

# In Our Words

WHAT ALCOHOL USE  
LOOKS LIKE IN  
OUR TOWNS





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This report can be accessed online at:  
[www.wolfville.ca](http://www.wolfville.ca)  
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[www.townofantigonish.ca](http://www.townofantigonish.ca)

If you are seeking help for your own or someone else's alcohol or other substance use call 811 and you will be directed to your local resources.

Address all other questions and inquiries to [municipalalcoholproject@avdha.nshealth.ca](mailto:municipalalcoholproject@avdha.nshealth.ca).

# Prologue

## Snapshots Of Alcohol Harms in Antigonish, Bridgewater and Wolfville



### The field

Some Antigonish residents describe it as a rite of passage: the high school graduation beer bash. Come late June each year

recently-minted high school graduates drive to a designated field, unload alcohol and other beverages, hand their car keys to one of up to 30 parent chaperones, then party the night away. The chaperones – who represent all walks of life, from judges' spouses to town officials – patrol the field, putting orange vests on kids they reckon have had too much.

By the time the music starts, the party will have been in the works since September, when Grade 12 students take it upon themselves to start organizing. The nine-month planning window gives members of the Antigonish RCMP plenty of time to deliver a sober warning to both the organizers and the chaperones: *The first kid that dies? I'll tell you what. We'll be here and all of you are going to be charged with criminal negligence causing death. Trust me.*

The parents wrestle their options and many – including people who firmly oppose the party, will chaperone anyway, reasoning their kids will be safer with the supervision than without it.

Laws governing private property make it difficult for the police to completely shut down the party. Some people say they turn a blind eye. But one year three officers set up a checkpoint outside the field, confiscating the alcohol in cars that contained no passengers over 19. They stacked cases three-high along the roadside. Then the owner of the land and a group of parent chaperones confronted the officers and an argument ensued so heated that the RCMP nearly laid arrests.

The next year, the party went ahead as planned.

### The shoebox

Without them, she couldn't do her job as an Emergency Room physician. And even with those little mental compartments, some experiences will stick with her forever. It's 11:30 p.m. and a nineteen-year-old boy is driving home from work. A 47-year-old intoxicated man crosses the centre line and his car hits the boy's head-on.



Shoebox A: She tries to resuscitate the boy but he flatlined on impact. She pronounces him dead and breaks the news to his parents. The physician knows the driver who killed the boy was impaired but she can't tell his parents until an investigation is complete. She

watches as they identify their son.

Shoebox B: She walks down the hall. The 47-year-old driver is lying in another room. He has a fractured femur. She tells him what happened to the boy he hit. He barely registers the tragedy. *He wants something for the pain. You're going to give me something to fix my leg, right? Something inside her switches off. It has to.*

### The second floor deck

The woman was sitting down to dinner with her husband and children when the phone rang. Someone who lived two houses down from the woman's university rental unit was calling to tell her about the accident on the property. Did you know there are ambulances outside your rental place? The woman leaves her husband and children at home and rushes over.

She's not an ordinary landlord. She takes the university students through her leases, ensures their parents read the fine print too. She carefully reviews each and every one of her special rules that limit the size of parties and number of guests the kids are allowed to have over. She's walked into house parties to count bodies and enforce her rules. The music stops and the crowd of university students parts



before her like the Red Sea. She'll howl about it later but she keeps her face straight when she needs to be tough.

Like tonight. Two ambulances? What's happened? The town house has a deck on the second floor. Her tenants had a party. A student drinks too much alcohol, then climbs on the deck railing and attempts to walk along it. At some point he falls. Someone calls 911. Young people rush downstairs. He's unresponsive. A couple of the guests pass out from the trauma of seeing him fall. They all fear the worst.

He is lucky. He fell in a patch of grass and passed out on impact. After he comes to, he stumbles away unharmed. But it could have been so much worse. The next morning, 7 o'clock, she pounds on her tenants' door. Sits them down and gives them "the talk." They're nice kids. Really nice kids. They don't renew their lease.



## The park bench

They couldn't have picked a worse evening for it really: pouring rain.

But the complaints over noise and disturbances

coming from a local drinking establishment have been gathering steam for years. So the three of them – the Mayor, one of his councilors and a representative from the president's office of Acadia University, figured they'd better investigate the matter fully. So they agreed: a full evening of observation – 9p.m. to 2a.m. rain or shine.

They sit on a park bench on Main Street and observe the action. They're shocked at the police presence: they count eight police cruisers. "Expensive babysitting," the Mayor remarks.

When the bar closes, the action really starts. They see people urinating in planters. They see someone remove a shop sign from one location and move it to another. They tense up: they've had problems with vandalism and property damage on Main Street: smashed glass, broken store windows. What surprises them most is the noise. The noise! Thanks to hours of pounding music and alcohol, the patrons can't hear. So they shout. Boys shout, girls shout. And the girls are the loudest. It's a raucous wave of sound floating up to residential areas.

Some of the students seemed intoxicated when they entered the bar. Now they seem worse. The group shake their heads in disbelief at how this could happen.

## The mystery

*If we put alcohol in a dropper and squeezed it in our eyes, could we get drunk?* The first rule in working with teenagers is to never show your shock. So he keeps his eyes and voice neutral and answers the question the best he can. He's worked with teens for years and they never cease to amaze him. On the one hand, their ingenuity is remarkable. On the other hand, it's frightening.

He thinks back to a high school dance he was working a few months back. Standing at the door, looking the kids in the eye as they came in, telling them Good evening. He never had a problem figuring out which ones had been drinking: bloodshot eyes, unsteady gait, slurred speech. And the smell. Always the smell. But that night was different. The kids seemed off. Glazed over eyes, unsteady on their feet. But he couldn't smell a thing.

"Are you OK?" he asks them. One says he has a stomachache. The police officer scratches his head. It doesn't add up.

A few weeks later he hears what happened. A group of teens – boys and girls - soaked tampons in alcohol and inserted them rectally so they could "drink" at the dance and not get caught. Mystery solved.



## The confined space

Name the trauma and he's seen it: fires, car crashes, accidents. He's in the business of saving lives and most people see the value in that.

They thank him and his colleagues for the care they get. It makes him feel appreciated. But it's not always like that. Especially if they've been

drinking. That's when the anger comes out, the aggression.

It's hard working on someone if you're worried they're going to reach up and punch you. Kick you when you turn around. There's not much room to duck in the back of an ambulance. Here you are, helping someone and they're showering you with verbal abuse, insults and fists. Sometimes a police officer will ride along in the back to help him. He doesn't let it get to him – it's a part of his job. He consoles himself with the knowledge that most people aren't like that.

