

To: Health Canada
Re: Consultation on Sweetened Alcohol Beverages

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further input into changes in the Food and Drug Regulations to restrict the amount of alcohol in single-serve highly sweetened alcoholic beverages. In particular, Health Canada proposes to make amendments to the *Food and Drug Regulations* in order to:

(1) Create a definition for a new class of alcohol-based products which have been:

- purified through a process other than distillation (e.g., reverse osmosis, carbon filtration) to remove the traditional characteristics of the starting material (e.g., removal of malt characteristics, wine characteristics, cider characteristics); and
- flavoured and/or sweetened so that the product takes on the taste of the flavouring and/or sweetening ingredients.

(2) Impose conditions of sale on this new class of alcohol-based products that would limit the number of standard alcoholic drinks 1 to 1.5 per container, if the container is:

- non-resealable at any volume; or
- re-sealable with a volume equal to or less than 1000ml.

It is our understanding that Health Canada's position is that if the upper limit is 1.5 standard drinks per container then men and women would still be within their limits in the Lower Risk Drinking Guidelines ("LRDG") if they consumed one beverage. Further, they could drink two and still be within the limits of 3-4 drinks on special occasions for women and men, respectively.

It is the position of Families for Addiction Recovery (FAR) that this rationale misses the mark. Consistent with our original submission, the limit should be 1 standard drink per container. These products are aimed at youth. The purpose of these provisions is to protect youth who are vulnerable because their brains are not fully developed. They are prone to take risks, be impulsive and not think things through.

The LRDG state:

"Alcohol can harm the way the body and brain develop. Teens should speak with their parents about drinking. If they choose to drink, they should do so under parental guidance; **never more than 1–2 drinks at a time, and never more than 1–2 times per week.** They should plan ahead, follow local alcohol laws and consider the Safer drinking tips listed in this brochure.

Youth in their late teens to age 24 years should never exceed the daily and weekly limits outlined in Your limits."

Youth will assume, as many adults would, that a single serve beverage contains one standard drink. If they consume two, girls will be consuming 3 drinks, thereby exceeding their limits by 1-2 drinks. They will be doubling their limit.

The LDRG go on to state, **for adults**:

“Drink slowly. Have no more than 2 drinks in any 3 hours.”

These products are designed for speedy consumption without knowledge of how much is being consumed. If the limit is 1.5 standard drinks per container, then adults, let alone youth, should not be consuming more than 1 in 3 hours. How likely is that? How many youths even know about the LRDG?

Further, we know that 80% of alcoholic beverages are consumed by the 20% who are problematic drinkers. The government has a duty to protect adults, not just youth.

FAR would also prefer that the first proposed change above be either/or as opposed to “and” so that these provisions to protect youth have the broadest possible application.

We would like to end by making a general suggestion for consideration in the future with respect to the regulation of all legal recreational drugs, including alcohol.

It is evident how difficult it is for the government to draft regulations which cannot be skirted around by well-funded industries selling legal recreational drugs including alcohol. Many years ago, the federal government amended the federal Income Tax Act to add a General Anti-Avoidance Rule (GAAR) which was intended to switch the risk of skirting the tax rules from the government to the taxpayer, with significant penalties for breaching GAAR. If similar legislation does not already exist for the regulation of legal recreational drugs including alcohol, it may be worthwhile for Health Canada to speak with the Canada Revenue Agency about the effectiveness of this provision and consider a similar provision for industries selling legal recreational drugs including alcohol.

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