

Mayor Roy Avis and Council  
c/o Lisa Slomke  
320 Portage Avenue  
Fort Frances, ON P9A 3P9  
Tel: (807) 274-5323 ext. 1215

Dear Mayor Roy Avis and Council:

Re: Municipal Alcohol Policy

Alcohol use is part of many aspects of Northwestern Ontario community culture. It plays a role in our economy, politics, health status, and relationships. Many people use alcohol to relax, to socialize and to celebrate. Alcohol accompanies our meals, and is incorporated into our holidays and events. Given that there are risks associated with alcohol misuse, it is important to understand the different ways alcohol can impact communities and how municipalities can lead the way in supporting healthy outcomes. One of the ways Municipalities can support healthy public policy is by reviewing and updating their Municipal Alcohol Policy (MAP) to be consistent with the latest municipal strategies to mitigate health harms related to alcohol misuse.

The purpose of a MAP is to put in place regulations developed by municipalities that require groups to use more responsible serving practices and to manage the drinking environment. The goal of a MAP is to encourage moderate, responsible consumption for those who choose to drink alcohol by changing social norms and the value placed on alcohol in a community.

This past year the Northwestern Health Unit released two reports on alcohol use trends in our region; *Northwestern Health Unit Alcohol in Our Communities: A Report on Alcohol Use in Northwestern Ontario 2017* and *Northwestern Health Unit Report on Alcohol Trends 2017*. In these reports it was noted that in Ontario, alcohol consumption is the second leading cause of death, disease and disability. Alcohol consumption results in substantial health and social costs to individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole. (Cancer Care Ontario, 2016).

Looking specifically at our region, evidence demonstrates the high level of morbidity and incidence of adverse health outcomes related to alcohol consumption in the NWHU catchment area relative to the rest of province:

- Over 3 in 5 people (61.7%) in the NWHU area exceeded the low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines in 2013/14, which is statistically higher than the provincial rate of 45.3%.
- The rate of heavy drinking is statistically higher in the NWHU area; 23.3% of the population engaged in heavy drinking in 2013/14 compared to 17.9% of the provincial population.

- In the NWHU area over half of the population (54.1%) aged 12-18 engaged in underage drinking in 2013/14, which is statistically higher than the provincial rate of 31.0%.
- In 2015, 7.2% of mothers in the NWHU area consumed alcohol while pregnant, which is over twice as high as (and statistically different from) the provincial rate of 2.5%.
- In 2015, the incidence rate of emergency department (ED) visits from alcohol misuse in the NWHU was 287.7 per 10,000 people. This was over 6 times as high as the provincial rate of 44.0 per 10,000.

**Healthy public policy: a tool to promote moderation**

Local alcohol policies can be an important and effective way to promote moderate alcohol consumption, support community values, raise awareness of harms, influence community social norms and promote healthier communities (Government of British Columbia, 2012).

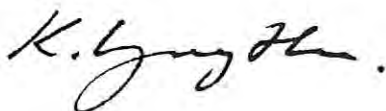
**NWHU recommendations for municipal action on alcohol use**

Based on best-practice evidence, as well community and partner input, the NWHU recommends that municipalities:

- Work with the health unit to update Municipal Alcohol Policies (MAPs), add their policy to the Municipal Alcohol Policy Repository, and educate communities on the importance of MAPs.
- Support the health unit's work to educate the public and provide skill-building activities related to:
  - The health harms of alcohol use through awareness campaigns such as *Rethink Your Drinking*;
  - The harms associated with underage drinking and the provision of alcohol to minors through local partnerships and campaigns; and,
  - Canada's Low-risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines and encouraging drinking in moderation.
- Promote, encourage and host family friendly events in our communities that do not include alcohol.
- Educating the public and community groups/coalitions on the benefits of stricter controls on alcohol availability and marketing

I would be pleased to provide a deputation with more information about Municipal Alcohol Policies at the Council of the Whole meeting scheduled for September 11, 2017.

Sincerely,



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