# The Municipal Alcohol Project

## An Overview

The stories you have just read about the impact of alcohol in Antigonish, Bridgewater and Wolfville were collected during the summer of 2011 as part of an innovative project designed to understand and illuminate alcohol-related harms in three Nova Scotia municipalities.

### A growing body of research paints a disturbing picture of alcohol use in Nova Scotia and across much of the world.

Per capita alcohol consumption in Nova Scotia rose 9.5% over the last 10 years.<sup>1</sup> Nova Scotia Liquor Commission sales have grown 56% in the past decade to hit \$579.4 million in 2010, driven in part by the addition of 47 new stores over the last five years.<sup>2</sup> Nova Scotian men and women consistently drink more heavily than their Canadian counterparts.<sup>3</sup> About one in five Canadians drink amounts that exceed recommended low risk drinking guidelines.<sup>4</sup> Alcohol ranks second behind tobacco as a cause of disease, and is widely known to contribute to trauma and social problems in high income countries like Canada.<sup>5</sup>

So what do these numbers look like on the ground in Nova Scotia communities? That's the question at the heart of the Municipal Alcohol Project, or MAP.

MAP has its roots in a May 2010 provincial forum that offered profound insights into the complex relationship that Nova Scotians have with alcohol. Discussions inspired by the forum clearly identified the need for municipal engagement in better understanding and reducing alcohol's harmful impacts.

Three municipalities volunteered to put themselves under the microscope: the Mayors of Antigonish, Bridgewater, and Wolfville agreed to work together to document alcohol-related problems and explore opportunities for municipal solutions.

The courage and cooperation of these communities puts them at the forefront of best practices in preventing alcohol harms. The crucial role municipalities can play in reducing the negative impacts of alcohol has been well documented. In painting a compelling picture of what alcohol-related harms look like in Antigonish, Bridgewater and Wolfville, the Municipal Alcohol Project can encourage municipal governments and local communities to explore and implement effective policies that reduce harms and support moderate alcohol use.

The Municipal Alcohol Project Team engaged 34 key informants from the three municipalities in focused, in-depth discussions about the impact of alcohol on their lives, jobs and communities. From RCMP officers to addictions workers, high school principals to judges, our goal was to engage community members to paint an honest, unflinching picture of the alcohol-related harms in their communities.

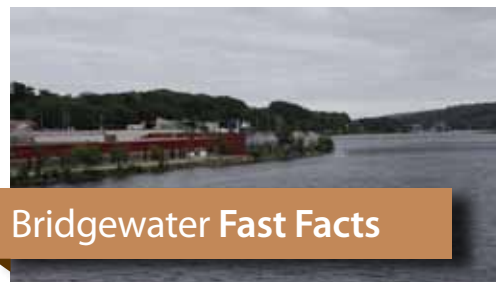
This report reveals our findings.

1. Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 183-0019
2. NSLC Annual Report 2010
3. Canadian Community Health Survey 2001-2010
4. Canadian Medical Association Journal, Alcohol in Canada: Reducing the toll through focused interventions and public health policies
5. Ibid.



### Antigonish Fast Facts

- Population: 4,236 (8,400 when St. Francis Xavier is in session).
- Home of St. Francis Xavier University
- Economy: Service-based
- Major employers: St. Martha's Regional Hospital and St. Francis Xavier University
- Median family income: \$58,066
- Known as the Highland Heart of Nova Scotia, Antigonish is the home of the oldest continuous highland games in North America.



### Bridgewater Fast Facts

- Population: 7,944
- Largest employer: Michelin Tire Plant
- Other major employers: Abitibi Bowater, Davis & Henderson Call Center
- Median family income \$49,583
- Known as the "Main Street of the South Shore," Bridgewater is the primary shopping center for Lunenburg County.



### Wolfville Fast Facts

- Population: 3,772 (7,000 when Acadia University is in session)
- Home of Acadia University
- Considered to be one of the cultural centers of Nova Scotia, Wolfville is home to the Fundy Film Society and the Deep Roots Music Festival.
- Approximately 41% of Wolfville adults hold a university degree making Wolfville residents one of the most educated populations in Nova Scotia.
- Median family income: \$56,270



# Findings

## A Summary

**Alcohol is part of Nova Scotia's culture.** Many of the key informants we interviewed told us they drink socially and enjoy a glass of fine wine or beer as much as the next person. Others pointed out Nova Scotia's status as an emerging wine region, and outlined the economic and cultural benefits of wineries and their positive impacts on rural communities.

The issue, our key informants told us, is not that Nova Scotians drink alcohol – it's how we drink alcohol.

A growing body of research has painted an unsettling picture of increasing alcohol use, and a disturbing pattern of alcohol-related harms and injuries. To put it simply, Nova Scotia has a drinking problem and if the trends continue, it's only going to get worse.

Talking about the problem is the first step. In reaching out to key informants in Antigonish, Bridgewater and Wolfville, our goal was to determine if the trends we're seeing provincially and nationally hold true in these towns.

### **The answer? A resounding yes.**

The stories we present in this report saddened and sometimes shocked us. Taken together, the first and second-hand accounts our key informants share with us suggest there isn't a corner of our communities that alcohol doesn't reach. Families and businesses struggle to cope with alcohol-fuelled noise and property damage. Parents wrestle with tough choices as they raise their kids in a culture where underage drinking is expected, and in some cases, condoned. Young children go to school without proper food because their parents spend grocery money on alcohol. We heard stories of destroyed families, domestic and sexual violence, vandalism, lost opportunities, failed careers, tragic accidents and life-changing events.

We heard stories about the personal and public costs associated with alcohol harms. Municipal officials discussed the challenges of earmarking tax dollars to deal with alcohol-fuelled vandalism and property damage. Emergency room workers told us they are sometimes so busy dealing

with alcohol-related emergencies that patients with other serious conditions must wait longer for diagnosis and treatment. Social support workers described the sometimes-lifelong difficulties young children encounter when they grow up in a home where alcohol abuse is prevalent.

Of course, while alcohol is a part of Nova Scotia's culture, it is also a part of our economy. Nova Scotia Liquor Commission sales grew 56% in the past decade to hit \$579.4 million in 2010, driven in part by the addition of 47 new stores over the last five years.<sup>6</sup> Calculating the harms from alcohol is more difficult since we are often talking about counting the damage it inflicts on human lives. How do you attach a number to the trauma of a sexual assault or the cost of ongoing noise disturbances that keep your family up at night?

As a group, we understand that alcohol has a place in our society, and also that it has a cost to society. Our goal was to take a good look at the many faces of alcohol related-harms in three towns. Here is an overview of what we learned.

