

Reducing the Burden from Alcohol in Ontario – Challenges to an Effective Policy Response

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**What are current challenges
to an effective policy
response?**

1. Increased and more diverse alcohol marketing & promotion

- Normalization of alcohol
- Expansion of occasions when alcohol is considered 'necessary' or 'essential'
- Sponsorship by alcohol industry associated with many areas of social life including those involving underage youth – such as Olympic venues
- Frequency, scope and quality of alcohol marketing & promotion dramatically overshadows any health promotion messages or 'counter-advertising'

2. International Trade Agreements

- Erosion of controls on marketing, promotion and retailing
- Typically give little or no attention to health issues
- Tend to treat alcohol like an ordinary commodity

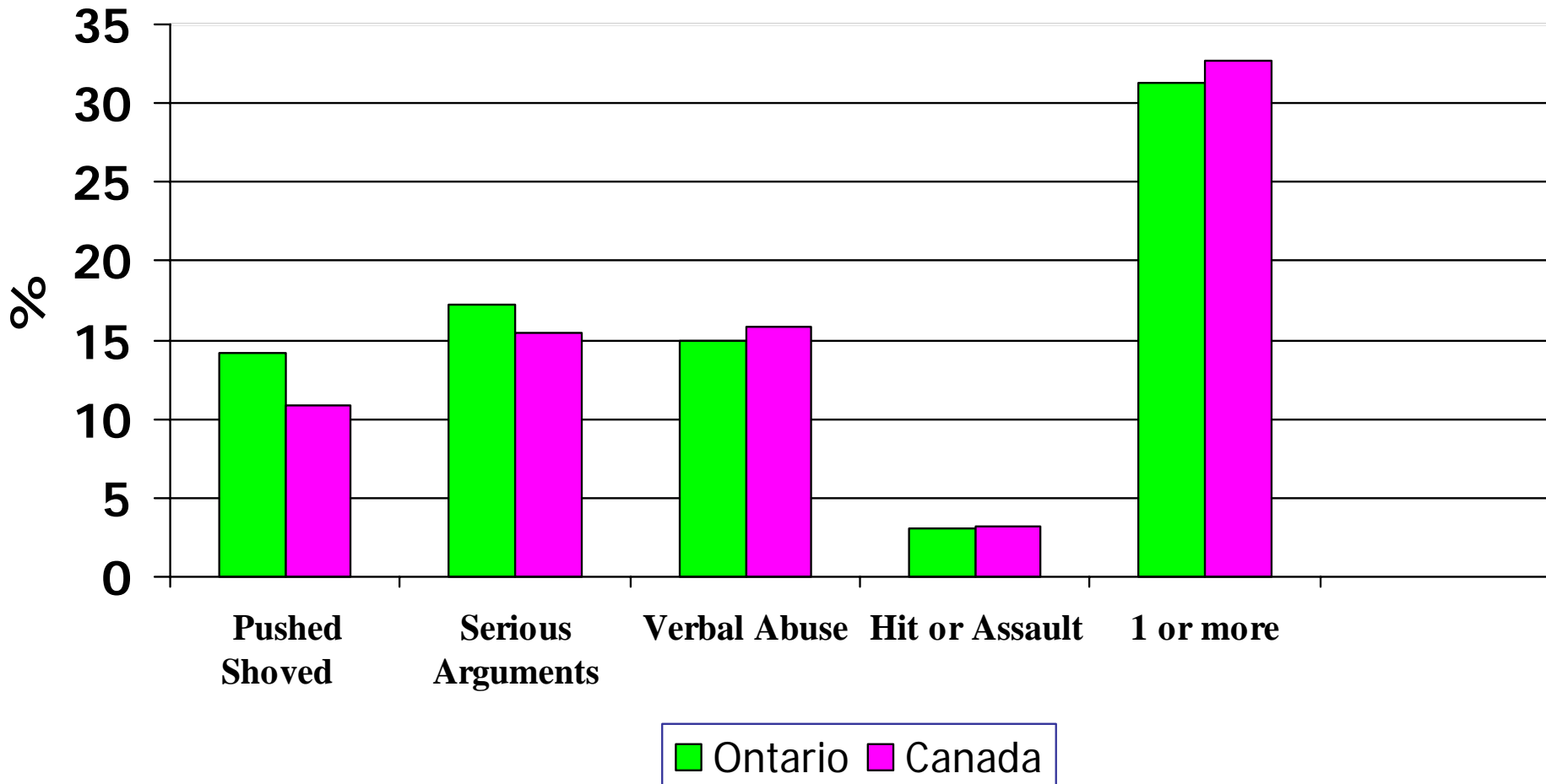
3. Privatization: Developments & Pressures

