

To: Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health

Cc: Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer

Re: Alcohol Labels
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

I'm writing to request that the federal government mandate information and warning labels on alcohol products in Canada to inform and protect consumers and the Canadian public.

Prevention and harm reduction are two of the four pillars for addressing the harms related to substance use. Information and education are important to both of these pillars. The public cannot take steps to minimize harms if they are unaware as to what those harms may be. It is difficult to understand why tobacco and cannabis products have labels to inform and protect consumers, yet alcohol products do not. Canadian governments have a [responsibility to inform](#) alcohol consumers of serious health risks.

Alcohol has now surpassed tobacco as the substance with the greatest costs and harms in Canada. [Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms 2015-2017](#), a joint report of the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, shows that in 2017 alcohol:

- accounted for the greatest costs of substance use in Canada at \$16.6 billion (36.2%);
- was second only to tobacco in healthcare costs at \$5.1 billion (41%);
- accounted for the greatest costs to the criminal justice system at \$2.8 billion (30.2%);
- was associated with almost 20% of all violent crimes; and
- was the leading cause of substance use lost productivity.

The federal government needs to provide alcohol consumers with the information they need to make informed choices about the risks they are assuming when consuming alcohol. While research evidence is clear that education alone will not reduce alcohol-related harm at a population-level, it is a crucial step for creating a supportive environment for effective public health alcohol policies regulating price, access and marketing.

Public health action on alcohol is all the more important given the effect that COVID-19 is having on the mental health of Canadians; action on alcohol policy, including warning labels, should be prioritized to enable healthier communities in the post-pandemic world. In a recent [CMHA Report](#) 40% of Canadians said their mental health had deteriorated during the second wave of the pandemic and 20% reported an increase in alcohol use. Also, in a recent [CAMH Survey](#) 25.7% of Canadians reported engaging in heavy episodic drinking. To make matters worse, many provinces have increased access to alcohol by allowing alcohol sales with restaurant take-out and delivery and have relaxed other regulations to protect the economy. Unfortunately, these changes are likely to increase use and harms. Ontario recently made these changes permanent and New Brunswick is moving toward this approach as well.

Labels containing information such as the number of standard drinks, serving size, calories and the existence of lower risk drinking guidelines should be mandated. In addition, warnings of the risk of developing an alcohol use disorder, cancer, FASD and impaired driving should also be mandated. Public awareness of alcohol-related health risks remains too low; only ~25% of the Canadian public is aware that alcohol causes cancer, despite the fact that alcohol is a major contributor to cancer across seven prevalent types.

To date our governments have not required the alcohol industry to disclose the harms of their products on labels. It is time for the alcohol industry to sell responsibly. I request that Health Canada develop a process for mandating evidence-informed alcohol warning labels based on recent findings from the Yukon Alcohol Warning Label study which assessed the content and design of labels that yield the greatest positive impact from a public health perspective.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the importance of alcohol labels to families affected by addiction.

Angie Hamilton
Executive Director
[Families for Addiction Recovery](#)

The undersigned support this request for the federal government to mandate information and warning labels on alcohol products in Canada.

Andrew Murie, CEO MADD Canada

Ann Dowsett Johnston, Co-founder of Faces and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR) Canada

Annie McCullough, Co-founder of Faces and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR) Canada

Dr Bernard Le Foll, MD PhD, Clinician scientist at CAMH and Professor at University of Toronto

Canadian Drug Policy Coalition

Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health

Faces and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR) Canada

Hayley Hamilton, PhD, Associate Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Kay and Shell Maude, whose son died from alcohol use disorder at age 32

Kevin Shield, PhD, Assistant Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Lana Popova, Senior Scientist, Institute for Mental Health and Policy Research, CAMH

Leslie Buckley MD, MPH, FRCPC, Chief, Addictions Division, CAMH, Assistant Professor, University of Toronto, Department of Psychiatry

Dr. Meldon Kahan, Medical Director, META:PHI

Dr. Norman Giesbrecht, Emeritus Scientist, CAMH

Dr. Peter Selby MBBS, CCFP(AM), Professor Depts of Family and Community Medicine & Psychiatry and Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Dr. Robert Mann, Senior Scientist, CAMH: Associate Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Samantha Wells, Senior Director, Institute for Mental Health Policy Research, CAMH

Susan and Grant Muck, whose son died from alcohol use disorder at age 25

Dr. Timothy S. Naimi, Director, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research

Dr. Tim Stockwell, Scientist at (and former director of) Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research