## Everyone is affected

Key informants told us that alcohol-related harms affect their communities as a whole. Furthermore, these negative impacts are experienced by people who do not consume alcohol harmfully as well as those who do.

Key informants in Bridgewater expressed particular concerns about the impacts of alcohol on children and youth. Concerns in Wolfville tended to focus on the university population as well as town residents whose properties border university rentals. Antigonish key informants described alcohol harms as being wide and far-reaching.

While Bridgewater key informants suggested a link between alcohol harms and socio-economic status, their Wolfville and Antigonish counterparts told us alcohol affects people from all walks of life.

6. NSLC Annual Report 2010

## Crime: the alcohol factor

From domestic and sexual violence to common assault, property damage, vandalism, noise and disturbances, key informants across all three towns told us alcohol fuels crime. Police in Bridgewater and Antigonish attributed as much as three-quarters of crimes to alcohol. In Wolfville, this proportion was about a third. Wolfville police credit proactive enforcement – especially early on weekend evenings, to the lower alcohol-fuelled crime rate.

## Alcohol and youth

Key informants in all towns expressed concerns over what they perceived as an increase in binge drinking among youth and underage drinking. In some instances, particularly Bridgewater and Antigonish, key informants suggested that parents had a role to play, either by condoning underage drinking, or supporting their children to avoid the associated legal consequences. Many key informants expressed concerns over risky sexual behaviour, and a “hyper-sexualized” youth culture, both of which are fed by alcohol. Key informants in Bridgewater and Wolfville told us they felt community college and university students respectively drank less than they did in past years. However, after experiencing the first weeks of the fall semester, which included the tragic death of a first-year Acadia University student following a night of excessive drinking, some Wolfville key informants have since said that underage and binge drinking have taken a serious turn for the worse.

## Alcohol and health

Key informants in Bridgewater and Antigonish told us the health care system – and emergency services in particular, is strained from dealing with alcohol-related emergencies. These emergencies range from acute alcohol poisoning to monitoring youth who have consumed too much alcohol to ensure they are safe. We also heard stories about the significant resources (time and money) that are spent caring for chronic alcoholics and patients suffering from alcohol withdrawal.

Key informants also outlined numerous ways in which alcohol affects the health of individuals, including accidents, motor vehicle collisions, suicides, and falls.

## The personal cost

Our informants described a range of personal costs individuals experience because of alcohol, including lost potential, increased impulsivity, unintended pregnancies, risky sex, and inappropriate spending of household income on alcohol. We also heard concerns over the impact of alcohol on depression, anger and overall mental health.





# In Depth: The Impact of Alcohol in Antigonish

Many informants told us that alcohol is a part of Nova Scotia's culture. Enjoying an occasional drink rarely poses problems for individuals or communities. But there are growing concerns over the past decade in public health about the harms related to alcohol consumption. The following section provides first and second-hand accounts of these harms in Antigonish.

## A. The people most affected

### 1. The Community

*"The whole community is suffering."*

It's a little bit like the second-hand smoke effect: you might not be the one doing the drinking, but you're impacted simply because you're there. The negative impact of alcohol on the Antigonish community as a whole was cited in every interview we conducted.

For instance, there's the family that made 36 complaints to the RCMP because of noise and rowdy behaviour coming from young people walking toward St. Francis Xavier University campus after the downtown bars closed at 2 a.m. There's the local businessman who had to replace the same broken window numerous times. There are the senior citizens who toil away in their gardens one day, only to wake up the next morning and find their hedge busted, their tree broken and an empty beer bottle in the middle of the lawn. There is graffiti and ongoing vandalism throughout the downtown core. One key informant told us that she refused to buy a house in town on account of alcohol-related noise and disruption and chose instead to live outside town lines.

Key informants also discussed the impact of alcohol use on the reputation of the community. They told us generations of Antigonish residents have accepted harmful alcohol use as a matter of course, and described the discomfort they felt when friends or family members from out of town came to visit: *They are absolutely stunned with the amount of drinking that goes on just as the norm.*

### 2. Families

*"Alcohol is destroying the family unit."*

Life partners and children were cited as among those most seriously affected by alcohol in Antigonish.

During his two decades as a staff lawyer for Legal Aid, one key informant said the majority of his divorce cases were alcohol-related:

Most often I would see a woman. And she's sitting there with two or three kids. The husband is working but he's drinking and spending the money and beating her up when he gets drunk. And he's a great fellow when he's sober, and a terrible fellow when he's drunk. She puts up with it for a number of years. And then finally she decides to leave...but she's got two kids and has to go back because he's got the money. The problems are just enormous.



Some key informants described individuals whose drinking threatens to destroy their lives and careers. Here is an example.

I saw a 40-year-old individual and he's having problems inside the home with alcohol. He is in a position of authority in the community and even though people at his work do not realize what's going on, he's able to cover up through sick time. He will never be able to drink safely. But until he figures out how to live his life without alcohol, there's going to be major problems – violence inside the home. Problems with the children. You're going to see him in the courts. You're going to see him with a DWI. And if he continues the way he's going for the next three to five years, he won't have a job.

Key informants stressed that families of all socio-economic backgrounds are affected by alcohol. We heard stories of families deeply affected by harmful alcohol use by both men and women. We also heard stories about spouses who did not recognize harmful alcohol use in their partners, and were not getting the support they or their children desperately needed.

Our key informants reported cases of children who either don't go to school, or go to school hungry, because their caregivers can't get up in the morning to help them. There are families who must cope with the loss of a loved one at the hands of a drunk driver. Members of the extended families contact addictions counselors for support related to drinking problems among their nieces or nephews. Key informants also discussed the "vicarious traumas" such as violence and job loss, that family members experience as a direct result of a loved one who is intoxicated.

## B. Alcohol and Crime in Antigonish

*If it wasn't for booze, we'd all be laid off.*

As much as 40% of crimes committed by federal and provincial inmates in Canada are attributable to alcohol use. In 2002, the percentage of alcohol-related crimes and charges attributable to alcohol was 67.6%, compared to 66.2% for the rest of Canada, costing \$78.09 million for alcohol-related crimes.<sup>7</sup>

Key informants from the RCMP estimate the majority of their work is related directly or indirectly to alcohol consumption. Between September and November, an estimated 70-80% of police-attended calls are alcohol-related.

Several informants referred to a disaster that could have been: an adult woman was stopped at an intersection, asleep at the wheel. She had been drinking. Other respondents mentioned numerous cases of impaired driving causing injury and death.

