

Hey Victoria!

Let's talk about your drinking

Vital Conversation

EVENT SUMMARY

*A vital conversation
hosted by:*



**VICTORIA
FOUNDATION**

With support from:



Community
Action
Initiative

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OVERVIEW

Hey Victoria! Let's Talk About Your Drinking... was a Community Dialogue held in Victoria BC on March 15, 2018. This event was part of a series of Vital Conversations connected to important issues and trends identified in [Victoria's Vital Signs](#), Greater Victoria's annual check-up. It was hosted by the [Victoria Foundation](#) in collaboration with the [Community Action Initiative](#), and facilitated by [SHIFT Collaborative](#).

The workshop focused on fostering open conversation across sectors and perspectives about one of our society's biggest pastime: drinking alcohol. Together, participants explored some of the perceptions, evidence, opportunities and challenges related to moderate drinking in our community. The session brought together a diverse group of approximately 50 community members and organizations, and featured speakers who shared about the business, health and culture of alcohol, as a lead-in to community dialogue in a safe, neutral space.

This event summary overviews some of the key themes explored by participants at the workshop and opportunities for further exploration.



Snapshot of the Vital Conversation Agenda:

- 3:00 Registration and "Mocktail" Reception
- 3:30 Welcome & Setting the Context
- 4:00 Introductory Small Group Dialogue
- 4:30 Speakers Panel & Discussion
 - Dr. Richard Stanwick, Chief Medical Health Officer, Island Health
 - Rod Phillips, Co-Founder at Liquify.ca and Radio Show Host at The Dock UnCorked
 - Dan Reist, Assistant Director of Knowledge Exchange, The Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR)
- 5:15 Small Group Dialogue
- 5:45 Share Back & Plenary Discussion
- 6:30 Close

WHY DIALOGUE ON THIS TOPIC?

Participants were welcomed by Dr. Grace Wong Sneddon, Board Chair of the Victoria Foundation, who acknowledged that the focus of this particular Vital Conversation had evolved out of data in the Foundation's Vital Signs report on increased alcohol consumption in our region. Building on this, partner groups were interested in opening a conversation with the community on this topic.

Stacy Barter, facilitator from SHIFT Collaborative, opened the workshop session by reflecting on why this particular issue merits community

dialogue, given all of the other pressing issues facing communities. She acknowledged our culture of drinking as a "sticky" issue, particularly because it is so seldom explored and talked about, and highlighted examples of some of the "wicked questions" connected to our drinking culture, as well as the overarching guiding questions for the dialogue session.

WICKED Questions??

- How is it that Victoria is known as a hub of healthy lifestyle activity and simultaneously has some of the highest drinking rates?
- Why is it that certain drugs and substances are socially acceptable and legal, while others are not? Who decides? Who makes the call as to what is a reasonable harm or benefit?

Overarching Dialogue Questions

- Is it time for a change?
- How do we foster a culture of drinking that supports personal and community well-being for all?
- How can we support the social, cultural and economic benefits of alcohol while reducing the harms and risks to citizens and communities?

"Real dialogue is where two or more people become willing to suspend their certainty in each other's presence."

- David Bohm

Dialogue Building Blocks

- Balance Inquiry and Advocacy
- Identify and Surface Assumptions
- Suspend Judgment
- Generative Listening

OUTREACH & PROMOTION

A goal of this community dialogue was to engage a diverse cross-section of community members and different sectors in exploring this issue. In order to reach diverse participants, the event was promoted through a wide range of channels including social media, local newspapers, and Victoria Foundation's newsletter. In addition to general promotion, the host partner organizations also carried out targeted outreach to key organizations and sectors including the liquor industry, health sector, academic institutions, community organizations, local government and the restaurant and tourism sectors, to name a few.



