

**METRO VANCOUVER REGIONAL DISTRICT  
REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2024**

**O N T A B L E**

- 1. Delegation: Dr. Cheryl Young, Medical Health Officer, Fraser Health Authority** *pg. 2*  
re. Alcohol Consumption in Regional Parks  
Executive Summary
  
- 2. Delegation: Dr. Michael Schwandt, Medical Health Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health** *pg. 5*  
re. Public Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol Health Harms  
Executive Summary

March 5, 2024

Metro Vancouver Regional District Regional Parks Committee  
4515 Central Boulevard,  
Burnaby, British Columbia  
[delegations@metrovancover.org](mailto:delegations@metrovancover.org)

**Re:** Pilot Program to Permit Alcohol Consumption in Regional Parks

Dear Regional Parks Committee,

Fraser Health Population and Public Health recognizes the Metro Vancouver Regional District as a key partner in protecting and promoting the public's health across its programs, systems, and services. In the interest of public health and safety, we strongly caution against the Regional Parks Committee approving a pilot program to permit alcohol consumption in the four regional parks proposed within the Fraser Health area: Boundary Bay, Campbell Valley, Derby Reach, and Brunette Fraser Greenway.

Alcohol consumption in B.C. has risen over the past decade. Alcohol causes more health harms than any other substance in B.C., surpassing tobacco and opioids, and is responsible for more hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and paramedic services than any other substance. This trend represents a significant economic burden to governments and society; alcohol related issues cost the B.C. public \$2.8 billion annually.<sup>1</sup> Even moderate amounts of alcohol can have serious health and social consequences including cancers, heart disease, liver disease and violence.<sup>2</sup>

**Permitting alcohol across an increasing number of parks in our region comes with a number of public health considerations and consequences that impact individuals and communities:**

1. Contribution to the over-normalization of alcohol, including among children and youth
  - Promoting alcohol as a habitual part of socialization: Social connection and connection with nature contribute to wellness, however, given the significant health and social harms of alcohol, it should not be positioned as a routine facilitator for such connections. Doing so reduces perception of the real risks and harms of alcohol, and can increase overall consumption.
  - Enabling underage drinking and lending legitimacy to spaces used by young people for drinking.<sup>3</sup>
2. Consequences from intoxication, including injury and death from drownings, violence, and impaired driving
  - Increasing risk for disruptive behaviour, violence, hazardous litter (e.g. broken glass), and vandalized park amenities.<sup>3</sup>
  - Increasing risk for drowning: Between 2012 and 2020, alcohol and/or drugs were found to be a contributing factor in 38% of drowning deaths.<sup>4</sup> **The Fraser River had the most deaths of any river/creek in BC,<sup>4</sup> and is readily accessible by three of the**

**four proposed sites in Fraser. Additionally, Centennial Beach is a popular swimming beach and has no lifeguard present.**

- Increasing risk for impaired driving: **Derby Reach and Campbell Valley Regional Parks are not accessible by public transit and are essentially car-access only.**
3. Equitable access for all community members
- Impacting the ability to enjoy shared public spaces for families and groups who prefer to be in alcohol-free spaces.
  - Impacting individuals with a history of problem drinking or who are in recovery from an alcohol use disorder, who want to avoid triggering environments.

**If the committee decides to proceed with the proposed pilot, we encourage implementation of the following evidence-based guidance and recommendations adapted from the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR):<sup>3</sup>**

1. Process:
  - a. Conduct an initial Health Impact Assessment and Health Equity Analysis
  - b. Seek early and ongoing engagement and feedback across diverse subgroups
2. Location:
  - a. Limit the number of proposed sites and set designated areas of consumption
  - b. Avoid establishing designated areas adjacent to bodies of water, child-specific areas (e.g. playgrounds), along hiking trails
  - c. Restrict the days/months/hours of consumption
  - d. Prohibit glass containers
  - e. Post clear, extensive, and accessible signage outlining the boundaries of designated sites, hours of consumption, and health and safety guidance
3. Implementation:
  - a. Pilot and restrict implementation to temporary, time-limited, or seasonal approvals
  - b. Implement ongoing monitoring and evaluation that includes:
    - i. Annual review to ensure due consideration is given before wider implementation
    - ii. Expand inspection and enforcement staffing to monitor underage drinking and public intoxication
    - iii. Comprehensive public reporting of health-related impacts, and community harms and costs

We commend the staff in recommending that pilot areas are at least 20 meters away from playgrounds and not located near schools, and that sale of alcohol would not be permitted. We appreciate such considerations that impact public health and safety, and we further encourage the Committee to consider the above additional impacts of this pilot program. Effective alcohol policy has the potential to reduce health and social harms, and we look forward to partnering with the Metro Vancouver Regional District to support your efforts in providing a regional park system that enables health and other benefits to park visitors in Fraser and across the region.

Sincerely,



**Cheryl Young MD, CCFP, MPH, FRCPC**  
Medical Health Officer – Medical Director  
Wellness Promotion Program  
Fraser Health Authority



**Emily Newhouse, MD, CM, MPH, FRCPC**  
Medical Health Officer – Medical Director  
Delta, Langley, White Rock  
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**Marianne Boisvert Moreau MD, MPH, FRCPC**  
Medical Health Officer – Medical Director  
Burnaby  
Covering for Dr. Lindsay Bowthorpe until April 7th, 2024  
Fraser Health Authority

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Scientific Working Group. [Canadian substance use costs and harms 2007–2020](#). (Prepared by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.) Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction; 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Paradis C, Butt P, Shield K, Poole N, Wells S, Naimi T, Sherk A, the Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines Scientific Expert Panels. [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report](#). Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction; 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Farrell-Low A, Johnston K, Naimi T, Vallance K. [Policy Brief. Not Just a Walk in the Park: Unsupervised Alcohol Consumption on Municipal Properties in BC](#). Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada; 2021.