Common assault, followed closely by domestic assault, were widely cited by key informants as a negative consequence of alcohol use. In fact, the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women attributes more than one-third of all domestic violence cases in Nova Scotia to alcohol or other drugs. As one informant put it,

“... that's when it all comes out. They start boozing and the anger comes out. Thirty days after Christmas when the credit card statement comes in and they're drinking, we get domestics

One key informant who works with women and sexual abuse victims estimates 65% of the sexual assault cases in her database were perpetrated on a victim who had been drinking.



7. Rhem J, et al. The costs of substance use in Canada 2002. Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. 2006.

It's very scary...when they present to us a lot of times there are gaps in their memory. Perhaps they were intoxicated, perhaps they had only one drink, but they still don't remember anything. The people who perpetrate know what they're doing. Either they will intentionally put something in a drink or what's most common is they will wait for someone to be incredibly intoxicated and take advantage of them.

Mischief, vandalism, noise, causing a disturbance and unruly behaviour and graffiti were also mentioned as alcohol-related crimes in Antigonish.

## C. Alcohol and Work in Antigonish

*"I can think of staff members whose work performance is directly affected by alcoholism in their home."*

Second-hand harm to employers – including low productivity, absenteeism as well as safety violations and workplace injuries, negatively affect the community of Antigonish.

Key informants provided numerous examples they either experienced first-hand, or witnessed in co-workers. Here are some examples.

An employee shows up in a high-pressured work environment. A few hours in, he gets a call: his spouse is inebriated somewhere and can't pick up the kids. His stress levels shoot up and he can no longer focus on what it is he was supposed to be doing. The following morning, he calls in sick.

After a stressful day at work, a health worker arrives home and pours herself a glass of red wine. "Why am I drinking this and not water?" she asks herself.

A teacher battles to keep her drinking problem a secret from her colleagues.

A workplace accident occurs while a staff member is drinking on the job. A second employee is injured.

## D. Alcohol and Youth in Antigonish

*"We have a physics department and we also have an alcohol department."*

Alcohol use by underage youth in Nova Scotia has been on a downward trend since 1995. However, Nova Scotia university students engage in heavy drinking far more than their counterparts in other provinces, with 27.2% drinking heavily at least weekly, compared to 18.4% for the rest of Canada.<sup>8</sup>

While key informants rarely discussed the effect of alcohol on secondary and post-secondary students as it relates to performance, some did express concerns such as underachievement, low grades and general struggling with the demands of school.

Informants also discussed youth, student and underage drinking in other contexts. For instance, one key informant reported that a great majority of infractions of St. Francis Xavier University's student code of conduct were alcohol related, including fights, sexual assault and noise. There was the sense among some informants that students see drinking and binge drinking as a rite of passage, rather than a problem. Health workers expressed concerns that young people who consumed too much alcohol and wound up in the emergency room rarely displayed regret or concern over their actions. One health worker described it this way: "If I came into emerg and I peed my pants and vomited all over



8. Adlaf E, Demers A, Gliksman L. Canadian Campus Survey 2004. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; 2004



everything, I would be mortified. But the mortification is not really there anymore.”

Key informants also expressed concern over nonchalant attitudes among youth about the dangers of drinking:

The hard part is, you can't really scare kids. You can say 'If you drink too much, your brain will shut off, you'll stop breathing, you'll choke on your own vomit.' They'll say: 'How many times has that happened?'

Informants expressed concern over the availability of alcohol to underage youth, saying former Grade 12 students who either attend university locally or still live in town, commonly purchase alcohol for underage drinkers. One key informant expressed concern over a practice among some families of subletting apartments from university students and offering them to their children following high school graduation. Parents do this, we were told, to offer their children a taste of independent living prior to starting university or community college.

We heard accounts of high school aged students – especially girls – drinking and attending parties on the university campus, and in some instances, informants reported cases of young girls trading sex for alcohol. Indeed, concern over the blasé attitudes about sex and alcohol among youth was prevalent throughout our discussions. One key informant reported that youth summarize their social lives in six words: “We drink and we hook up.”

Many key informants expressed concerns over drinking on campus at St. Francis Xavier University, as well as the institution’s perceived reputation as a party school. In some instances, this reputation is fuelled by parents of current students, said one key informant: “Parents come in and expect that their child gets the same experience they got in the 70s when it was a free for all...that’s what they want their son or daughter to have.” Meanwhile, some key informants told us they felt extreme drinking and behaviours were on the rise.

## E. Alcohol and Health in Antigonish

*“Your emergency room is the canary of your community. Everything that is not available in your community will be experienced in the ER.”*

Informants cited numerous negative medical and health-related consequences related to alcohol consumption. Most often, these references were related to physical harms: vomiting, black-outs, falls, self-harm and accidental death or death by suicide. Informants also discussed the strain alcohol places on the medical system.

One of the most significant traumas related to alcohol use informants referred to are so-called “sucker punches,” or innocent young people who have been beaten up by a group of intoxicated youth.

One key informant described the “incredible number” of falls that happen to elderly people who have been consuming alcohol. Medical workers have cared for young people, often “naïve drinkers,” who have gone into respiratory arrest from excessive consumption. Residents, both young and old, have experienced hypothermia from falling asleep outside after drinking. Informants also referenced a number of suicides in the community over the last 18 months, and three-quarters of these were completed while the men were under the influence of alcohol and in some cases, other drugs.



Informants also described the strain of caring for patients with severe alcohol problems:

When somebody who is a very serious alcoholic goes into severe withdrawal like delirium tremens – which is the ultimate worst – it's as labour intensive as a major trauma. These patients are incredibly sick, and it may take you 24, 48 hours to stabilize them. And then they go out and come back again the same way.

Mental health issues are placing an enormous strain on emergency room resources, informants told us, and a majority of the mental health patients seen in the Antigonish ER “use some sort of substance.” Between such cases, as well as injuries related to alcohol or treatment for patients who have consumed too much alcohol, medical workers are sometimes too busy to care for ER patients with other serious health issues, such as cardiac problems.

## F. Alcohol and Individuals in Antigonish

*“Alcohol is... a soother they use to numb the feelings of inadequacy, abandonment, abuse...”*

Our informants described a range of serious harms Antigonish residents experience in their personal lives as a result of alcohol. Self-medication, increased impulsivity, decreased inhibition, risky sexual behaviour, STD's, and unintended pregnancy were cited. Informants described how alcohol use in the home results in inappropriate spending of household income on alcohol instead of food or bills. The effect of alcohol use on mental health was also a concern, particularly its effects on depression, anger and low or lost self-esteem.

Key informants described young people using alcohol to cope with traumas such as the divorce of their parents, stresses from school, anxiety and depression. One mental health worker told us, “every student has got a story around alcohol.”