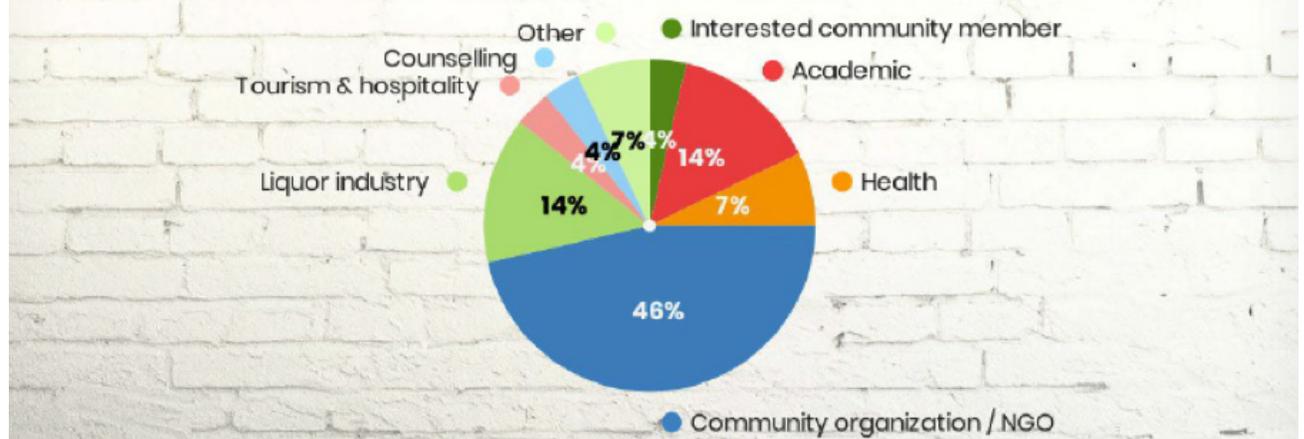
GETTING STARTED — PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS

Using an engagement application called Mentimeter, participants were invited to begin the session by responding to a series of questions using their smart phones. This allowed them to answer anonymously, and for the results of each polling question to be broadcast live back to the audience in the room. The result was the sharing of information and perceptions amongst the group that set the stage for the some of the themes to be explored more fully through the dialogue session.

Dialogue Participants

Answers to the opening question regarding the diversity of sectors represented in the room indicated that the greatest number of participants were from community or non-governmental organizations, and a significant number from the liquor industry and academia. In addition to interested community members, other sectors represented included Health, the Tourism and Hospitality industry, Counselling, and "other" sectors (not specified).

WHAT SECTOR DO YOU REPRESENT?



Perceptions about Drinking:

To begin surfacing some underlying perceptions and assumptions, participants were invited to share the first 3 words that come to mind when they think about drinking. Larger words in the word cloud below indicate more frequent submissions. Of note, positive aspects of drinking such as the social and relaxing aspects stood out among others.

When you think about drinking, what are the three words that come to mind?



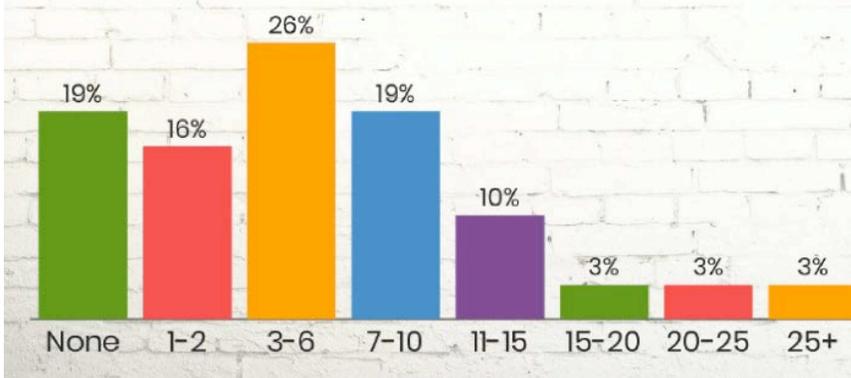
“Moderate” Drinking

The focus of this Vital Conversation was on the experience of moderate drinking and its effects on our community. This was acknowledged as a topic that is seldom discussed and explored compared to other community concerns such as high risk, heavy-drinking, binge-drinking, chronic substance abuse or alcoholism (which are all very worthy of discussion, but were not the focus of this workshop).

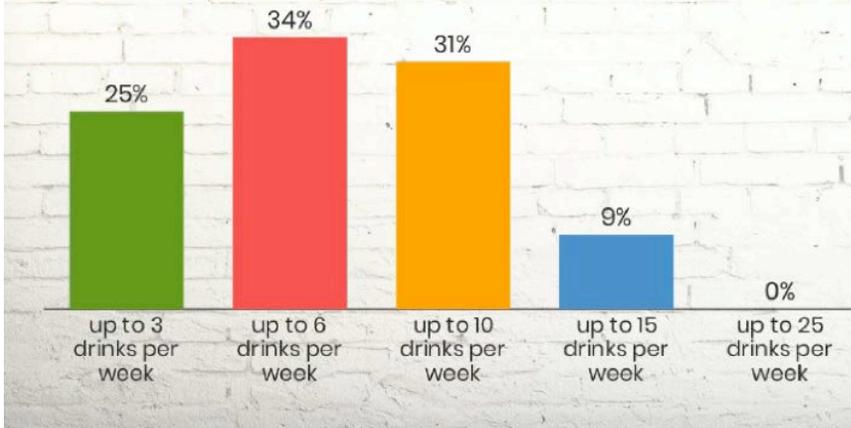
To uncover some of the varied perceptions of what we mean by “moderate”, participants were invited to reflect on their own consumption of alcohol, and their perspectives on what they believe to be moderate drinking levels. The slides that follow highlight some of the diversity of perceptions and experiences including the lack of a common understanding about what constitutes “moderate”. This proved to be a central theme in the dialogue session.



