

From: [Robert Mann](#)
To: [Economic and Community Development](#)
Cc: [Samantha Wells](#); [JF Crépault](#)
Subject: Letter for submission to Economic and Community Development Committee for meeting April 27
Date: April 23, 2021 6:11:03 PM
Attachments: [Submission to ECDC \(2021-04-23\).pdf](#)

Dear Ms. Lavertu,

My colleagues and I would like to submit the attached letter for consideration when the Economic and Community Development Committee discusses the proposal to liberalize drinking in Toronto parks at the meeting on April 27. We hope the committee will find this useful, and we would be happy to discuss this issue further if there is interest.

Please stay safe and well!

All best regards,

Bob

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Submission to the Economic and Community Development Committee

EC21.15: “Enjoying a Drink Outdoors: Providing Safe, Responsible and Equitable Options for All Torontonians”

April 23, 2021

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this motion.

As committee members know, alcohol is a major cause of death and disease. Nearly 15,000 deaths per year in Canada (5% of all deaths) can be directly attributed to alcohol, and more hospitalizations are caused by alcohol than by heart attacks. These harms are largely preventable through evidence-based policy and there is a scientific consensus regarding what policy measures are most effective in reducing alcohol-related harms.

Direct evidence regarding the impact of allowing drinking in parks is limited, but the main concern is that the proposed change could lead to an increase in alcohol consumption, especially among young people, who may be seeking locations where they can drink given that bars are currently closed. Decades of research have clearly demonstrated that a) the level of risk associated with alcohol is directly related to the amount a person consumes: the more one drinks (not just in the short term but over the lifespan), the higher the risk; and b) as overall consumption increases in the population, so does the full range of harms associated with alcohol. Additionally, recent evidence shows that the pandemic has resulted in significant increases in alcohol use, which could present health problems for many in the future.

Since this motion is motivated by a desire to address concerns about equity in addition to public health, it should be noted that the health harms of alcohol are disproportionately borne by people in lower socioeconomic status positions; in other words, for any given drinking pattern, people with lower socioeconomic status experience more alcohol-related harm. This suggests that policies that inadvertently increase alcohol consumption actually have the potential to *exacerbate* health inequity.

Finally, we understand that the purpose of this motion is to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 exposure by encouraging people to safely gather outdoors. But since alcohol consumption – even moderate – is associated with impulsivity and disinhibition, the committee may want to consider that people drinking in parks could be less likely to following masking and distancing guidelines.

From the standpoint of public health, it seems likely that this motion, if passed, would have unintended consequences, such as public drinking, especially for young people. Indeed, the costs of this motion would outweigh any benefits. If Council does decide to pass it, we recommend that this measure be temporary, expiring when licensed premises are allowed to re-open.

We would be pleased to provide more information if desired.

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