

Evaluation of New Educational Materials Addressing High-Risk Drinking Among Young Adults in Nova Scotia

- 2006 HIGHLIGHTS REPORT -

As part of a renewed strategy for prevention and early intervention, the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection (NSHPP), Addiction Services, is supporting the development of evidence-based best practices to address high-risk drinking in the province. Recent quantitative studies had confirmed that high-risk drinking was a problem among young adults (19-29 years) in Nova Scotia.¹ In 2005, Focal Research worked under the direction of NSHPP on qualitative research undertaken to explore the context of alcohol consumption among young men and women in the province and to assess their reactions to a series of education materials and messages that highlight low-risk drinking guidelines, personal strategies to reduce consumption, and alcohol effects^{2,3}. A major finding from this research was the identification of a gap between participants' experiences and perceptions around alcohol use and recommended low-risk drinking guidelines currently conceptualized for use in other parts of Canada.

One of the recommendations emerging from the study was to develop and test new communication and education materials for this audience. Participants clearly responded to materials and messages that provided information about alcohol rather than against alcohol. A harm reduction approach that incorporates the context of drinking was identified as being most relevant, including the promotion of safe drinking rather than low-risk or abstinence with a primary focus on addressing over-drinking and binge drinking.

Up-dating the current fact sheets and educational materials developed by the Department of Health Promotion and Protection and the District Health Authorities was identified as a priority by the project team at NSHPP. Focal Research, in collaboration with Alidade, an independent marketing firm, worked with NSHPP to develop and test a series of new evidence-based materials including posters, an up-dated fact sheet, and brochure. Following consultation with the project team regarding content, Alidade developed the initial concepts from August 15 to September 15 2006.

Evaluation of the materials occurred from September 25 to October 16, 2006. There were 126 qualified adults (aged 19-29) initially screened and recruited from across Nova Scotia to take part in the study. Each participant completed a set of baseline measures in order to benchmark current drinking patterns, awareness, attitudes, and beliefs and then received an evaluation package in the mail. Following a self-administered review of each of the materials, participants were re-contacted by telephone to complete the evaluation. Overall, 91 young adults took part in all phases of the study with a split between age groups (19-24, n=47; 25-29, n=41) and by gender (males, n=40; females, n=51). Participants who completed all phases of the study were eligible to receive one of ten randomly drawn \$50.00 gift certificates as a thank you for their participation.

Young adults taking part in the study had drinking profiles, attitudes, and beliefs that were consistent with the target group identified in the previous research; they reported high accessibility to alcohol, regular monthly or weekly drinking patterns, and high exposure to over-drinking personally and through the behavior of others. These young adults responded very positively to the materials tested finding them to be relevant, credible, and appealing. The materials were strongly endorsed by participants with some improvements identified and are recommended for release.

KEY FINDINGS

The following summary report highlights the key findings emerging from the evaluation process conducted with 91 young adults across the province of Nova Scotia. While participants were screened to be representative of the target market, the results are qualitative in nature and cannot be generalized to the population at large. However, the approach adopted is appropriate for evaluative purposes and provides valuable feedback from a reasonable cross-section of young adults in the province. For detailed methodology and findings, refer to the Final Report⁴.

Contextual Background (At Baseline)

Those young adults taking part in the evaluation of the up-dated materials had drinking patterns, related behaviors, attitudes and beliefs about alcohol that were consistent with the target group characteristics identified in previous research.

Drinking Patterns

- The primary reasons given for drinking were to socialize with friends (49%), celebrate as part of a social event or “*special occasion*” (e.g. *concert, wedding, sporting event*) (43%), or to relieve stress (e.g. *to unwind, relax*) (22%).
- Perceived harms were related most often to poor physical outcomes but also included embarrassment and financial costs:
 - *getting alcohol related diseases, liver damage* (55%)
 - *looking bad, acting foolish, making an ass of myself* (43%)
 - *hangovers, being sick* (36%)
 - *alcoholism or alcohol dependency* (18%)
 - *being broke, wasting money* (7%)
- The majority (85%) of young adults taking part in the evaluation (63%) were typically in a situation involving alcohol at least once per month with 63% reporting regular weekly exposure.
- Most (75%) tended to consume alcohol at least occasionally when in a situation where alcohol was available and 27% noted that they usually drink under such circumstances.
- Typically, 71% of young adults evaluating the materials were consuming alcohol at least once a month or more with 41% drinking on a regular weekly basis.
- The median number of drinks consumed per sitting was 4-5 regardless of age, gender, or frequency of drinking. This means that each time they drink about half of all participants regularly consumed five or more alcoholic beverages.