How many drinks (containing alcohol) did you have last week?



In your opinion, what constitutes "moderate drinking"?



Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Guidelines recommend people reduce their long-term health risks to alcohol by drinking

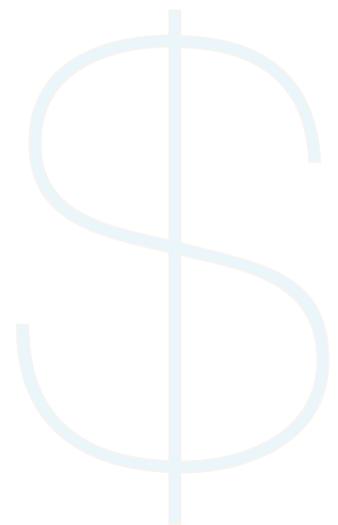
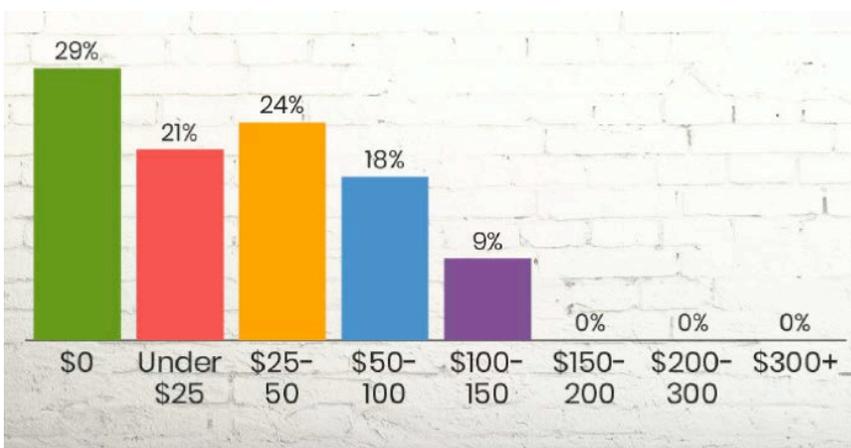
- No more than 10 drinks per week for women with no more than 2 drinks most days
- No more than 15 drinks per week for men with no more than 3 drinks a day most days
- Plan non-drinking days every week to avoid developing a habit.

Source: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction www.ccsa.ca

Economic Considerations:

A question about how much money participants had spent last week on alcohol was explored to begin considering some of the economic impacts of alcohol, which were further highlighted and discussed later in the Speakers' Panel:

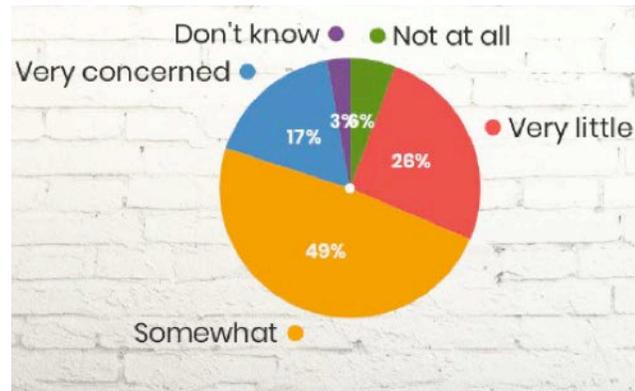
How much did you spend on alcohol last week?



Level of Concern:

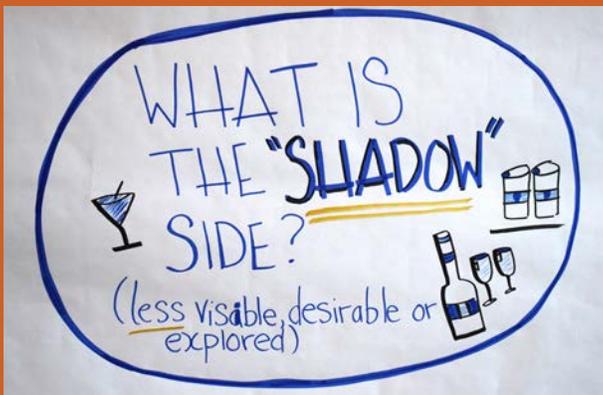
One of the intentions of this Vital Conversation was to explore perceptions about the benefits and harms related to moderate alcohol consumption, and the extent to which community members and stakeholders are concerned about Victoria's culture of drinking. A poll at the beginning of the session revealed that a large number (49%) of attendees felt "somewhat concerned" about drinking in Victoria, while a significant number (26%) characterized their level of concern as "very little", and 17% were "very concerned". This exercise highlighted the diversity of experiences and opinions related to this topic and set the stage for a rich dialogue across this diversity.

