

Reply:

March 14, 2005

Committees of the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Health
180 Wellington Street
6th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Re: Bill C-206, An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act

I am writing in support of Bill C-206, an Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol), which is currently before the Standing Committee on Health.

I have enclosed our 1996 submission to the Standing Committee on Health when the Committee was considering an earlier version of this legislation, then called Bill C-222. Such an initiative has been under consideration for at least 10 years and has been supported by the public health community during this long time period. During these 10 years, alcohol-related problems and costs have continued to present significant challenges to our Canadian health, legal, and enforcement services as well as to our communities.

Toronto Public Health recommends adoption of the legislation to require warning labels on alcohol with one specific addition to the legislation: warning labels should require information on what is referred to as a "standard drink", in order to assist consumers to follow advice such as the Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines which were developed by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Ontario Public Health Association and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies. I also recommend the following refinements and activities to increase the impact of alcohol warning labels:

1. The warnings should be a series of rotating messages to address the variety of hazards associated with misuse of alcohol;
2. Focus testing of the messages should be conducted in order to ensure that they are meaningful to Canadians;
3. In order to ensure readability, consideration must be given to such things as font, type size, colour, location of the label on the container, etc.

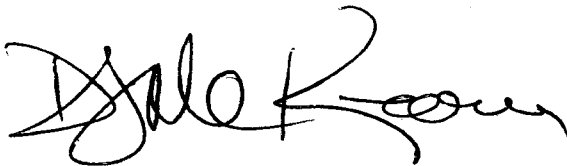
In proceeding with this legislation, I would encourage the government to ensure that adequate and appropriate counseling and treatment programs and services are available across the country.

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The government should ensure that this initiative is part of a more comprehensive and coordinated strategy that includes policies and other measures aimed at addressing the root causes of alcohol use and misuse and at preventing alcohol-related problems. The research literature indicates that policies and other measures that reduce population-level alcohol consumption are the most effective way of reducing alcohol-related problems. Furthermore, research shows that strategies such as warning signs and labeling can only be effective as part of a broader, more comprehensive strategy to change alcohol-related behaviours.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to provide input on this important initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David McKeown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "M".

David McKeown, MDCM, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

Attachment

Copies to: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Public Health Association
Medical Officers of Health in Ontario