We also heard concerns that alcohol contributes to a “hyper-sexualized culture”, and numerous stories of alcohol leading to unintended sex and sexual assault, many of which are never reported.



# Alcohol Consumption in Antigonish

## An Overview

### Who drinks?

Under-age drinkers and university students were among the most discussed cohorts, and at least one key informant expressed concern over the amount of “high risk” or heavy drinking these young people engage in. Male and female adults were the next most discussed group, followed by seniors.

### What?

All forms of alcohol were mentioned during our discussions. Informants provided accounts of young people mixing energy drinks with alcohol, as well as combining drugs and alcohol.

### Where?

Open liquor in public places was most often discussed, followed by private house parties and campus dorm parties. Bars, school dances, festivals and events were also cited.

### How?

The purchase of alcohol for youth under 19 was frequently discussed; informants related several instances of local cabdrivers delivering alcohol to underage drinkers. Our informants expressed frequent concerns over binge drinking and general over-indulging, and made only fleeting reference to moderate drinking at social events.

### When?

Thursday and Friday evenings as well as weekends were cited as problematic times for drinking. The beginning of the university academic year as well as exam time were cited as challenging times for alcohol harms. Holiday and post-holiday drinking periods were also identified.

### Why?

The most cited reasons for drinking included anxiety, depression and trauma relief. The availability of alcohol, including bars over-serving, multiple retail outlets and cheap drinks were cited as contributing to consumption.





# In Depth: The Impact of Alcohol in Bridgewater

## A. The people most affected: Children and Youth

*“It’s out of control.”*

Few people in Bridgewater are unaffected by alcohol, key informants told us. The social, criminal and health harms related to alcohol use affect the community as a whole, including the municipality’s adult men, women and seniors. However, key informants most often expressed concerns about the impact of alcohol on the town’s youngest, and arguably, most vulnerable population: its youth.

Some of Bridgewater’s children and youth are experiencing significant harms related to alcohol use in the community. For some children, the impact begins before birth. Several interviewees expressed concern over prenatal exposure to alcohol, and described cases in which young pregnant women may consume as many as six drinks in a sitting. While these women do not seek to intentionally harm their unborn children, key informants pointed out that binge drinking, combined with an unplanned pregnancy can result in unintended harms.

Key informants discussed at length the harmful and long lasting effects of harmful drinking in the home on the physical and emotional well-being of young children. According to the World Health Organization, parental drinking can affect the environment in which a child grows up through financial strain, poor parenting, marital conflicts and negative role models. A large number of studies have reported a variety of childhood mental and behavioural disorders to be more prevalent among children of heavy drinkers than others. What’s more, the risk of child abuse is higher in families with heavy drinking parents.<sup>9</sup>

We heard stories of children as young as five or six who are left home alone while their mother or father parties at local drinking establishments. We heard stories about children who were sexually abused by non-family members while their parents were intoxicated, or by a parent who was intoxicated. The lasting impact of such childhood experiences is grim. One informant described it this way:

The inability of an intoxicated parent to protect (a child) from others that may be looking to abuse them. Not having enough food because alcohol is purchased first. Growing up and not knowing what life could be like without alcohol. And when that happens to children my experience is they just give up and go with the flow – drugs or alcohol.

Key informants also expressed serious concerns about what they perceive to be a “culture of alcohol” in Bridgewater and its impact on youth. *Kids are losing the ability to have fun without alcohol. That’s pretty scary.*

### Youth drinking: Parents and Caregivers

Parents play a role in supporting Bridgewater’s culture of alcohol, in some cases adopting blasé attitudes toward underage drinking, key informants told us. This happens in one of two ways.

First, key informants expressed concerns over some Bridgewater parents allowing their teenaged children and friends to drink at home, which creates problems when the parties get unruly or spill out into the streets and affect the entire neighbourhood.



9. Child Maltreatment and Alcohol, World Health Organization

A second way in which parents support youth drinking is by helping their children avoid its legal consequences, key informants tell us. Two years ago, Bridgewater police began cracking down on underage drinking. They did this in response to a growing number of interactions with repeat offenders – youth who were caught drinking and causing disturbances at high school dances, house parties, out on the streets. Unlike in the past, where the police would often let school or parents deal with the youth, police began arresting repeat offenders and taking them through restorative justice and other youth criminal justice processes. Many young people took the charges seriously, and changed their ways. But not everyone.

There is a growing number of them that think it's just a joke...some kids are being supported by their parents saying, 'You know what. This is too much to go through in the restorative justice process. The parents look at their child and they go, 'We'd be better off just paying the fine.'

Key informants say the backlash against the police crackdown on repeat offenders is especially strong among well-to-do families.

They may be on a sports team or they're an honour student. And the expectation is, "Well, these are good kids." But more and more often we are seeing good kids getting off on the wrong path and coming in front of us two, three, four times with alcohol at the root cause of things.

Several key informants reported a perceived increase in binge drinking among youths in Bridgewater. Both police and emergency health services workers say they are responding on a more frequent basis (sometimes as much as once per week) to calls on behalf of youth who have consumed too much alcohol and require medical attention. *They don't seem to know when to stop...whether it's a lack of experience, or that they want to show that they're acceptable to their friends, they pound it back.*

Evidence shows binge drinking rates among young girls has risen in Nova Scotia and is now on par with young men. In Bridgewater, key informants told us these habits are evident and are having serious consequences.

It seems to go hand in hand with the new vision of sexuality...young girls tell us about being involved with several sexual partners at the age of 12 and 13, sometimes more than one in a night and alcohol is normally involved in all that.

Key informants expressed concerns over the long-term prospects of Bridgewater children and youth affected by either parents or their own alcohol consumption: *The town may end up struggling with individuals losing their life potential and productivity.*

## B. Alcohol and Crime in Bridgewater

*It is at the root cause of most of the issues we deal with here in Bridgewater. Marijuana is a close second, but alcohol will always be king because it is readily available and in a lot of ways culturally acceptable.*

The average member of the Bridgewater Police will deal with a number of alcohol-related crimes or disturbances each shift. Crimes range from common assault, domestic violence, causing a disturbance (including noise and verbal abuse), sexual assault, unruly behaviour, mischief, vandalism, property damage, theft, robberies and home invasions.



In the past, alcohol-related arrests tended to be most common on Thursday and Friday nights, but one key informant said “it’s becoming harder to see a pattern to it.” For example, during the most recent Bridgewater Exhibition, the police had “people locked up for intoxication at 3:30 in the afternoon.”

Another alcohol-related concern for the Bridgewater police is so-called “bush parties”, during which Bridgewater youth congregate in one of a number of well-known wooded areas and consume alcohol. Police have responded to crimes resulting from these parties such as sexual assault and forest fires.