- Most (62%) young adults at least occasionally consumed beyond the number of drinks defined as heavy drinking in the Canadian Addiction Survey 2005 (5+ for males; 4+ for females per occasion). About one-third reported exceeding these limits almost every time they drink.

Drinking Consequences

- Physical effects from intoxication were common among study participants with almost all young adults in the study (94%) having been drunk at some time, 83% having experienced a hangover and 76% having vomited due to over-consumption of alcohol.
- Just under one-third (31%) had personally experienced an alcohol-induced “*black-out*” (e.g. period of memory loss) and almost one-quarter had “*passed out*” (24%) or been injured (22%) because of drinking.
- One in 10 reported having injured someone else when drinking and a similar proportion had been approached by others recommending they reduce the amount (12%) and to a lesser extent, the frequency (6%) of their drinking.
- Exposure to these outcomes through the drinking behavior of others was even higher.
- Only 44% indicated that they rarely drink to the point of intoxication. For the remaining 56%, 38% stated that they get drunk on only an occasional basis but 17% reported frequently over-drinking.
- Despite participant’s perceptions surrounding their frequency of “*getting drunk*”, most (85%) reported they had been drunk during the past year, with a majority (61%) reporting that they had been drunk within the past month. Although only 17% felt that they were frequently over-drinking, 29% reported they were drunk within the past week and 41% were with someone else who was drunk suggesting that drunkenness is a common weekly occurrence for a large proportion of young adults taking part in the study.
- Although most (85%) of the young adults taking part felt that they rarely “*get sick*” from drinking, one-third reported experiencing alcohol-induced vomiting during the past month (33%) and over half (53%) were with someone else who had “*thrown up*” due to alcohol.
- During this same period, about half of them had experienced a “*hangover*” and 79% recalled being with someone else who “*had a hangover from drinking too much*”.
- At the time of the baseline measure most of those taking part in the study (64%) were not considering any changes to how they drink. About one-quarter felt that they had already initiated changes and about 1 in 20 were in the process of changing how they drink (4%) or thinking about it (6%).

Awareness, Beliefs and Attitudes about Alcohol

- Almost all participants (98%) felt that driving after drinking was a *very serious* issue. In contrast, fewer than half (46%) expressed this same level of concern for over-drinking. About half felt that the situation was *very serious* if someone was “*throwing up*” and 69% felt that “*passing out*” likely constituted a serious situation.
- Only half of participants felt that they were knowledgeable about what constitutes an alcohol overdose. Unaided, most could identify at least one sign of alcohol overdose, primarily “*vomiting*” (85%) and “*passing out*” (62%). One in five mentioned memory loss (“*black-outs*”), or altered appearance such as “*sweating*” or “*blue face*”. About 10% or less mentioned “*loss of balance*”, situations where the person is “*awake but non-responsive*”, “*slurred speech*” or “*odd behavior*” as warning signals.
- Most were unsure of the various things you should do if someone had consumed too much alcohol. A minority spontaneously mentioned “*turning the individual onto their side*” (34%), “*call 911 or take them to the hospital*” (26%), “*keep an eye on them*” (10%) or “*get help from someone else*” (4%). About one in five thought “*putting them to bed to sleep it off*” was the best approach with other mentions including giving them “*water*” (13%), “*food*” (4%), encouraging them to “*walk it off*” (4%) or “*take a cold shower*” (2%).
- In terms of myths surrounding methods of countering over-drinking and hangovers:
 - 41% believed that “*you could sober up faster by eating food or sleeping it off*”;
 - 33% believed that “*alcohol affects men and women the same way*”;
 - 31% believed that you could avoid a hangover by “*taking a couple of Tylenol/Aspirin before you go to bed*”; and
 - 6% agreed that “*eating greasy food will cure a hangover*”.
- The majority (75%) were not able to identify how long it takes the body to process one standard drink.

Evaluation of Up-dated Materials

Young adults taking part in the study were mailed a copy of the materials and evaluation instruction. All participants were instructed to evaluate the poster series first before opening envelopes containing the fact sheet or brochure.

