



BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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BCAFN SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY
March 9-10, 2023
Hybrid - In person & online via Zoom

Late Resolution 01/2023

SUBJECT: ALCOHOL REGULATION, FUNDING AND JURISDICTION

Moved by: CHIEF JAMES HOBART, SPUZZUM FIRST NATION

SECONDED BY: CHIEF LYNDA PRICE, ULKATCHO FIRST NATION

DECISION:

WHEREAS:

- A. Alcohol is a legal substance that is widely normalized and often portrayed as low risk, despite being identified as a Class 1 carcinogen in 1987 by the World Health Organization, causing over 14,000 deaths and 88,000 hospitalizations in Canada in 2014, and being associated with at least 43 major categories of disease;
- B. First Nations people experience disproportionate alcohol related harms, including a three times higher rate of deaths attributed to alcohol than other BC residents;
- C. Federal and provincial governments continue to regulate alcohol in ways that promote access and availability, and underfund essential services, supports and education, both for the general public and Indigenous peoples;
- D. First Nations attempts to reduce consumption and availability of alcohol in their communities at times requires cooperation from local municipalities, such as limiting alcohol sales to reduce bootlegging;
- E. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which the government of Canada has adopted without qualification, and has, alongside the government of BC, passed legislation committing to implement, affirms:

- a. Article 21 (1): Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security; (2): States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.
 - b. Article 23: Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programs through their own institutions.
 - c. Article 24(2): Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right;
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- F. Alcohol contributes to wide-ranging social, health, and justice issues, including domestic violence and the overdose crisis, with the BC Coroner’s Service finding that alcohol was present in 29% of illegal drug overdose deaths in 2021 and stating that it exacerbates the crisis;
 - G. Research has established the connection between trauma and hopelessness and harmful alcohol use, including increased risk of binge drinking for those whose parents attended residential schools;
 - H. The In Plain Sight report found that 23% of Indigenous respondents were likely to feel “not at all safe” when using mental health or substance use services, and current alcohol treatment services are unable to meet demand, are plagued by excessive wait times, and have additional barriers for Indigenous people, such as culturally inappropriate programs and inaccessibility for remote First Nations;
 - I. Through BCAFN Resolution 15/2006 *Support for Pilot Project for Drug and Alcohol Programs* Chiefs-in-Assembly advocated for government funding policing and priorities to reflect the need for pre/post treatment and other supportive initiatives.
 - J. The BCAFN Board of Directors has supported BCAFN events that are alcohol free, and events where there are alcohol-free options, spaces, and supports.

- K. Alcohol incurs the highest cost to society of all illegal and legal substances, while simultaneously being a revenue source for governments, with Canada-wide revenue totaling \$10.9 billion and BC's revenue totaling \$1.6 billion in 2014;
- L. Although longstanding research has shown the carcinogenic harms of alcohol, there have been no public education campaigns in BC on this risk and the general population has low knowledge of the carcinogenic risks or lower risk drinking guidelines;
- M. The BC government increased the availability and accessibility of alcohol during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has no plans to revoke these regulations or move forward a holistic approach to alcohol regulation, education, supports and services;
- N. The BC government's planned approach relies on the creation and implementation of a Minimum Alcohol Pricing Model without a holistic approach to prevent potential unintended negative impacts on vulnerable populations; and
- O. The BC government completed preliminary consultation on the Minimum Alcohol Pricing model with health organizations and only Treaty First Nations.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The BC AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly fully supports First Nations exercise of their jurisdiction in alcohol laws, controls and initiatives and calls upon all levels of governments to work in partnership with them;
2. The BC AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly calls on the governments of British Columbia and Canada to take a holistic, culturally-appropriate approach to alcohol regulation that respects title and rights and reflects the unique needs of First Nations, and to provide increased funding for both First Nations-specific and culturally-safe mainstream alcohol prevention and treatment services and supports;
3. The BC AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly demands that BC's future engagements and consultations related to alcohol are completed in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ensure engagement with all First Nations regardless of whether or not they are involved in the BC Treaty Commission process; and
4. The BC AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly directs the BCAFN Regional Chief and BCAFN staff to work with federal, provincial and municipal governments and liaise with the First Nations Health Authority and other like-minded organizations, on alcohol regulations and funding to reduce alcohol-related harms, increase Indigenous-specific supports, ensure cultural-safety in mainstream services, and recognize and support First Nations jurisdiction and initiatives.