- Numerous proposals in past 20+ years to fully or partially privatize alcohol retailing in Ontario
- Due to shortfall of present provincial government, this is on the agenda again
- However, evidence of substantial health and safety risks of privatization was presented to Ministry of Finance in 2005
 - The evidence is stronger now than it was then
 - Partial privatization in BC has contributed to increased consumption in areas most impacted
 - Alberta experience in 1993 led to increased harm, without substantial increase in returns from revenues
- Remember the sale of Highway 407?

4. Increased consumption and high risk drinking

- Per adult sales – aged 15+ -- have increased in Ontario since 1996 by about 7%
- Concurrently, high risk drinking – defined as 5+ per occasion - has increased, and especially among young adults
- The % reporting drinking above the low-risk drinking guidelines has also increased
- In a 2006 survey, 31% of a representative sample of adult Ontarians said they had experienced disruption or harm due to drinking by others.

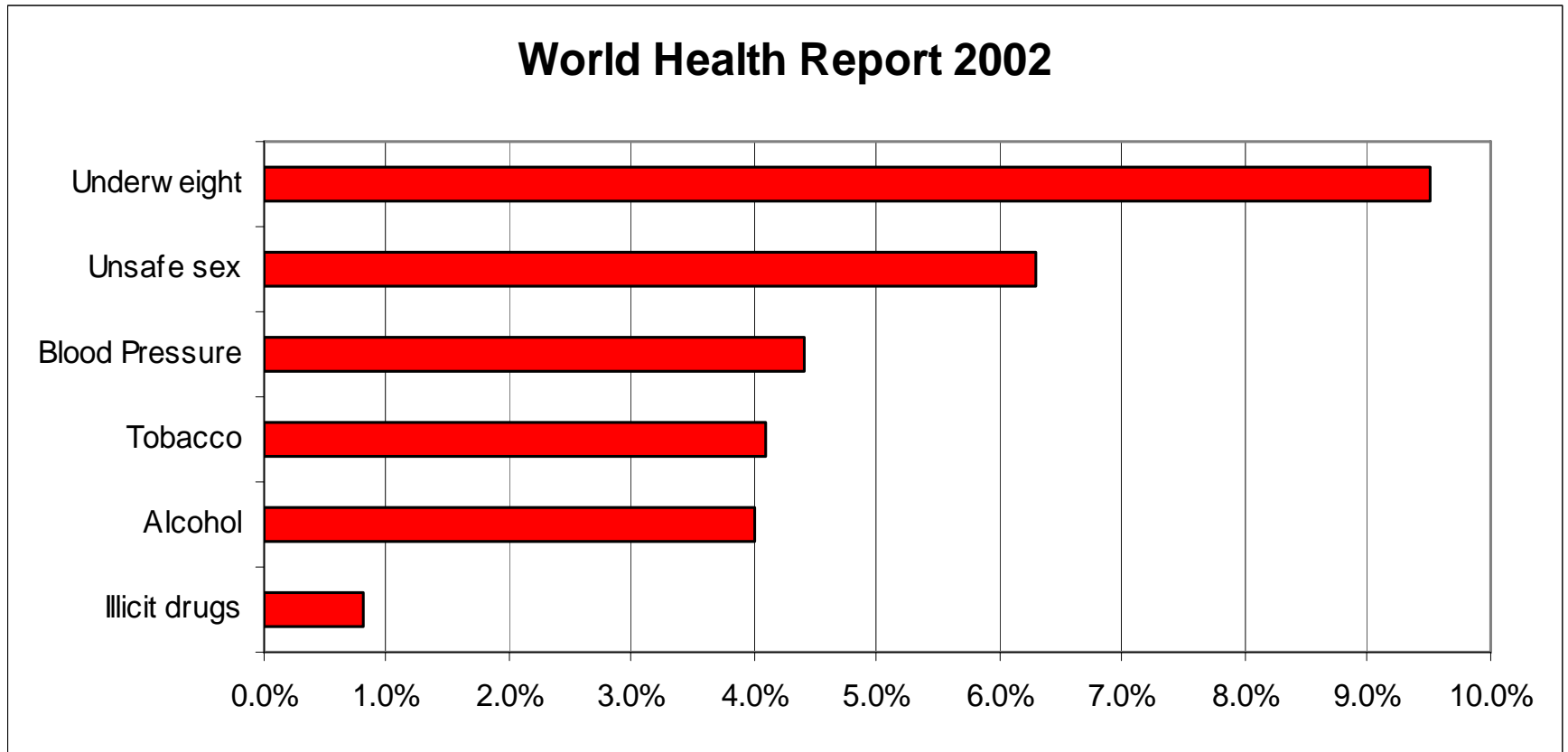
Harm to Self due to Drinking by Others, Past Yr., Aged 18+ Respondents, CAS 2004 Survey



