



Supplementary Research Analysis

Alcohol in Parks: OPH Submissions on Considerations

Ottawa Public Health recognizes that the City of Ottawa is considering allowing the consumption of alcohol in select city parks. This policy change is consistent with some other cities, such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Edmonton. However, there have been some municipalities who have considered this option and decided not to pursue this policy change, some of which include Winnipeg, Regina, Richmond, and Kitchener.

Current evidence indicates that reducing alcohol consumption, even by small amounts contributes to increased health effectsⁱ. Conversely, alcohol use is linked to at least seven types of cancer, heart and liver disease, an increase in risk taking behaviour, such as driving under the influence, and frequently associated with violent and aggressive behaviour, including intimate partner violence, male-to-female sexual violence, and aggression and violence between adults. Alcohol can also increase the severity of violent incidentsⁱⁱ.

Youth and young adults are at an increased risk for harms related to alcohol; and increasing exposure to alcohol use has been shown to increase the frequency of drinking among young people and the belief that underage drinking is normal, common and even encouragedⁱⁱⁱ. Thus, increased exposure by allowing alcohol in parks, is likely to:

- impact youth alcohol consumption by increasing social access to alcohol, normalizing drinking in public spaces^{iv}.
- legitimize spaces that underage youth often use for drinking^v.
- further normalize drinking in public spaces and increase social access to alcohol among underage children and youth with limited enforcement infrastructure to prevent underage drinking^{vi}.

Therefore, if Ottawa City Council allows for this policy shift, it is important to consider all the factors outlined above when choosing proposed locations, and ongoing monitoring of the impacts of this policy change, along with compounding impacts of other provincial policy changes, such as alcohol expansion^{vii}. For example, alcohol expansion includes accessibility to purchase alcohol at convenience stores, many of which are open late, or 24 hours a day. This can result in people being able to purchase alcohol into late hours, resulting in challenges in abiding to the allowed hours of consumption at selected parks, resulting in increased risks associated with alcohol consumption.

The [Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation](#) experts are not supportive of expanding alcohol consumption in parks^{viii}. However, for those municipalities that do choose to allow alcohol consumption in parks, researchers at the University of Victoria's (UVic's)

Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR), have created the policy brief entitled: *Not Just a Walk in the Park: Unsupervised Alcohol Consumption on Municipal Properties in BC*^x. This policy brief is an evidence-based, public-health-oriented guide for municipalities, and is “designed to provide an evidence-based, public-health perspective to support local government decision-making around unsupervised public alcohol consumption on municipal properties such as parks, beaches, and city plazas. It outlines key areas for consideration with a focus on health equity and creating and maintaining healthy, vibrant, and accessible outdoor community spaces”^x.

Ottawa Public Health supports the recommendations outlined by UVic, as they are designed to help mitigate the associated risks related to alcohol. Thus, prior to adopting this policy change, OPH encourages the City of Ottawa to conduct an initial *Health Impact Assessment* and a *Health Equity Analysis* and recommends a temporary, rather than a permanent bylaw change. This would allow the city to build upon the *What we learned report - Parks and Facilities By-law Review, June – August 2024* and continue to seek ongoing public engagement and feedback across diverse subgroups and assess the impact of allowing alcohol in parks on an annual basis. OPH recommends ensuring that there is adequate signage in visible areas, including health related messaging which includes how to access help if someone is questioning their relationship with alcohol. Also, OPH recommends utilizing the guiding principles and park selection criteria based on the UVic policy brief, and criteria outlined by other cities, such as [Toronto](#)^{xi} and [Vancouver](#)^{xii}. For instance:

- Limit the number of proposed sites and exclude primary special event venues.
- Set designated areas for alcohol consumption at selected parks.
- Restrict hours of consumption for alcohol.
- Set limits on alcohol consumption and possession.
- Do not allow glass containers/bottles etc.
- Do not allow access to waterfronts (e.g., beaches).
- Choose locations city-wide to avoid concentration of selected parks.
- Choose parks that are at least 1.5 hectares.
- Ensure selected parks are not adjacent to schools or playgrounds.
- Choose sites that:
 - Are highly visible, non-remote locations with emergency vehicle access.
 - Are accessible to food establishments.
 - Are accessible to permanent or temporary washroom onsite.
 - Are accessible to free drinking water onsite.
 - Are accessible to nearby pedestrian walkways, cycling routes, and public transit.
 - Have minimal impacts to natural areas, purpose-built, and programmable spaces.
 - Have minimal impacts or disruptions to neighboring residents.

An important role of public health is to provide clear and concise information related to substance use health to ensure people can make evidence-informed decisions. OPH will continue to monitor and report on health data and trends related to alcohol and other substances.

ⁱ Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#) in 2023.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*

ⁱⁱⁱ [Unsupervised alcohol consumption on municipal properties in BC](#)

^{iv} *ibid*

^v *ibid*

^{vi} *ibid*

^{vii} [Ontario Delivering Choice and Convenience by Expanding the Sale of Alcoholic Beverages Starting this Summer | Ontario Newsroom](#)

^{viii} [Expert Q&A on drinking in parks - University of Victoria](#)

^{ix} [Unsupervised alcohol consumption on municipal properties in BC](#)

^x *Ibid*

^{xi} [Alcohol in Parks Program – City of Toronto](#)

^{xii} [Alcohol in parks and beaches | City of Vancouver](#)