



## AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

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On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014 I attended a municipal alcohol project forum in Truro. The forum was to engage participants in a conversation about alcohol use in our communities. The culture of alcohol use or misuse in our communities has to be addressed.

Long-term alcohol abuse can increase the risks associated to chronic disease including some forms of cancers. It can also lead to depression and is known to cause high blood pressure. The threat of serious illness is compounded when you start mixing alcohol abuse with other risks such as tobacco use or lack of physical activity. Alcohol mortality rates have increased in Nova Scotia by 27 per cent in recent years and in 2007, there were 252 deaths related to the use of alcohol. This figure dropped slightly to 231 people in 2008 (the last reporting year). Pregnant women should not drink alcohol and the prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome should be enough for people to understand the risks posed for the unborn child.

Alcohol consumption rates in Nova Scotia are amongst the highest in Canada. According to a 2011 Alcohol Indicators report by the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, alcohol consumption by Nova Scotians has increased by 6.6 per cent over a 20 year period. In the same study, rates range to 38.9 per cent for males and 17.5 per cent for females engaging in heavy monthly drinking. Heavy drinking is defined as consuming 5 or more drinks in one sitting. This disturbing stat appears to be prevalent in the drinking rates among our youth. The average age of a youth's first time consumption of alcohol in the Province is 12.9 years. (12.7 for males and 13.1 for females). The high consumption rates among our youth is causing problems especially in the university settings. The culture of excessive drinking among university aged students has caused hospitalizations and fatalities among students in our Province. A young person's brain continues to develop and grow during their early twenties and excessive alcohol consumption can affect this growth and development.

Alcohol related crimes in Nova Scotia accounts for 31.2 per cent of all crimes committed. Impaired driving offenses, while plateauing 10 years ago, is still too high. Nova Scotia has a higher rate than the Canadian average for alcoholic crashes that cause serious injury.

While some may argue that the economic benefits from alcohol purchases offset the other issues, this is not the case. In 2006, revenues from alcohol purchases were 224.2 million dollars. The direct social costs however has been calculated at upwards of 242 million dollars.

There are a lot of responsible drinkers out there. It is important that we, as a community, work together to modify some of the behavior associated to excessive consumption of alcohol. Light or moderate consumption is not usually the problem. The issue stems from the heavy use that puts a strain on our families, our community and our limited resources. If we can modify the behavior and reduce this over-indulgence, our community would be safer for it.