As noted in an earlier section, there are growing concerns among key informants about a perceived rise in underage drinking. Police describe instances in which parents who are frustrated over their teenager’s unruly behaviour ask police to “keep” their kids. The result? Police officers – many of whom have their own families and numerous other work priorities, “end up spending the night in the drunk-tank,” to monitor their charges.

The prevalence of disturbances outside Bridgewater’s drinking establishments forces police to make tough choices. For instance, key informants told us police “know there are a lot more impaired drivers out there; it’s having the time to catch them.” While the police do set up checkpoints and institute random checks, they don’t do them as often as they’d like. You’re constantly having to keep an eye on the drinking establishments because the likelihood of there being a disturbance outside is good.

These disturbances result in fights, property damage to businesses along King Street and noise problems for residents living along Scotia and Prince Streets. The disturbances also contribute to a sense of fear in the community, particularly among senior citizens.

The local B&B down on King Street had their sign vandalized because some drunk walking past kicks the crap out of it. It’s those little things, annoying little things that wear away at people’s feeling of safety and well being in their community.

## C. Alcohol and Work in Bridgewater

Alcohol-related harms in the workplace include reduced effectiveness and productivity, job loss, and physical injury.

For key informants whose work brings them into direct contact with people who have been drinking, especially police or medical workers, there is also a threat of physical injury or harm.

## D. Alcohol and Health in Bridgewater

*“..so many people falling down stairs, who have gotten into car wrecks, who have gotten into a fight, who have been drinking and decide to take a bunch of pills...there have been so many instances that over the years it starts to blend a little bit...”*

Informants cited numerous negative medical and health-related consequences related to alcohol consumption. Most often, these references were related to physical harms: vomiting, blackouts, falls, self-harm and accidental death or death by suicide.

Several informants related accounts of near-fatal hypothermia caused by excessive drinking.



There was a chap coming back from the lounge, a young chap in his early 20s. He damn near froze to death on the Centennial Trail, just was so intoxicated he passed out and I actually thought he was dead. I couldn't believe he could be that cold, that stiff, and still be alive.

Fetal alcohol syndrome, self-medicating and depression were also cited by informants as medical alcohol-related harms.

Alcohol use also exerts a negative impact on the medical system in Bridgewater. For instance, it is not uncommon to have multiple health and law enforcement professionals involved in the care of a single intoxicated person.

If you have someone who is intoxicated, belligerent, maybe seriously hurt, that ends up requiring paramedics to be around longer. It usually requires a larger number of nursing staff to maintain the safety of the environment and also to care for the patient. And it usually requires more resources from an investigation point of view to make sure you're not missing things that may be disguised by someone telling you where to go. That all takes time and resources and keeps other people who may be waiting for an X-Ray in the waiting room, because we can't get a reliable history from them.

## E. Alcohol and Individuals in Bridgewater

*"We forget how much of an impact alcohol has, especially on young kids."*

Our informants described a range of serious harms Bridgewater residents experience in their personal lives as a result of alcohol. In earlier sections, we have outlined the impacts of alcohol use in the home on young children.

Key informants highlighted a range of other negative effects including impulsivity and disinhibition, risky sexual behaviour, STDs and pregnancy. Key informants related accounts of youth trading sex and oral sex for alcohol.

Inappropriate spending of household income on alcohol instead of food or bills was discussed by several key informants. Key informants also discussed the negative impact of alcohol on decision-making abilities and general productivity in moving forward with one's life.



# Alcohol Consumption in Bridgewater

## An Overview

### Who drinks?

Under-age drinkers – children and youth under 19 years old, were the most commonly referenced group, followed by male and female adults, pregnant women and the elderly.

### What?

Informants rarely discussed what type of alcohol is being consumed, although some key informants noted the mixing of drugs and alcohol.

### Where?

High school and college dances were referenced the most, followed by consumption at private house parties. Consumption at licensed bars and bush parties was discussed next, followed by consumption at festivals and events, particularly the Bridgewater Exhibition. Drinking by youth at The Plaza was also identified as a problem.

### How?

Binge drinking was most frequently discussed.

### When?

Thursday and Friday evenings as well as weekends were cited as problematic times for drinking. Summers and holidays when students return from university were also discussed.

### Why?

Bridgewater residents drink to fit into social groups. They drink to self-medicate for current and past traumas and also because alcohol is readily accessible at multiple retail outlets.



# In Depth: The Impact of Alcohol in Wolfville

The following section provides first and second-hand accounts of alcohol-related harms in Wolfville. Due to the composition of our interview subjects, this report focuses primarily on Acadia University, and the interactions between its students and the town when and where alcohol is involved.

Wolfville, like any other town, experiences a range of alcohol-related harms such as violence, disturbances, and even death. However, over the years individual residents, and diverse organizations representing health care, addictions, municipal government, Acadia University and the police, have worked together to coordinate a range of programs aimed at reducing alcohol harms. These efforts, over a period of twelve years, have improved town and university relations, united the community and lessened the harmful impacts of alcohol, particularly within the student body.

The great irony of these efforts, however, is that despite them, alcohol-inspired tragedies, such as the recent death of a first-year student after a night of binge drinking, still happen.

## A. The people most affected

*“The harms through noise and damage spill out into the whole town...it affects the personality of the entire community.”*

Alcohol-fuelled noise and disturbances such as loud parties, or foot traffic between apartments or dorms and drinking establishments, interrupt town life and negatively affect neighbours, key informants told us. As one key informant put it, “A loud party can have a major, major impact on a family with young children, and on a sustained basis, it can create a lot of anxiety.”

Wolfville is a very small community geographically, so you'll have a couple who are empty nesters living next to a rental unit, living next to a house that's occupied by a couple with young school-aged children. So those three houses alone, have very different views on what's acceptable behaviour. And one of them with alcohol-fuelled behaviour can influence the other two enormously.

Instances have been cited in which excessive drinking in dorms can harm the overall environment for neighbouring students, and cause repeat offenders to be evicted from university-provided housing.

Representatives from both Acadia University and local government were clearly aware of the challenges and described a range of measures designed to address the problem including door-to-door communications, a joint task force and peer-led awareness campaigns. In addition, Wolfville has instituted an early closing hour – 1 a.m. – for drinking establishments, which key informants suggest helps minimize noise and disturbance-related harms.

I have worked in jurisdictions where the closing hour is 2 a.m. and 3 a.m.. The deeper you go into the night, the more people are impacted by noise and the spillover effect before and after the closing hour.

