health and Wellness) released *Changing the Culture of Alcohol Use in Nova Scotia: An Alcohol Strategy to Prevent and Reduce the Burden of Alcohol-Related Harm in Nova Scotia*. In 2011, the Canadian Public Health Association released their statement, *Too High a Cost: A Public Health approach to alcohol policy in Canada*. In 2012, the Province of Nova Scotia released their strategy *Together We Can: A plan to improve the mental health and addictions care for Nova Scotians*, which includes working with communities to take action to reduce alcohol-related harm as a key priority action. A public health approach appreciates that societal structures influence how much alcohol we consume, how regularly we consume and how much alcohol-related individual and community harm is tolerated.

Impact of alcohol on our community

Alcohol is the second leading cause of death and disability in high income nations (CPHA, 2011; WHO, 2011). It is a factor in more than 60 chronic diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, liver disease, gastrointestinal diseases, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, as well as cancers of the mouth, throat and esophagus (Babor, Caetano, Casswell & Edwards, et al., 2010; Butt, Beirness, Gliksman, Paradis, & Stockwell, 2011; WHO, 2011). Additional health concerns include the mixing of alcohol with prescription medications, illegal substances, and energy drinks, as well as the impact of alcohol on vulnerable populations (youth, women, mental health consumers and Aboriginal communities).

Alcohol harms come at a huge cost to society. The direct and indirect costs of alcohol-related harms more than double the revenue generated from alcohol sales (CPHA, 2011; Province of Nova Scotia, 2011). Harms associated with heavy alcohol consumption include injury, alcohol poisoning, violence (violent crime, assaults, sexual violence), drowning, suicides, motor vehicle collisions, vandalism, property damage, noise complaints, family problems, abuse, unplanned sexual activity, poor work and school performance, and financial problems (Atlantic Collaborative for Injury Prevention, 2010; Babor et al., 2010; CPHA, 2011). Alcohol consumption can impact brain development and function across the life span (prenatal through older adulthood). Heavy drinking, binge drinking and underage drinking are of particular concern. Youth are starting to drink, on average, at 13.4 years (Asbridge and Langille, 2013; Province of Nova Scotia, 2007; CPHA, 2011).

A comprehensive approach: Working together to build a solution

Healthy alcohol policy is critical to healthy communities work. Healthy and vibrant communities, where moderate and safe alcohol use is the norm, will support economic sustainability and community well-being. With our growing commitment to local and sustainable agriculture, including grape and wine production, we need comprehensive, multi-pronged and multi-governmental strategies and interventions to achieve moderate and low-risk alcohol use while supporting our local economic development. Effective population-based strategies include controls on pricing, availability, industry marketing and promotions, and maintaining government system control with arm's-length regulation.

Annapolis Valley Health's Position on Alcohol and Healthy Communities

Policy and Legislation

Healthy alcohol policy will improve our surrounding environment and change the conditions in which people make decisions about their health.

- Working with municipal and provincial leaders, AVH will:
 - Advocate for strategic and systematic controls on alcohol pricing (e.g. pricing per percentage of alcohol content; increasing prices for high sugar content drinks).
 - Support limitations on physical availability of alcohol (e.g. a limitation of the number, density and hours of operation of retail outlets and licensed establishments).
 - Advocate to maintain complete government system control of alcohol sales.
- Create alcohol policies with local communities, schools and municipal governments and our own DHA.

Marketing and Sponsorship

Alcohol marketing normalizes alcohol consumption and promotes it as risk-free, leading to harmful patterns of consumption especially among children and young adults (Province of Nova Scotia, 2009).

- AVH will work with municipal and government leaders to support the restriction of alcohol marketing through advertising, promotion and sponsorship, particularly in areas where children and youth live, play and go to school.
- AVH recognizes that alcohol can be a harmful substance and the normalization of alcohol in our communities contributes to childhood alcohol use, heavy drinking and other associated harms. AVH will review all fundraising and advertising opportunities to limit the normalization of alcohol and minimize associated risks.

Harm Reduction and Treatment

Addressing risk behaviours and vulnerable populations through treatment and harm reduction will have limited benefit unless implemented as part of a comprehensive approach.

- AVH supports governments and communities in advocating for and taking targeted action to reduce alcohol related harms (e.g. drinking and driving counter measures, changing the drinking context through regulation and licensing; promoting behavior change).
- AVH supports increased access to screening, brief interventions and early intervention.

Strategic Partnerships

Successful advocacy for healthy communities will be achieved through the formation of effective, collaborative, and sustainable community partnerships. Our work with our partners is guided by our advocacy framework.

- AVH is committed to working with all levels of government, non-government organizations, coalitions and community initiatives to advocate for healthy alcohol policy.
- AVH assists in the creation of supportive environments and works to strengthen the ability of communities to take action on healthy alcohol policy.
- AVH will pay attention to the social determinants of health and will work to address the unique situations of those most vulnerable to problem alcohol use and its related harm.

Complete references available in the *Alcohol and Healthy Communities: Position Statement Supporting Document*.