



February 12, 2024

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.
 Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
 House of Commons
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
chrystia.freeland@canada.ca

RE: The alcohol industry prospers at the expense of our healthcare system and the wellbeing of people in Canada

Dear Deputy Prime Minister Freeland,

We urgently request that the Canadian government honour its commitment to the scheduled 4.7% federal beer, wine and spirit excise duty increase slated for April 1, 2024. This will ensure that the public’s share of the \$26 billion dollars of alcohol sales in Canada is not eroded through inflation.¹ This is particularly important given the substantial \$19.7 billion dollars that alcohol costs every year in healthcare, lost productivity, criminal justice and other direct costs.² Alarming, this is more than the cost for opioids, cannabis and cocaine combined.

We know that the consumption of alcohol is related to over **200 health conditions and diseases** -- including at least 9 cancers, liver cirrhosis, alcohol use disorder and cardiovascular disease, resulting in **over 800,000 emergency room and hospital visits** and **17,000 deaths across Canada every year**.³ When accounting for both alcohol revenues and alcohol costs, **Canada currently runs a deficit of about \$6.2 billion dollars a year**.⁴

At a time when people in Canada are grappling with the highest cost of living increase in decades, it is incomprehensible that, of all the products in our shopping carts, the government would encourage the consumption of alcohol by effectively lowering its tax rate after inflation, making it less expensive relative to other goods. The alcohol industry should not be allowed to profit off inflation while contributing less to the enormous social costs and harms that are caused by its products.

Amid economic challenges, long patient wait times and low healthcare provider retention rates continue to negatively impact health outcomes, instilling anxiety among healthcare providers, patients, and loved ones alike. Given alcohol’s burden on our healthcare system, honouring the anticipated 4.7% federal beer, wine and spirit excise duty is something the government can do to avoid further jeopardizing the stability and sustainability of the healthcare sector in these critical times. **It is vital the government stand alongside the health sector in support of a healthier and wealthier Canada.**

¹ Statistics Canada, Control and sale of alcoholic beverages and cannabis, April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022.

² Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Scientific Working Group. (2023). 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.

³ Naimi, T., Stockwell, T., Giesbrecht, N., Wettlaufer, A., Vallance, K., Farrell-Low, A., Farkouh, E., Ma, J., Priore, B., Vishnevsky, N., Price, T., Asbridge, M., Gagnon, M., Hynes, G., Shelley, J., Sherk, A., Shield, K., Solomon, R., Thomas, G. & Thompson, K. (2023). Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation 3.0: Federal Results. Victoria, BC: Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria.

⁴ Ibid

Deputy Prime Minister Freeland, we urgently request that the Canadian government prioritize the well-being of people in Canada by maintaining the alcohol industry's contribution to our economy through inflation indexation to partially offset the social costs and harms directly caused by their products. Your attention to this matter is crucial in supporting families, improving the health of people in Canada, alleviating the strain on our healthcare system and saving lives.

Yours truly,

Organizational signatories



Daisy J. Dwyer
Chair
Annapolis Valley Community Alcohol Partnership



Rita Koutsodimos
Executive Director
BC Healthy Living Alliance



Andrea Seale
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Cancer Society



Dr. Alexander Caudarella,
MDCM CCFP AM ABAM(d)
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction



Ian Culbert
Executive Director
Canadian Public Health Association



David Martell, BSc, MD, CCFP (AM), FCFP, CSAM (Certificant), ISAM (Certification)
President
Canadian Society of Addiction Medicine – Société médicale canadienne sur l'addiction



Leslie Buckley, MD, MPH, FRCPC
Chief, Addictions Division, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Shawna Comeau
Conseil de Santé de Clare
Clare Community Health Board



John-Paul Cody-Cox
Chief Executive Officer / Directeur général
Dietitians of Canada / Les diététistes du Canada

Maureen Langsford
Chair
Digby and Area Community Health Board



Angie Hamilton
Executive Director
Families for Addiction Recovery



Paul-Émile Cloutier
President and Chief Executive Officer
HealthCareCAN



Dr. Sara Kirk
Scientific Director
Healthy Populations Institute, Dalhousie University



Diego Marchese
EVP, Mission, Research & Social Enterprise
Heart & Stroke



Peri Lockhart
Health Promotion Consultant
Injury Free Nova Scotia

Amanda Paugh
Chair
Lunenburg County
Community Health Board



Dr. Sara Kirk
Chair
Nova Scotia Alliance for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity



Kevin Churchill
President
Ontario Public Health Association



Dr. Kara Thompson
Associate Professor
Director
Substance Use and Health in Emerging Adulthood Lab

Guy Surette
Councilor at the Municipality of the District of Argyle
Yarmouth Substance Use Awareness Partnership

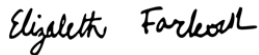
Program Coordinator,
Interdisciplinary Health
Program, StFX University
Department of Psychology
St. Francis Xavier University
Collaborating Scientist,
Canadian Institute for
Substance Use Research

**Central Inverness Community
Health Board**

**North Inverness Community
Health Board**

**Victoria County Community
Health Board**

Individual signatories



Elizabeth Farkouh
MD candidate, Mayo Clinic
Alix School of Medicine
Researcher, Canadian
Institute for Substance Use
Research



Norman Giesbrecht, PhD
Emeritus Scientist, Institute
for Mental Health Policy
Research
Centre for Addiction and
Mental Health
WHO/PAHO Collaborating
Centre in Addiction and
Mental Health
Adjunct Professor, Dalla Lana
School of Public Health,
University of Toronto



**Andrew Lynk, MD MSc
FRCPC D.Litts (Hon)**
Chief of Pediatrics - IWK
Health & NSH Central Zone
Halifax Nova Scotia
Chair of Pediatrics -
Dalhousie University
Department of Pediatrics,
Faculty of Medicine
Consultant Pediatrician -
Cape Breton Regional
Hospital Sydney Nova Scotia



Timothy S. Naimi, MD, MPH
Director, Canadian Institute
for Substance Use Research
Professor, School of Public
Health and Social Policy,
University of Victoria

CC: Honourable Mark Holland, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health
Honourable Ya'ara Saks, P.C., M.P., Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate
Minister of Health
Rachel Bendayan, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of
Finance
Yasir Naqvi, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health
Élisabeth Brière, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
and Associate Minister of Health

¹ The Union of BC Municipalities is a member of the BC Alliance for Healthy Living but cannot endorse this letter nor any other policy position that has not been explicitly passed as a resolution at their annual convention.