



Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse  
Centre canadien de lutte contre l'alcoolisme et les toxicomanies

In partnership with



University of Victoria | Centre for Addictions Research of BC

# Alcohol and Caffeine – Youth and Young Adults at Greatest Risk

## Background

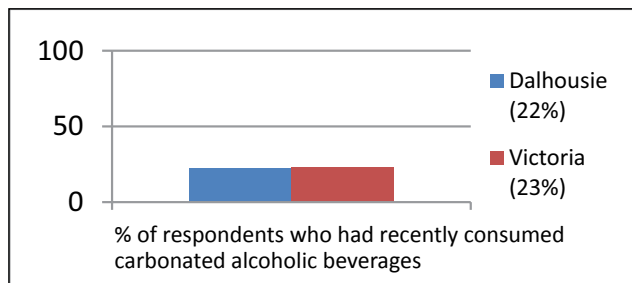
### What are caffeinated alcoholic beverages?

Caffeinated alcoholic beverages are drinks that combine alcohol with caffeine, most often in the form of energy drinks. They are available in two forms:

- ★ Pre-mixed by manufacturers and sold in liquor stores or licensed establishments; and
- ★ Hand mixed by consumers themselves.

Based on limited survey data, an estimated one in four young adults in university consumed caffeinated alcoholic beverages in the past 30 days.<sup>1,2</sup> This rate is almost double that reported for young adults in the general population in a large national survey,<sup>3</sup> indicating that caffeinated alcoholic beverage use may be higher among young adults in post-secondary settings.

### Caffeinated alcoholic beverages consumers on two Canadian campuses<sup>1,2</sup>



## The Issue

Youth and young adults are at the greatest risk of harm from consuming caffeinated alcoholic beverages because they drink them at levels four times higher than the general public.<sup>3</sup>

Young adults in university

- ★ prefer hand-mixed over pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages, putting them at greater risk of dangerous side effects because hand-mixed varieties typically contain more caffeine than pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages; and
- ★ consume more caffeinated alcoholic beverages than other young adults.

Compared to those who drink alcohol alone, youth and young adults who drink caffeinated alcoholic beverages are more likely to

- ★ commit or be a victim of sexual assault;
- ★ ride in a vehicle with someone driving under the influence of alcohol, or drive while under the influence of alcohol themselves;
- ★ be hurt or injured and require medical attention; and
- ★ drink more alcohol without realizing they are intoxicated because the caffeine keeps them awake longer.

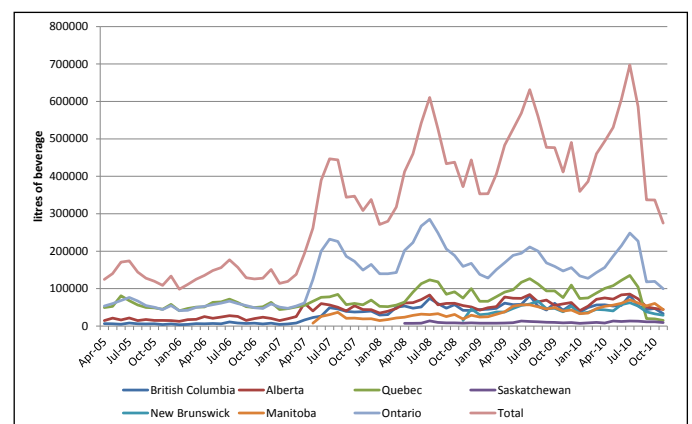
## The Current Situation in Canada

### Consumption of caffeinated alcoholic beverages

Non-alcoholic energy drinks were introduced to Canada in 1997. Pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages entered the market in 2000. Since then, there has been an upward trend in sales of pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages. This trend stems from the introduction of new products and the increasing demand for existing caffeinated alcoholic beverage products. Consumption varies across provinces and territories.

### Trends in sales of pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages in jurisdictions with stable product lines

(BC, AB, MB, QC, ON; May 2007–August 2010)



Sources: Provincial liquor authorities; sales data on file with authors

## The Policy Landscape

Various government and professional health organizations, including Health Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, HealthLink BC and the Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention, have expressed concerns over the increased use of energy drinks and caffeinated alcoholic beverages.

Several policies have been developed to address the issue:

- ★ In 2009, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) undertook an independent review of the caffeinated alcoholic beverage issue and imposed a cap of 30 mg of caffeine per serving on all products sold in Ontario containing alcohol. The Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation has since followed the LCBO's lead.
- ★ In early 2010, Health Canada issued a formal directive that only caffeine from natural sources (e.g., coffee, cacao, guarana, etc.) is allowed in alcoholic beverages for sale in Canada.
- ★ In late 2011, Health Canada published its proposed approach for managing caffeinated energy drinks, which, among other things, recommended banning the sale of all pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages.

## What More Can Be Done?

A coordinated, multi-faceted approach that targets different sectors is required to reduce the risks and potential harm of caffeinated alcoholic beverage use, especially for youth and young adults. The following recommendations are offered within the report by Brache, Stockwell and Thomas (2012), *Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages in Canada: Prevalence of Use, Risks and Recommended Policy Responses*.

### Policy makers

Pricing:

- ★ Increase the price of pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages to reflect their higher risk potential compared to regular energy drinks and non-caffeinated alcohol beverages.

Labelling:

- ★ Require labels of pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages in Canada to list caffeine content in addition to alcohol content.
- ★ Require warning labels about mixing alcohol and caffeine on the labels of all pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages sold in Canada.

Packaging and marketing:

- ★ Require that pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages be packaged in containers that are noticeably distinct from their non-alcoholic versions.

Access:

- ★ Restrict sale of regular energy drinks in licensed establishments (e.g., bars and clubs) to reduce hand-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverage consumption in higher risk environments.

- ★ In light of the relatively higher risk posed by hand-mixed compared with pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages, any ban of pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages as suggested by Health Canada should be accompanied by adequately resourced policies and awareness programs discouraging the hand mixing of alcohol and energy drinks by consumers.

### Public health organizations, healthcare providers and researchers

- ★ Conduct or fund Canadian research on the extent and impact of caffeinated alcoholic beverage use.
- ★ Educate the public about the health impacts of caffeinated alcoholic beverages, particularly the dangers of the hand-mixed versions. Develop targeted awareness campaigns for youth and young adults.
- ★ Incorporate questions about caffeinated alcoholic beverage use into routine screening processes for harmful alcohol use, especially for youth and young adults.
- ★ Evaluate or fund the evaluation of the impact of policy interventions on purchase and consumption behaviour, as well as health impacts. Again, youth should be a focus of these evaluation efforts.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Brache, K., & Stockwell, T. (2010). Unpublished survey data on alcohol and energy drink use among college students at a western Canadian university.

<sup>2</sup> Price, R., Hilchey, C., Darredeau, C., Fulton, H., & Barrett, S. (2010). Brief communication: Energy drink co-administration is associated with increased reported alcohol ingestion. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 29(3): 331-333.

<sup>3</sup> Health Canada. (2010). Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey microdata file; analysis by Centre for Addictions Research of BC.

### Reference

Adapted from Brache, K., Thomas, G., & Stockwell, T. (2012). *Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages in Canada: Prevalence of Use, Risks and Recommended Policy Responses*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