Key informants also told us that life partners and children of people who abuse alcohol are among those most vulnerable to alcohol-related harms. “Dis-functionality is quite often



attached to alcohol or drug use in families and kids suffer from that and it comes out in their behaviours," one informant reported.

In addition, one key informant described instances in which children go without necessities such as food, school supplies and even sleep, as a result of parental alcohol abuse.

## B. Alcohol and Crime in Wolfville

*"We'll get complaints of loud parties, open liquor in public, unruly behaviour..."*

In Wolfville local police estimate anecdotally that one-third of their calls are alcohol related. Over the years, representatives from law enforcement, town council and Acadia University have worked together to implement a range of campaigns and programs – both formal and informal – to reduce alcohol harms and deter alcohol-related crime.

For instance, in September, which is a peak time for alcohol-related disturbances due to returning University students, members of the Mayor's Community Living Issues Committee (including police, Acadia Safety and Security and Student Affairs, Acadia student leaders, landlords, addictions workers, community members, etc.) pass out pamphlets to educate students and other residents about the effects of alcohol as well as alcohol-related laws.

On weekends, another peak time for alcohol consumption and disturbances, police are proactive in enforcing liquor and vehicle violations early in the evening. Local police say this practice deters and decreases more serious harms and crimes later in the evening. Individual police have also adopted creative strategies to deter alcohol-related crimes:

One of Constable Donald Fisher's initiatives was, about half an hour before closing time, he'd go around to the local drinking establishments on foot, checking empty vehicles and being very visible, so that when patrons were coming out of the bar, they saw a policeman in uniform, making note of the vehicles. And he was actually given an award by Mothers Against Drunk Driving for that, for the amount of impaired driving he prevented.

Despite the time, effort and resources Wolfville has devoted to reducing harms, alcohol-related crimes do occur. Problems are most frequently related to common assault, including domestic violence, as well as impaired driving. Other alcohol-related crimes that are not as prevalent, key informants told us, include sexual assault, general unruly behaviour, property damage, noise disturbance and uttering threats.

There have been instances in which crimes such as property damage resulting from parties have come very close to resulting in more serious crimes. One informant, a landlord who rents to university students, described an instance during which her tenants hosted a small party that was crashed by a group of university students from Halifax. The young women hosting the party asked the Halifax students to leave.

They pushed her and said, 'We'll do whatever.' Of course, there were boys there and the testosterone just explodes. The fight took off, the girls called the police. By the time the police got there, there were three walls smashed with bodies...it's a huge hole in the wall and then two more with punches. The police could not catch these kids because they knew what they were doing and left when they heard the police were coming.

Informants also provided accounts of harms that befall people who abandon their cars and flee from police on foot in an effort to escape impaired driving charges.



They see the cops, panic, try to outrun the cops. They get into accidents. And then they don't realize how serious their injuries are. I had one gentleman who completely ripped his nose loose from his face – it was flapping – and he didn't know anything was wrong. He kept trying to wipe his nose. I said, "Do not pull on that." And he was getting mad because I wouldn't let him wipe his nose.

## C. Alcohol and Youth in Wolfville

*"This is an experimental time for them and they're learning what their limits are...it gives them a threshold that says, okay, now I know what I can't do and they start to make adjustments..."*

In September 8, 2011, the Acadia University community was saddened at news that a first-year student died after consuming large amounts of alcohol earlier in the week. The news sent shockwaves throughout Nova Scotia and prompted questions about a "culture of drinking" on university campuses.

The great irony of the tragedy is that it happened in spite of a spirit of proactivism and a range of programs, by-laws and other measures both the university and town have implemented over the years to reduce alcohol related harms.

While virtually all our key informants discussed both underage drinking and drinking among university-aged students, the majority of discussions suggest that problems are identified early and dealt with. However, some of these incidents have already had life changing impacts (sexual assault, criminal charges, etc.). For example, anywhere from 75-90% of "behavioural incidents" among Acadia University students are alcohol-related. Through the academic judicial process, a student coordinator meets with the student, reviews the regulations and initiates a discussion. A fine may then be levied. Fewer than 5% of that cohort of "offenders" are caught infringing again.

However, the town still experiences its share of youth drinking problems. Some key informants described what they perceive as an increase in binge drinking and a "drink to get drunk" attitude among youth.

The type of drinking that concerns me the most is binge drinking – high amounts of alcohol ingested over a short period of time – by people who are, for the most part, inexperienced with alcohol. When that happens, sometimes people make decisions that are life changing.

Furthermore, key informants described instances during which youth from other communities will visit Wolfville for university events, crash parties and cause disturbances within town.

However, the bulk of key informants suggested that alcohol use among underage youth and university students is less of a problem now than it has been in years past. Many informants spoke at length about a range of alcohol-related prevention programs and safety policies put in place at Acadia University. Meanwhile, one university-aged student informant told us alcohol is most frequently used by students in casual settings where they consume lightly, for instance, watching a basketball game on TV and drinking one or two beers.

Several key informants described youth drinking as a "rite of passage", and said that many university students experiment with alcohol and learn their limits during their first semester. Students generally adjust their behaviour to suit their own personal limits thereafter.



## D. Alcohol and Health in Wolfville

Key informants cited a range of physical harms related to alcohol including blackouts, falls, vomiting, self-harm and death by misadventure. We heard stories of fights where harms were escalated because of alcohol:

There was a case where two men got into an argument; one punched the other and what would normally be common assault grew into (something more). The person who was punched fell down, hit his head and was medi-vac'ed to Halifax.

Emergency health workers also described instances in which they have responded to calls associated with intoxication, especially among youth.

The biggest fear with acute alcohol problems when you're drinking enough to pass out and you've got to go to the position that you're most comfortable in, which is not to practice lying on your back (where you can) vomit in your own mouth and die from that. So that's a big concern with us, that's why we try not to leave a drunk person.

Emergency health workers also described the increasing awareness among many university students about alcohol harms and the dangers of over-consumption. They described instances in which they have worked with Acadia Residence Assistants (RA) to provide better on-campus care for intoxicated students. An example of this communication would be advising RAs to remain with intoxicated students versus assigning the job to another student, who may or may not be trained or responsible enough to help.

Health workers also discussed a range of significant health problems associated with chronic alcohol abuse including pancreatitis, cirrhosis of the liver and various cancers.

We also heard stories of health consequences related to alcohol-inspired impulsivity:

A woman was leaving a local drinking establishment with one of her friends. Her boyfriend was mad and tried to stop them by jumping on the hood of the car. He actually went through the windshield. He wasn't seriously injured, he was just cut up bad enough that he needed medical attention and he felt really, really dumb.