5. Myths or misunderstandings about alcohol

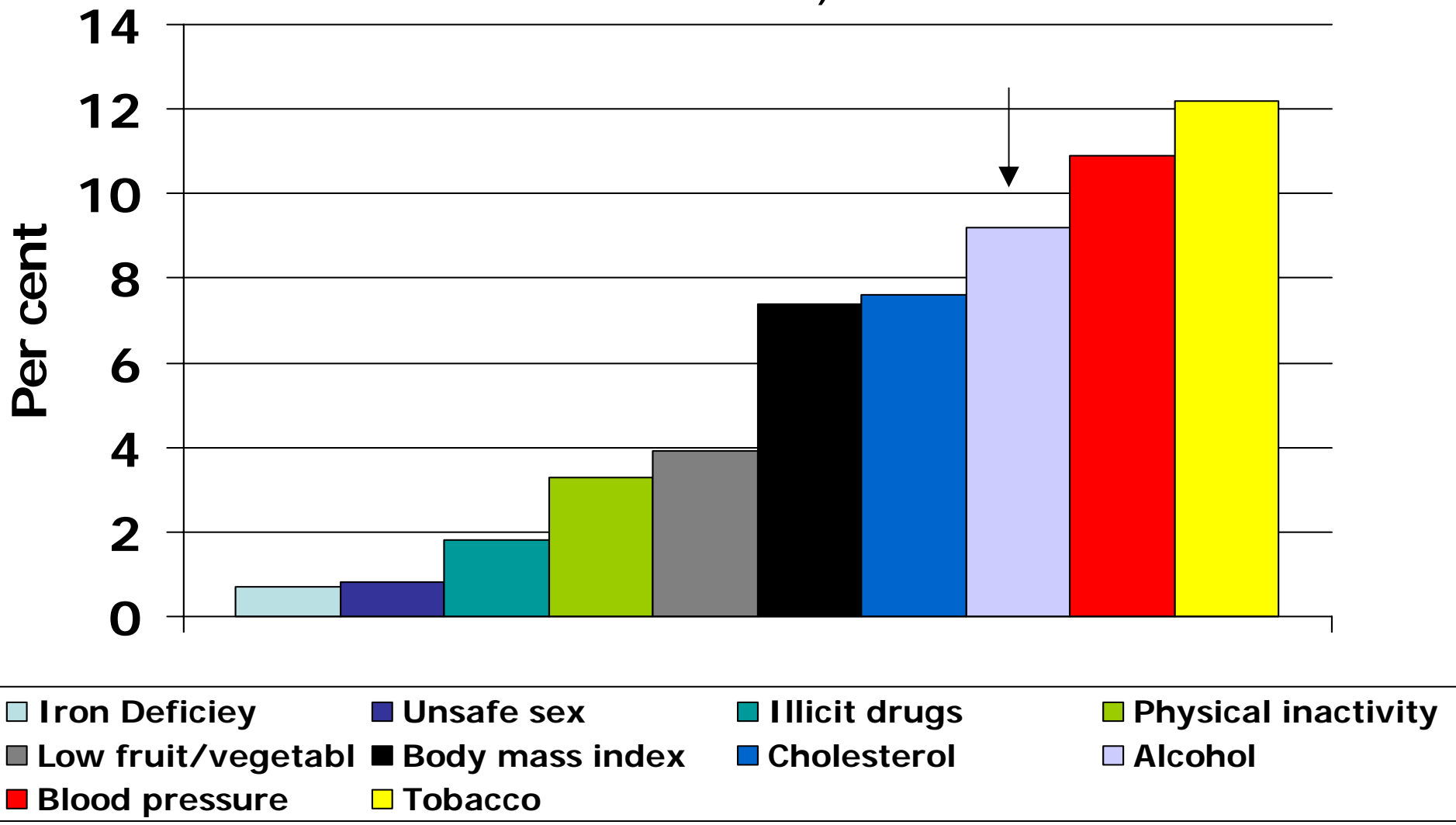
- The health benefits out-weight the damage
- It is not really a serious problem compared to tobacco, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, illicit drug use, etc.
- If we control drinking and driving and FASD the problem is solved
- Focus on educating youth to drink responsibly
- Those who get involved in alcohol control issues are really secret prohibitionists
- If I work on alcohol issues my friends will shun me, I will never be invited to great parties and only be served cranberry juice

WHO STUDY



Percent of Disability-Adjusted-Life Years of
26 risk factors considered, world-wide, 2002

Leading risk factors for disease in established economies (% total Disability Adjusted Life Years - DALYs)



5. Challenges: Positioning & Classification

- 'Abuse' or 'addiction' as descriptors of alcohol issues?
 - Alcohol abuse a problematic concept?
 - It is not ethanol that is being 'abused' – ethanol is not a person.
 - It is the social network, health, safety that are negatively impacted
 - Focuses too narrowly on the heaviest users
 - Descriptors do not encourage a population-based perspective needed for an effective response
- Alcohol as a sub-set of mental health and addictions?
 - Resources are divided up and part for alcohol reduced
 - Does not fit with high level of damage from alcohol

6. Municipal – Provincial Relationships

Three recent examples

- Ottawa – Councilor supports bylaw amendments
- Hamilton – Report to distinguish bar/nightclubs from food premises
- Toronto – Feasibility of CAMH's Safer Bars training program as a mandatory element in municipal licensing requirements

7. Capacity & training issues

- Not enough inspectors, health promoters or staff trained on alcohol issues
- Individual health unit capacity
- Alcohol controls are poorly understood
- Look for transferable skills and lessons from tobacco control and addressing other health and safety issues for alcohol
- Provide opportunities for mentorship
- Acknowledge leaders
- Provide interesting and challenging opportunities for newcomers

Conclusion

- Alcohol is major contributor to chronic disease, social problems and trauma in Ontario
- There are a number of challenges to reducing the burden from alcohol – both local and provincial
- Drawing on experience with other health & social issues, it is feasible to overcome these challenges through a coordinated, comprehensive and well resourced provincial alcohol strategy.

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