

**PH 2 - 1. Zoning and Development By-law Amendments to Allow Wine-on-Shelf Sales in Vancouver Grocery Stores - Oppose**

Date Received	Time Created	Case ID	Subject	Position	Content	Author Name	Author Email	Neighborhood	Attachment
2023-10-12	11:06	201000903309	PH 2 - 1. Zoning and Development By-law Amendments to Allow Wine-on-Shelf Sales in Vancouver Grocery Stores	Oppose	A letter is attached from the VCH Board of Directors regarding Zoning and Development By-law Amendments to Allow Wine-on-Shelf Sales in Vancouver Grocery Stores	organization Vancouver Coastal Health - Board of Directors	[REDACTED]	Downtown	Appendix A



Penny Ballem MD FRCP FCAHS  
Board Chair



October 10, 2023

**City of Vancouver Mayor and Council**

Submitted by email.

Dear Mayor and Council,

**Re: Impact of City of Vancouver Decisions on Alcohol Availability**

We are writing as members of the Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) Board to express our serious concerns regarding Vancouver City Council proposals to increase the availability and access to alcohol in Vancouver. We believe that the evidence shows that these decisions will increase alcohol consumption, alcohol-related health harms to the population, and the burden on the healthcare system.

While we appreciate the desire of City Council to embrace a Mediterranean Europe-style culture of alcohol availability and consumption in the City, the evidence is clear that Vancouver has a drinking culture quite different from that of those European countries and cities—we have much more of a binge-drinking culture, and an increase in access to alcohol will lead to greater harm. We have observed the detrimental impact of increased alcohol consumption on areas such as the Granville Entertainment District and in association with catastrophic events such as the 2011 Stanley Cup riot. Of note, in addition to a provincial review of the Stanley Cup riot identifying access to alcohol as a key driver (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/inquiries/report.pdf>), a review by Vancouver City Council concluded this as well: <https://council.vancouver.ca/20110906/documents/specAppendixA1.pdf>.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, alcohol consumption in British Columbia has increased to the highest level since tracking commenced in 2001. Alcohol consumption in Vancouver's City Centre consistently exceeds regional, provincial and national averages. In 2022, annual per capita alcohol consumption in Vancouver's City Centre was 15.46 litres per person (aged 15+ years) compared to 9.16 litres provincially and 8.1 litres nationally. Additionally, in the spring of 2021, 29% of Vancouver residents self-reported monthly episodes of binge drinking, an extremely high level of consumption and not in keeping with a cultural of moderation, which characterizes the situation in Mediterranean Europe.

Permitting alcohol to be stocked and sold from the shelves of grocery stores will have a particularly deleterious impact on children and youth, as it will normalize alcohol to this vulnerable group. Alcohol causes more overdoses among children and youth than any other psychoactive substance. A review of overdose visits to BC Children's Hospital Emergency Department in 2017 found alcohol responsible for 40% of visits (#1 among substances identified) compared to less than 5% of visits associated with opioids. Among children in grades 7-12 in Vancouver schools, reported alcohol use has been rising. According to the 2018 McCreary Centre Society Adolescent Health Survey, 35% of children and youth in grades 7-12 had tried alcohol and 30% of this group reported binge drinking at least once in the month prior to the survey.



Visible alcohol on grocery shelves will also present an unavoidable temptation to people addicted to alcohol who struggle on their journey of recovery. There are an estimated 25,000 people with alcohol use disorder living in Vancouver as of 2021.

New Canadian Guidance on Alcohol and Health published in January 2023

([https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/CCSA\\_Canadas\\_Guidance\\_on\\_Alcohol\\_and\\_Health\\_Final\\_Report\\_en.pdf](https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/CCSA_Canadas_Guidance_on_Alcohol_and_Health_Final_Report_en.pdf)) included the latest evidence of the health risks of alcohol consumption. Alcohol is leading preventable cause of death, disability and social problems. Alcohol is a carcinogen that can cause at least seven types of cancer, a main cause of liver disease (on the rise in Canada), a risk factor for heart disease and stroke, and associated with intimate partner and sexual violence. The new guidelines recommend consumption of no more than 1 to 2 standard drinks per week to avoid these risks, much lower than previous guidance.

As you know, the health system is under considerable stress from the three year impact of the pandemic, the ongoing opioid overdose crisis, and the demographic trends of an aging population. Higher rates of alcohol consumption will have a direct impact on the pressures facing the healthcare system. In 2021, direct alcohol-attributable hospitalizations in BC increased by 15% when compared to 2019 rates, and BC ranked second highest among all Canadian provinces. Emergency Department visits and hospitalizations related to unintentional injuries and cardiovascular disease attributable to alcohol have continued to rise in Vancouver until 2022, our latest data. In addition to the preventable illness, injuries and deaths experienced by these patients, increasing visits to our Emergency Departments and hospitals has a negative impact on access to care for all residents of Vancouver.

We are also concerned about the important impacts of alcohol consumption and related harms on Indigenous people. The enduring trauma stemming from Colonization, economic marginalization, and systemic efforts to undermine Indigenous cultures has created deep-seated issues within Indigenous populations, impacting them physically, psychologically, financially, and culturally. Extensive research has established the interconnectedness between trauma, depression, and alcohol use. Addressing alcohol-related health harms by preventing an expansion of alcohol availability is an essential step in reducing health inequities among Indigenous people.

Given these disproportionately harmful impacts of alcohol on Indigenous people, that Vancouver is a City of Reconciliation, and BC's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, we also strongly recommend that Council engage with the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation), səliłwəta+ (Tsleil-Waututh Nation), and urban Indigenous communities regarding planned policy changes.

In summary, we have profound concerns that expanding access and availability of alcohol in Vancouver will result in an increase in consumption and associated harms, and impact access to essential healthcare services. We strongly urge you to assess the cumulative consequences of recent alcohol policy decisions and to reconsider policy directions that would enhance access to alcohol, such as allowing the sale of wine on grocery store shelves and relaxing or eliminating distancing requirements between liquor outlets.

Thank you for considering our input which we offer as part of our accountability as a Board to the health and well-being of our public in Vancouver Coastal.

Sincerely,



**Penny Ballem, MD FRCP FCAHS**

Board Chair

Vancouver Coastal Health

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Vancouver Coastal Health:

Wendy Au

Deborah Baker

William Duvall

Kathy Greenberg MD

Margaret McGregor MD

Davis McKenzie

John McLaughlin

Eyob Naizghi

Chief Marilyn Slett