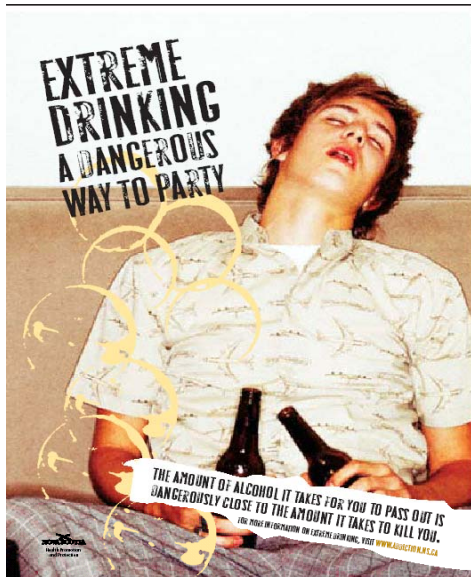
Poster Evaluation – *Extreme Drinking* Series

There were four versions of the *Extreme Drinking* poster tested using four different stock photos that varied by gender and by type of situation depicted. (Male: ED1, ED4; Female: ED2, ED3)

- Overall, 87% of young adults taking part in the evaluation *somewhat* (50%) or *strongly* (36%) liked the *Extreme Drinking* slogan and tagline, *A dangerous way to party*.

- Most (91%) felt that they were *somewhat* (41%) or *very likely* (52%) to read the posters.

Preferred Poster: ED1



- **Poster ED1** (Young male passed out with two beer bottles) elicited the strongest preference (58%) and the lowest levels of dislike (13%) as compared to 20% or less indicating liking for any of the other versions.
- Preferred features for the poster centered on the realism of the situation depicted (92%) and the degree to which young adults could relate to the character and situation featured (75%):
 - Looks real, not staged.
 - He really looks like he is in trouble.
 - They aren't trying to be drunk. They really look drunk.
 - I passed out the same way.
- The majority felt that the target market for these posters was young adults, although one-third also felt they would appeal to teenagers.
- For version ED1, the most preferred poster, 87% thought it looked real, 85% agreed that the situation portrayed looked realistic, 79% agreed the person looked drunk, 54% could personally relate to the person in the poster and 86% believed that this poster would catch their attention.
- For the other versions tested, the images had less appeal and there was some confusion expressed regarding the connection between the image and the message being communicated:
 - By looking at the picture, you wouldn't know it was drinking related.
 - It looks like she's sleeping no sign of alcohol at all.
 - This picture looks fake, like she is just lying there, not really drunk.

Poster Evaluation – Life of the Party Series

There were four versions of the *Life of the Party* Poster tested using four different stock photos that varied by gender and by type of situation depicted. (Male: LP1, LP4; Female: LP2, LP3).

There were also different taglines developed and tested for the male and female posters:

- a) *MELANIE THOUGHT SHE WAS THE LIFE OF THE PARTY...*

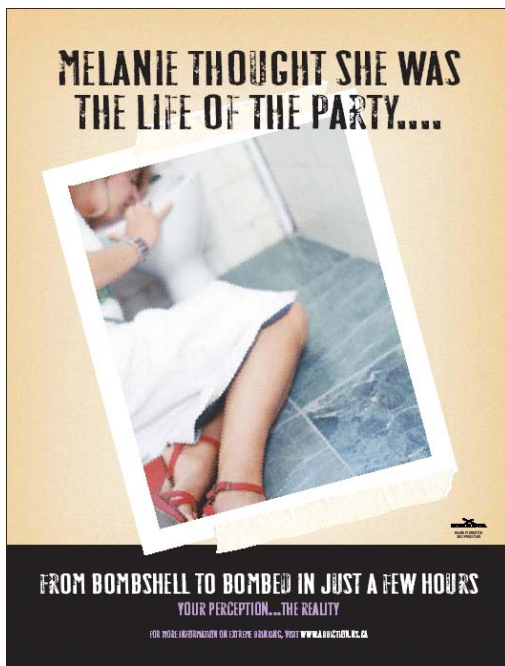
From Bombshell To Bombed In Just A Few Hours.

b) **MATHEW THOUGHT HE WAS THE LIFE OF THE PARTY...**

From Hot to Not in Just a Few Hours.