<sup>4</sup> [BC Coroners Service. Accidental Drowning Deaths 2012-2022](#). Office of the Chief Coroner, BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General; 2023.

**Office of the Medical Health Officer**

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March 4, 2024

Regional Parks Committee  
Metro Vancouver Regional District  
Metrotower III, 4515 Central Boulevard  
Burnaby, BC V5H 0C6

**RE: Pilot Program to Permit Alcohol Consumption in Regional Parks**

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing in regard to the upcoming Committee decision on a pilot program to permit alcohol consumption in select Metro Vancouver Regional Parks. There are significant public health concerns related to the expansion of public space for alcohol consumption, including park areas, which are outlined below. I recommend against permitting alcohol consumption in regional parks, and for any potential changes in alcohol policy I suggest close consultation and careful monitoring in cooperation with affected Regional Health Authorities.

We note that the Committee has not consulted or informed health authorities about this impending decision despite the potential for significant health impacts to Metro Vancouver residents.

Alcohol is a leading cause of preventable death

Alcohol is a leading global cause of preventable death, harms, and disability. In BC alone, alcohol consumption contributed to 1,729 deaths in 2019. Evidence shows that consuming alcohol increases the risk of seven types of cancer, cardiovascular disease, as well as liver disease and violence. Alcohol is also associated with social harms, including aggression and interpersonal violence, including sexual violence, and intimate partner violence. Nearly 20% of violent crimes in Canada are associated with alcohol consumption. Impaired driving related to alcohol use also leads to considerable injury and loss of life every year. In the VCH region in 2019, the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research estimated that there were 288 alcohol-attributable deaths (25 per 100,000 population) that were caused, in part or wholly, by alcohol consumption, and 2920 (245 per 100,000 population) alcohol-related hospitalizations<sup>1</sup>.

Alcohol consumption has been increasing in the Metro Vancouver Region

**It is important to recognize that alcohol use has been on the rise in the Vancouver Coastal Health region since 2019.** Data from the second round of [BC's COVID-19 SPEAK Survey](#) found that 24% of respondents in VCH Region reported drinking more than before the pandemic, compared to 20% who reported drinking less, and 28% reported binge drinking at least once per month in the past year. In the VCH Region, per capital alcohol consumption in 2022 averaged 9.18 standard drinks per week, far in excess of Canada's Guidance on alcohol and health.

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Institute of Substance Use Research. (2023). *Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Trend Analyzer Tool*.  
Victoria: Canadian Institute of Substance Use Research. <http://aodtool.cfar.uvic.ca/pca/tool.php>

Increasing alcohol consumption carries substantial economic burdens

In British Columbia, the costs related to alcohol use reached \$2.81 billion in 2020<sup>2</sup>, which translates to an average cost of \$546 per person<sup>3</sup>. These costs are considerably higher than those associated with tobacco or opioids. Alcohol is also the leading cause of substance use-related lost productivity in the workforce, and accounts for the greatest costs to the criminal justice system.

Considerations to protect population health & safety against excessive alcohol consumption

If this decision is taken, I recommend that the Committee carefully and continually assess the possible health, equity, and community impacts by rigorously monitoring and evaluating any pilot programs that would encourage public alcohol consumption.

I also urge the Committee:

- To include, as part of its Signage Plan, displaying information from and links to [Canada's Guidance on alcohol and health](#) to inform the public about safe consumption and associated risks (VCH has a sample poster available to the Committee for consideration) and
- To consider other public realm considerations such as the impacts on noise, rubbish, and public perceptions of safety. For example, one New Zealand study on the effects of alcohol in public spaces concluded that the community benefit of public space was reduced by the use of alcohol<sup>4</sup>.

In closing, I strongly urge the Committee against permitting alcohol consumption in regional parks and recommend that the Metro Vancouver Regional District continue its responsible practice of only allowing alcohol consumption in regulated settings.

Thank you for your careful consideration of the health impacts of policies affecting Metro Vancouver Parks, which are resources for community wellbeing. Our program will be pleased to work closely with Metro Vancouver in support of the above recommendations.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Schwandt  
Medical Health Officer, Vancouver

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<sup>2</sup> Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research. (2023). *Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms 2007-2020*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. <https://csuch.ca/documents/reports/english/Canadian-Substance-Use-Costs-and-Harms-Report-2023-en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Population estimates based on 2020 Sub-Provincial Population Estimates Report. BC Stats. (2020). *2020 Sub-provincial Population Estimates Highlights*. Victoria: BC Stats. [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/pop\\_sub-provincial\\_population\\_highlights.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/pop_sub-provincial_population_highlights.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Randerson, S., Gordon, L., Casswell, S., Lin, J., Borell, B., Rychert, M., & Huckle, T. (2022). *"I feel it's unsafe to walk" Impacts of alcohol supply on public space in eight neighbourhoods and residents' input to alcohol licensing decisions*. Wellington: Te Whatu Ora. <https://resources.alcohol.org.nz/assets/Inclusivity-report/Inclusivity-report.PDF>