



Wider liquor sales bad idea

Wed Feb 12 2014 Page: A4 Section: News Column: Letters to the Editor

(Re: 'Ashley's death leaves hearts shredded; Victim impact statements flood Barrie courtroom in tears' and 'Embracing wider booze sales' in the Feb. 7 edition of the Examiner)

This story carries a poignant message about the tragic impact of alcohol on the lives of one family.

Juxtaposed with that was coverage of the continuing campaign to increase access to alcoholic products by offering them in convenience stores.

Although the link between the two is not overt, the strong correlation between increased availability and increased alcohol-related harm is there, between the lines.

The public health community has grown increasingly concerned about relaxing regulations related to alcohol sales, both in Ontario and across Canada. A large body of evidence shows that increased access to alcohol leads to increased consumption, which in turn leads to both short and long-term harms.

Ontario residents already consume more than the national low-risk drinking guidelines, putting them at risk for chronic diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, liver disease and mental health problems. Occasional heavy use of alcohol often results in impaired driving, alcohol poisoning, violence, unwanted or high-risk sexual encounters and injuries.

Gerald Thomas, a senior research and policy analyst with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, has pointed out that alcohol-related healthcare, enforcement and lost productivity cost Ontario \$5.3 billion in 2002. That figure was \$456 million greater than alcohol sales and taxes combined.

British Columbia, which has experimented with the sale of alcohol in convenience outlets, has seen increased alcohol-related violence, disease and death as a result.

Tim Stockwell, director of the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, found that alcohol-related deaths increase by 2% for every 10% rise in the number of liquor outlets.

In October last year, Premier Kathleen Wynne made it amply clear that the Ontario government was not interested in allowing sales of alcohol in convenience stores, citing an effective and controlled distribution network already in place. Yet the Ontario Convenience Store Association has persisted in lobbying for the sale of beer and wine in their outlets.

I urge residents and decision-makers to think beyond convenience and the mantra of competitiveness -and consider the real human health and social impacts of wider availability of alcohol products.

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