- Liking was especially high for the *Life of the Party* slogan and taglines with 95% reporting that they somewhat (55%) or strongly (41%) liked this concept.
- Almost everyone taking part in the evaluation (98%) would be somewhat (42%) or very likely (56%) to read the posters.

Preferred Poster: LP3



- The most preferred version was LP3 (*Hazy image of young woman in dress and red high heels on the floor in a bathroom over a toilet*), as compared to 20% or less for any of the other versions tested. Only 4% selected LP4 as the least preferred poster option.
 - *The toilet is a common stopping place after drinking and everyone can relate to that.*
 - *Realistic situation, you could see the floor by the toilet.*
 - *Most realistic then the others because you see this happen more often than anything, someone throwing up in a toilet because they have over done it with booze.*
 - *People get sick when they drink in excess, throwing up in the toilet. It really happens more often than what happens in the other pictures.*
- As observed for the *Extreme Drinking* series, the primary target was perceived to be young people in general (86%), especially young adults (41%), university students (8%) as well as teenagers (36%) and high school students (6%).
- Young adults agreed that the preferred posters looked real (95%), 97% thought the situation depicted was believable, 82% thought the girl really looked drunk, 64% could relate to the person in the poster and 85% believed this poster would catch their attention.
- The other three stock photos tested poorly and young adults taking part in the evaluation did not find them credible or relevant. Suggestions for improvements centered largely on replacing the photos with customized versions that “*look more real*”, “*like real people*” who are drunk “*not stoned looking*”.

Preference for Each Poster Concept

Young adults participating in the evaluation were asked to select which of the two series of posters they most preferred (*Extreme Drinking* versus *Life of the Party*). They were then asked to indicate their relative preference for each of the three taglines tested: *Extreme Drinking: A dangerous way to party*; *Life of the Party: From Hot to Not in Just a Few Hours*; *Life of the Party From Bombshell to Bombed in Just a Few Hours*.

- There was value in both of the poster series tested with only two of the 91 young adults taking part in the evaluation indicating that they did not like at least one of the series.
- Overall one-third preferred the *Extreme Drinking* series whereas 55% reported a preference for the *Life of the Party* series and an additional 10% indicated that *they liked both equally*.
- When specifically queried regarding each of the three different taglines and poster versions young adults were evenly divided in terms of preference suggesting that each version is preferentially targeting different groups in the population.
 - 31% preferred *Extreme Drinking: A dangerous way to party*
 - 31% preferred *Life of the Party: From Bombshell to Bombed in Just a Few Hours*
 - 33% preferred *Life of the Party: From Hot to Not in Just a Few Hours*

Fact Sheet Evaluation – Myths and Reality

Each participant evaluated the fact sheet on a series of standard measures to assess the presentation, content, appeal and relevancy. Young adults participating in the study were also questioned as to where they would expect to find these materials, what they liked and disliked about the material as well as recommendation for improvements.

- Overall the *Extreme Drinking* fact sheet was evaluated very positively:



- 69% reported that the amount of information presented was just right and only 26% thought there was too much information included.
- 95% found the information to be believable with and additional 4% indicating that it was at least somewhat credible.
- 97% found the information provided very (79%) or at least somewhat (18%) useful.
- The fact sheet was easy to understand for 99% of participants.
- 90% learned something new.

- 80% felt the content was very (45%) or at least somewhat (36%) relevant to them.
 - 69% indicated at least some interest in learning more or seeking additional information on the topic.
 - 98% reported that they would likely read some of the Fact Sheet with 68% likely to read most of it.
 - 64% felt the piece was designed for someone like them.
 - 97% found the material to be at least somewhat appealing.
- The vast majority (85%) would be very likely (54%) or somewhat likely (30%) to pick this material up in a doctor's office with 58% indicating that they would probably pick it up at other locations.
 - Suggested venues for distribution included educational institutions (62%), doctors' offices (59%), liquor stores (52%), bar washrooms (14%), hospitals (14%), support groups (9%), and police stations (2%).
 - The most preferred aspects of the material was the information content (50%), the format and presentation of the information (35%) and the practicality and "usefulness" of the information provided.
 - Primary areas for improvement identified were to reduce the amount of information in the material (17%), increase the font size to make it easier to read (8%), modify the "What Happens To My Body" (10%) and the "Ask Yourself" sections (4%), and add contact numbers for additional information.

