



Centre for Addiction and Mental Health



July 4, 2013

The Honourable Charles Sousa, MPP
Minister of Finance
7 Queen's Park Crescent, 7th floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Y7

Dear Minister:

We are writing to express our concern about a drive to allow alcohol to be sold in convenience stores. Our organizations are dedicated to evidence-based public policy on alcohol.

After tobacco, alcohol is responsible for the highest rate of death and disease in Canada. It contributes to dozens of illnesses and injuries as well as fatalities from impaired driving. It's implicated in threats to public safety and community well-being such as homicides, suicides, assaults, fires, drownings, and falls. The annual cost of direct health care, law enforcement, corrections, prevention, lost productivity, and related problems is estimated to be \$5.3 billion in Ontario.

Increased alcohol availability results in increased alcohol-related harm. There are approximately 1,000 LCBO and Beer Store retail sites and more than 10,000 convenience stores in Ontario; if beer and wine are sold in convenience stores, their availability could multiply ten-fold across the province. Evidence from other jurisdictions indicates that this increase in availability will result in higher consumption and more harm.

Following partial privatization of alcohol outlets in British Columbia, alcohol consumption increased more sharply in areas with the highest proportion of private alcohol outlets. Alcohol-related deaths rose by 3.3% for each 20% increase in private store density. In Alberta, privatization of the provincial legal monopoly has also been associated with increases in the province's suicide mortality rates. Intoxicated and underage persons are more likely to be served under a private retail system than a public one like Ontario's. Since partially privatizing alcohol sales, BC has found that government stores are more effective than private stores at identifying minors. Furthermore, surveys by CAMH and MADD Canada have shown that Ontarians are satisfied with the current system. The majority is not in favour of selling alcohol in convenience stores.

The stakes are high. Our current system strikes a balance between consumer access, selection, and service on one hand and the need to minimize alcohol-related harm on the other. Liquor control board systems provide an effective means of controlling alcohol consumption and

alcohol-related harm. Alcohol is no ordinary commodity, and we believe that it should not be sold as one.

We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine Zahn".

Catherine Zahn, MD, FRCP(C), MHSc
President and CEO
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Murie".

Andrew Murie
Chief Executive Officer
MADD Canada