

# Female drinking on the rise as alcohol companies target women

Experts suggest women catching up to male peers in alcohol consumption

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*Experts suggest women may be catching up to their male peers when it comes to alcohol consumption. (Eric Risberg/Associated Press)*

when it comes to alcohol consumption.

A group of researchers gathered in Toronto on Friday to discuss what they describe as a rise in female drinking.

Several said booze was the new tobacco, saying alcohol companies have begun targeting ads towards women the way cigarette manufacturers did in the late 1960s.

They said advertisers market liquor as "diet" or "natural" in an effort to appeal to health-conscious women.

**Illnesses on the rise**

They said the result is a rise in women suffering from liver disease and other alcohol-related illnesses, saying it mirrored the spike in ailments caused by smoking several decades ago.

Experts agreed the issue demanded change, both from advertisers and the governments that regulate alcohol sales.

"Over and over again, young people are being exposed to more alcohol advertising than adults," said David Jernigan, director of the U.S.-based Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. "This is an opportunity ... an area of growth for the industry."

## **Female drinkers on the rise**

Research supports the notion that drinking among women is on the rise.

Earlier this week, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health issued a report describing alcohol as one of the top health risks in the country and calling for more government involvement in alcohol sales, pricing, advertising and treatment.

The report also included a score card for each province on its alcohol controls. Ontario topped the rankings, while Quebec came in last.

Studies in the U.S. have shown that exposure to alcohol among youth has increased more rapidly than among those 21 and older.

Studies done by Jernigan's own organization suggest the most popular beverages are not the discount beers normally associated with an age group on a budget, but rather more heavily advertised brands such as Budweiser, Miller, and Smirnoff.

## **CAMH blames political inaction**

While Jernigan thinks advertising is driving the problem, others echoed CAMH in pointing the finger at political inaction.

"There is absolutely a vacuum" when it comes to alcohol and public policy, said Ann Dowsett Johnston, author of the Women and Alcohol Atkinson series. "It's as if we're under a spell. Where's the national and provincial leadership on this issue?"

Canada has had a national alcohol strategy since 2007 and is a signatory on the World Health Organization's global strategy to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol, but experts called for stronger action.

"It's time to hold them to it," said Gerald Thomas, a researcher with the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse that drafted guidelines to help keep Canadians' alcohol consumption in check.

The guidelines advise female consumers to drink no more than 10 drinks a week and two drinks a day, and advise men to drink no more than 15 drinks a week and three drinks a day.