How concerned are you about drinking in Victoria?



“WARM-UP” DIALOGUE: THE POSITIVE AND THE “SHADOW”

To further explore some of this diversity, participants were invited to “warm up” for dialogue with a quick brainstorm in their small table groups about the positive aspects of alcohol, as well as the “shadow side” (aspects which are less visible, desirable or explored.)



Some of the key themes that were identified regarding the positive impacts of alcohol included the contribution to community culture and celebration (e.g. celebrations, holidays, celebrating “rites of passage” and cultural traditions), social aspects (e.g. relaxing, enabler for socializing, community building), sensory appreciation/pleasure (e.g. taste, association

with good food) and economic impacts (e.g. impacts on tourism, production, sales, government revenues, and job creation/employment)

Some of the “shadow” sides of these impacts included impacts on health (e.g. link to chronic disease, mental health, costs to health care) issues regarding safety (e.g. vehicle safety, personal safety), social isolation (e.g. drinking alone, feeling disconnected if choosing not to drink), economic impacts (e.g. personal costs/debt, increased costs for government & tax payers, effects on employee performance), and cultural norms and pressures (e.g. expectations of drinking in social environments, reliance on alcohol as a social lubricant)



SPEAKERS PANEL

To get participants thinking about some of the complex considerations related to our culture of drinking, the panel of 3 guest speakers shared short, engaging presentations. These provocative talks set the stage for participants to hold and grapple with some of the key themes related to alcohol consumption and complexity of this issue as they moved into dialogue conversation.



Dr. Richard Stanwick, Chief Medical Health Officer, Island Health

Dr. Stanwick introduced some of the considerations about alcohol from a public health perspective. This included the recognition of alcohol as a cancer-causing agent that likely will soon surpass tobacco as the leading cause of morbidity in our health care system. He spoke briefly about some of the key health risks including cancer, heart conditions and mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression.

Dr. Stanwick shared a spectrum of substance regulation, with prohibition on one end of the spectrum and free market legalization on the other, demonstrating that public health most often sits in the middle of these two extremes.

Dr. Stanwick asked questions about what can support citizens to make better, informed choices and overviewed some of the opportunities and challenges with alcohol labelling.

Finally, he highlighted the lack of consistency across Canada's provinces with respect to low-risk drinking guidelines, and the challenge this presents to citizens in understanding health risks and the definition of "moderate" drinking levels.

In closing he left participants with a question to consider: "Do you have the right to know what you are consuming so that you can make the choice to be a moderate drinker?"

"Do you have the right to know what you are consuming so that you can make the choice to be a moderate drinker?"

Dr. Richard Stanwick

Rod Phillips, Co-Founder at Liquify.ca and Radio Show Host at The Dock UnCorked

Rod Phillips engaged participants in a snapshot of some of the key economic considerations related to alcohol in our community.

In his overview, Rod highlighted what we drink in Victoria and where we drink (83% "off-premise" in our homes with friends and family, and 17% "on premise" in venues such as restaurants, bars and hotels).

Rod Phillips cont'd

To get a sense of who the liquor industry represents, he touched on both the primary liquor businesses (e.g. bars, wineries, distilleries, retailers) as well as numerous “secondary” industries (e.g. graphic design and printing, trades and construction) that are connected to the production and sales of alcohol.

WHAT WE DRINK PER DAY:

41,100 pints of beer

32,880 glasses of wine

30,140 two-ounce cocktails

8,220 cans of ready-to-drink beverages

Excerpt from Rod Phillips' slide presentation

Of significance, Rod estimated that almost two in 10 jobs in the Capital Region is either directly or indirectly related to beverage alcohol.

He concluded by noting that the alcohol industry directly produces \$529 million in wholesale revenue per year, with \$90 million contributed to BC general revenue.

