

January 26, 2004

Dear Colleague:

Attached is a CAMH Position Paper about the important role retail alcohol monopolies can play to reduce the social and personal harm associated with alcohol consumption.

Preserving the Public Interest was developed by CAMH staff to contribute new research evidence to public debates about whether governments should control the sale of alcohol through retail alcohol monopolies. The paper concludes that retail alcohol monopolies can be a powerful tool for reducing alcohol consumption, promoting responsible alcohol use and reducing the social harms associated with drinking when the public health aspect of their mandate is maximized.

The paper also identifies a trend amongst retail alcohol monopolies towards a greater emphasis on product marketing and promotion. In response to this trend, ***Preserving the Public Interest*** recommends that governments rebalance the focus of retail alcohol monopolies to ensure that public health and alcohol control objectives remain a priority. The paper recommends several steps forward to realize this potential.

This issue is timely because recent studies show that the burden of disease and disability to society from alcohol is similar to that from tobacco and in some countries it is even greater. In Canada there are concerns that this burden is increasing with the rising rates of alcohol consumption since the late 1990s.

In light of the growing evidence that drinking rates and patterns are closely linked to social, health and safety problems associated with drinking, it is important for governments and those who distribute and retail alcohol to devote attention to health promotion and prevention strategies, and promote those alcohol policies that are most effective in reducing harm.

We hope that you will find the paper of interest and that it will represent a useful addition to discussions about how governments can best promote health and reduce the harms associated with alcohol use.

If you have any questions or comments about the paper, please contact either Dr. Norman Giesbrecht (by phone at 416-535-8501, extension 6895 or by e-mail at Norman_Giesbrecht@camh.net), or Ms. Janet McAllister (by phone at 519-433-3171 or by e-mail at Janet_McAllister@camh.net).

Sincerely,

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A PAHO/WHO
Collaborating Centre

Un Centre collaborateur
OPS/OMS

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