Some key informants expressed concern that police and medical resources are used up in caring for alcohol-related incidents that could be applied elsewhere. For instance, emergency health workers said caring for patients who are intoxicated is especially time consuming because they often get unreliable information from these patients and must spend more time diagnosing and monitoring. Finally, emergency health workers described the increasing prevalence of alcohol and energy drink cocktails and the resulting negative health consequences such as heart arrhythmias.

## E. Alcohol and Individuals in Wolfville

*"I think the serious impacts of alcohol abuse in Wolfville, thankfully, are fairly rare. But one is too many."*

Throughout our discussions, key informants referred repeatedly to measures that Wolfville organizations have implemented to reduce alcohol-related harms. Such measures have created an enhanced alcohol awareness, particularly among university-aged students, that has resulted in positive impacts both for individuals and the community as a whole.



For instance, in-depth alcohol-related training programs for student Residence Assistants (RAs), combined with informal discussions between paramedics and RAs have increased the awareness of the physical harms of alcohol, as well as student responsiveness. For example, several key informants referred to what is known as “The Mr. and Mrs. Eaton Incident” during which four intoxicated students were taken to hospital. The incident made headlines across the country, but several informants – including emergency health workers – recognized the importance of the responsiveness of other students in getting help quickly.

Ongoing communications have also helped to improve “town and gown” relations. For instance, one key informant described an instance during which her university student tenants hosted a party while trying their best to respect her house rules governing parties and alcohol:

In their goodwill and sweet minds they were trying to do what we told them to do. They were not partying in the house because they have the (number of guests) limit. They were not using glass, they were using paper cups. But they had set up tables and coolers in the driveway. So now we had made it even worse because we’re in a public place. (I spoke to them) and immediately they cleaned up. Some of them were really tipsy but they picked up as much as they could. I thought that case was really cute and after that they didn’t have a party anymore.

While a proactive approach to reducing alcohol harms has helped unite the town, alcohol continues to exert negative influences on individuals. Our informants described a range of harms Wolfville residents experience in their personal lives as a result of alcohol. These harms included lowered decision-making abilities and loss of self-esteem, including self-blame.

Another harm is the vulnerability that some people, particularly females, put themselves in because they drank too much...there’s no sense trying to hide it, you do have the sexual assault component and people taking liberties that normally probably would not happen if it wasn’t for the use of alcohol.

Impulsivity and dis-inhibition , risky sexual behaviour and the impact of having a criminal record were also cited as personal harms caused by alcohol. One key informant also discussed the use of food or household money to purchase alcohol.



# Alcohol Consumption in Wolfville

## An Overview

### Who drinks?

University students were the most commonly referenced group, followed by children and youth under 19, and youth between the ages of 19-25. Adults and seniors were also referenced.

### What?

Key informants told us Wolfville residents consume hard alcohol, beer, and wine. Informants also referenced “cocktails” featuring both alcohol and energy drinks, as well as alcohol and other drugs. In hospital settings, the use of liquid hand sanitizer to “spike” coffee was also mentioned.

### Where?

Wolfville residents drink alcohol at home parties, off-campus licensed public establishments as well as on-campus parties or events including sporting events. They consume alcohol on campus in residence buildings, the campus bar and at festivals and events. The community also sees alcohol consumed in junior and senior high schools occasionally during the school day and more frequently at dances.

### How?

Binge drinking was frequently discussed. Informants also told us that moderate drinking (versus binge drinking) is something that should be strived for.

### When?

Key informants discussed the seasonal aspects of alcohol consumption, particularly related to Acadia University’s frosh week, homecoming, sports events and end-of-year. Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights were identified as being problematic.

### Why?

Key informants rarely discussed why people drink – but some offered reasons including: socialization, availability and to relieve life’s pressures.





# Ideas on Community Action

The culture of heavy alcohol use in Nova Scotia didn't happen overnight. Factors such as family stress, unemployment and poverty, reduced public resources, and the influence of alcohol marketing, have created a climate ripe for excessive consumption to occur.

Key informants had a number of suggestions of what needs to occur at the community level in order for a shift in drinking culture to begin. Here are a few:



## Community involvement

Holding community conversations about alcohol norms and related harms is one way we can create opportunities for community change. Parents, community leaders, landlords, business owners and other role models can provide leadership in initiating these conversations and developing collaborative, multi-sector partnerships that can tackle the areas where changes need to be made.



## Control access and advertising

Excessive consumption and service to underage drinkers can be reduced by controlling access to alcohol. Key informants suggested limiting where and when alcohol can be purchased, increasing prices, and other more targeted strategies such as reducing the number of drinks that can be purchased at "last call". Our informants also suggested restricting alcohol advertising in stores and in the public, as well as restricting alcohol industry sponsorship of community events.



## Educate

Many informants said that there is a need for early and ongoing education on alcohol consumption and harms to individuals and society. This would include education about (and more enforcement of) alcohol-related laws.



## Supports

Increased services and financial resources in the community are necessary to provide support to those who need more help, particularly for youth. This could include positive role modeling programs and discharge follow-up and services on evenings and weekends when the need is greatest.

# Conclusions

Alcohol harms in Antigonish, Bridgewater and Wolfville are serious, far-reaching and affect people from all walks of life. When taken together, the stories we heard from key informants across all three towns are clear: we live in beautiful communities that offer many opportunities for individuals and families to fulfill their potentials. But our towns also have a drinking problem.

We learned that in Antigonish, alcohol-harms are deep-seated and far-reaching, affecting the community as a whole. Key informants expressed rage at the harms and importantly, a desire to change the status quo.

We heard that Bridgewater's children and youth are among those most affected by alcohol harms. Some children in particular are experiencing significant harms. Informants expressed concerns over the implications for the town.

In Wolfville, various individuals and organizations have worked together to create a coordinated set of programs to build alcohol awareness and reduce alcohol related harms. These efforts have improved the relationship between the town and the university and reduced harms among the university students. Yet despite these measures, tragedy still occurs.

In the future, we hope to gain a clearer picture of how alcohol affects other cross-sections of the community not represented in this report. Not everyone's voice was heard.

## So where do we go from here?

Community problems require community, provincial, national and global solutions. Action is required on each level. Our municipal governments can play a role in addressing alcohol related harms in Antigonish, Bridgewater and Wolfville. This report provides us with a useful tool to hold more conversations.

A large body of research points to the need for strong policies around alcohol pricing, access and marketing as necessary to reduce harms overall. We see the provincial government as one of our many partners in moving ahead with these and other best practices. It is our hope that we can build community-based, collaborative strategies that will change the culture of alcohol use in Nova Scotia.

**Our communities depend upon it.**



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