Dan Reist, Assistant Director of Knowledge Exchange, The Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR)

Dan Reist concluded the speakers panel with a compelling discussion looking at our relationship to alcohol from a socio-cultural lens. Examining society’s relationship to alcohol going back at least 12,000 years, Dan highlighted that people’s reasons for producing and consuming alcohol have largely remained the same. They were in those times and continue to be, largely social and political. Throughout history alcohol has also been used as a medicine to deal with pain, for religious/spiritual reasons, and for its psychoactive effects. Drawing on teachings ranging from Greek stories of the god Dionysus and the Sufi mystic Rumi, Dan took us on a journey highlighting both the positive aspects of alcohol, as well as its darker side throughout history and modern times.

He drew out two themes that have continued to emerge throughout history regarding how to use alcohol well: moderation and wisdom. He concluded his talk leaving us with deeper questions about democracy, liberty and choice. Through this, Dan presented important ethical questions on how we might balance the responsibility of cultivating a caring society that looks after the least privileged, while allowing individuals the autonomy and freedom to take control of their lives and make their own choices.

A sample of advertising and public health messaging that influences perceptions and choices about alcohol.



GROUP DIALOGUE SESSION



Dialogue

dia = through
logos = word or meaning

Exploring shared meaning through
integrating multiple perspectives

Following the speakers' talks, participants were invited to engage in a "[World Café](#)" dialogue process involving 2 rounds of small group dialogue. In this process, after the first small group discussion, participants moved tables to join a new group of people to discuss the second set of questions, "cross-pollinating" the second round with ideas and experiences from the first.

Following the small table group dialogues, a large group discussion was hosted where each table shared back key themes from their conversations, and speakers shared their reflections and observations.



Dialogue Round 1:

What makes this a “sticky issue”?

What are some of the tensions that were surfaced through the panel or from your own experience, that we need to consider as a community?

In this round of small group conversations, participants explored some of the tensions that exist around our culture of drinking. When these were shared back, some speakers highlighted the complexity of the issue with respect to individual choice.

While solutions emphasizing individual choice and responsibility were often emphasized, there were questions about how autonomous we really are and the multiple factors that influence our choices. Key themes that emerged across the groups pointed to a number of colliding tensions including:

- How drinking is normalized (and legal)
- Health impacts and concerns for vulnerable people
- Confusion and lack of clear definitions of what is “moderate”
- Shame and stigma around drinking
- The role of government and regulation in a high benefit/high cost environment (economic benefit vs. health risks)
- Lack of and need for education
- The diversity of perspectives and experiences with alcohol



Dialogue Round 2:

What, if anything, needs to change?

What, if anything, needs to change in order to foster a culture of alcohol consumption that supports personal and community well-being for all?

How can we best support the benefits (social, cultural and economic) while reducing the harms and risks to citizens and communities?



There was rich discussion and diverse perspectives on the question of what, and whether, anything needs to change regarding our culture of alcohol consumption, and how to best support the benefits of alcohol while reducing risks.

Not all participants felt that change was necessary; however, some key themes emerged as potential opportunities in this discussion:

Information & Education

Participants discussed what types of education and information would help people be better informed and make good decisions. There was particular emphasis on the opportunity to improve alcohol labelling and information about health risks.

Focus on youth

Some groups identified an important opportunity to focus education that supports a healthy transition and relationship to alcohol before reaching legal drinking age. Several tables noted to importance of the teen years, and several highlighted the importance of starting this education with young children.

Supporting cultural shifts in behaviour & attitudes

This discussion pointed to some of the underlying cultural factors that influence people's alcohol consumption including social inequities, stress management/stressful lifestyles.

In particular, it was noted that many of the dominant "coping" strategies and norms around how we socialize and relax involve drinking.

The need for thoughtfulness, self-reflection and more discourse on our culture of drinking was raised, as well as the opportunity to create more social spaces and activities that do not focus on alcohol.

Bar environment & role of industry

Many people identified strong examples of how leaders in the liquor industry are modelling practices to support healthy drinking environments for their patrons and staff.

Participants noted the opportunity and desire of many in the industry to educate and support consumers on safe consumption.



REFLECTIONS & TAKE-AWAYS

As a wrap-up to the dialogue session, participants were invited to share response using the Mentimeter platform to answer the question:

What is one thing you personally would change about how alcohol/drinking is supported in our community?



Larger words in the slide above indicate more frequent submissions. Participants emphasized the important role of education and awareness raising, particular opportunities to improve alcohol information, and the need for more open conversations and dialogue.



NEXT STEPS

As a next step coming out of this dialogue session, the host partners are drawing on the themes and issues raised to help shape their work moving forward. Community Action Initiative is drawing on this learning to inform the development of programs and funding across BC, and Victoria Foundation is similarly informing their community grant program and other work in the community. Together, with the BC Ministry of Health, the partners are exploring collaborative opportunities for future convening and community actions.