Brochure Evaluation –Extreme Drinking

There were four versions of the brochure produced using different combinations of the stock photos and the two concepts; *Extreme Drinking* versus *Life of the Party*. This approach was used to control for any variations in preference that participants may have for the various images and concepts. The content, graphics and layout of the brochure was identical for all versions tested. These features of the brochure were evaluated using the same criteria used for the Fact sheet.

- The *Extreme Drinking* brochure was also evaluated positively by young adults taking part in the study:
 - 78% thought the amount of information in the brochure was "just right".
 - Everyone felt that the information was believable (100%).
 - 96% felt the information presented was useful.
 - 98% thought the brochure was easy to understand.
 - The content was relevant for 68% of participants.

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Evaluation of New Education Materials Addressing High-Risk Drinking Among Young Adults in Nova Scotia
HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

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- 95% indicated that they were likely to read at least some of the brochure with half feeling that they would probably read it all.
- 64% felt they were likely the target for this piece.
- 91% found the brochure to be very (43%) or at least somewhat appealing (48%).

- Most (84%) would expect to pick up this material in a doctor's office with two-thirds indicating that they would probably access it if it were available in other locations, primarily educational institutions (55%) and liquor stores (53%).
- Again, preferred aspects of the material centered on the format, layout and presentation (51%), the usefulness of the information provided (48%) and the general appeal of and interest in the content.
- Just under half of the participants offered any insight for improvements primarily related to improving the layout (12%) and presentation (10%) of the materials, reducing the information and wordiness in some areas (11%), and clarifying the "When You Drink" section (3%).

Final thoughts

- Overall, one-third of participants felt the materials had an impact on the way they think about alcohol and their own alcohol consumption.
- The vast majority (85%) in all segments reported that they had learned something new and found the materials useful and appealing.
- Almost all young adults taking part in the evaluation (96%) endorsed the public release of these materials in Nova Scotia, even without any changes or improvements.
 - *It is educational about drinking and people can learn the true things about drinking and the dangers it can cause as well.*
 - *It will be of benefit to people who like to go out and drink and don't know the facts.*
 - *It will help the target audience better understand the consequences of excessive drinking.*
 - *It will open the eyes of people who think drinking is fun and they will know the true facts about drinking.*
 - *It's a good approach to inform young people about drinking and what can happen to you or someone you know.*

- Its good information on drinking easily understood and people will learn a thing or two on drinking that may help them someday.
- People will learn to know if they are hurting themselves by drinking too much. You learn what a real drink is like 5 oz of wine, 1.5 oz of liquor so you can watch yourself so you don't pass out, it will help you see how much you are really drinking.
- The fact sheet was informative you learn what not to do if someone is drunk and then what to do if someone shows signs of being in trouble from drinking; also it shows you how much one drink really is, what a standard drink is ounce-wise, so you can keep track of what you are really drinking such as the number of drinks [you consume] when you go out.
- The lack of information in this area is a lot. I am 24 and I learned a lot from it.
- There is a lot of over drinking and people don't realize it. They misuse alcohol and this information will help people learn at least how to drink responsibly.

Conclusions

- ⇒ The materials tested strongly with individuals comprising the key target market across the province of Nova Scotia.
- ⇒ Perceptions of the primary target for the materials was skewed towards younger people especially towards young adults 19-24 years and teenagers, although many felt most drinkers would benefit from the information.
- ⇒ Young adults participating in the evaluation consistently found material content to be relevant, credible, and useful.
- ⇒ Evaluation of the formats and presentation of the material were generally positive and considered engaging and appropriate for the target group.
- ⇒ Opportunities for improvement consisted primarily of simplifying (e.g. reducing some content and “wordiness”, “using more graphics”) and clarifying (e.g. increasing font size and readability, reorganizing layout)
- ⇒ Both concepts, *Extreme Drinking* and *Life of the Party*, were well accepted and appear to resonate with young adults in the province.
- ⇒ There was clear preference for two of the stock images tested; one male (ED1) and one female (LP3) that are appropriate for use with the *Extreme Drinking* series. However in order to remain relevant to the audience, new images are likely required for the on-going campaign development, especially for the *Life of the Party* series
- ⇒ The content of the brochures and fact sheet were also considered to be more appropriate for the *Extreme Drinking* concept than for the *Life of the Party* concept as evaluated in the current study.

Recommendations for Next Steps

Recommendation 1

“The overall idea will be much more clear if you use [the Extreme Drinking] concept. It drives the point home about how truly dangerous drinking large amounts of alcohol can be.”

Incorporate identified changes and launch materials under “*Extreme Drinking - A dangerous way to party.*” campaign.

It will be recalled that the two concepts *Extreme Drinking* and *Life of the Party*, were developed in response to previous research with young adults in the province that identified over-drinking, binge drinking, and drinking safety as areas of key priority. A harm reduction approach was recommended that promoted safe drinking rather than low-risk drinking or abstinence using a two-pronged strategy intended to challenge **beliefs** and **cultural norms** among adults in this high-risk age group. Evidence indicated that young adults responded most positively to materials and messages that provided non-judgmental information about alcohol rather than against alcohol. Therefore, the most urgent communication objective was to address some of the misconceptions and social norms supporting a culture of “unsafe” drinking practices, particularly at the far end of the drinking continuum. Among participants in the current study, the terminology, “extreme” drinking, was seen to re-position “over-drinking” as a risky behavior rather than a judgment call. There also was perceived to be a greater fit between the *Extreme Drinking* concept and the content and available stock photos that tested most strongly in the evaluation.

Recommendation 2

“This is real: You have been there. You think you’re the life of the party, but then later on you look gross, you can’t walk straight, and your judgment is all messed up.”

Develop new content and materials for the *Life of the Party* concept in order to broaden the reach of the campaign, continue to challenge social norms surrounding over-drinking and to build upon interest and/or motivation generated by the *Extreme Drinking* campaign.

Drinking to the point of intoxication was found to be a normal and accepted part of alcohol consumption among young adults, 19-29 years of age. One of the recommendations emerging from earlier research was to explore ways to influence a shift from a culture of intoxication to one of moderation. Consistent with this goal the *Life of the Party* concept set a different tone with participants. It was “*humorous*”, “*lighter*”, yet still hit home in targeting social norms about over-drinking. Rather than focus on survival and safety issues, the focus for this campaign shifted to include the social consequences and context of getting drunk; an area considered highly relevant by young adults in the province. Participants reported a range of problems because of their drinking that fall short of the dangers addressed in alcohol overdose. Hangovers, overspending, embarrassing behaviour, violence, injury, were typically identified. Development of new content should take into account previous research recommendations and will need to be adjusted to reflect

the more social tone of the campaign. While the current creative tested very well, new “photos” of real people in real drinking situations are recommended in order to enhance the credibility and impact of the materials among members of the target group.

Recommendation 3

“Drinking is a dangerous thing if you don't do it safely. I think most people drink irresponsibly. The more information out there, the better-educated people will be. This will help them so they can learn to drink responsibly.”

Consider undertaking follow-up with original study participants at fixed intervals in order to assess movement along the stages of change continuum following exposure to the materials.

The short-term goals of the current research study were two-fold: 1) to obtain a baseline measure of behaviors and beliefs prior to exposure to the materials and, 2) to obtain feedback on the content and design of the current evidence-based materials from a cross-section of young adults across the province. This assessment was critical in informing the decision process surrounding the immediate release of the materials. However, NSHPP has also committed to evaluate the effectiveness of education and prevention initiatives. All participants in the current study provided baseline measures and agreed to further contact. Therefore, this panel offers NSHPP an option to assess movement among the stages of changes set at baseline.

Recommendation 4

“People need their eyes opened about what drinking can do to your body and what's real about drinking and what is not.”

Incorporate quantitative research to establish contextual benchmarks for alcohol consumption including awareness, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs as input into on-going development and monitoring of education and prevention initiatives to address harmful alcohol use.

NSHPP has adopted a proactive strategy for prevention and early intervention in order to ensure programs are relevant to a wider population base beyond traditional treatment programs. An important component of the proposed provincial strategy to address harmful alcohol use is to develop various communication materials and messaging targeted to alcohol consumers in the general population and within high-risk groups. The Nova Scotia Alcohol Indicators Report has established important benchmarks relative to alcohol-related harms (e.g. deaths, illnesses, and self-reports of problems) and drinking patterns of Nova Scotians (e.g. frequency and quantity of consumption). Additional benchmarks relative to context are needed, including attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge levels relative to alcohol use and its potential impacts. This

information can assist NSHPP in developing and assessing education and prevention programs or services for addressing harmful alcohol use in Nova Scotia.

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