

New alcohol consumption guidelines stir controversy, but is it warranted?

By Robert Fisher

ST. STEPHEN – New Canadian guidelines on alcohol consumption are generating controversy, including among medical professionals.

But for officials with Sophia Recovery Centre, the new guidelines may help some women ask for help where they might have felt they couldn't previously.

Dr. Tracy Meyer, Sophia board member and an emergency medicine doctor at Saint John Regional Hospital, says the new guidelines are meant "to allow people to make informed decisions about their own alcohol consumption."

The guidelines were last updated in 2011. Since then, Meyer notes, new research and discoveries have led to updating the guidance.

The goal is to allow people to recognize there are certain levels of risk associated with alcohol consumption.

"What is new is that there's no level of drinking that is considered zero risk," said Meyer.

Evaluating health outcomes under the old guidelines, researchers found that life expectancies were shortened even for people who drank within the guidelines. The new guidelines account for what are considered low and moderate risk levels for people engaging in voluntary activities. Those risk levels are one in 1,000 for low and one in 100 for moderate risk.

In terms of the work Sophia Recovery Centre does, Meyer says these new guidelines are another piece of information the centre can provide to women who may be evaluating their own drinking habits and looking to improve well-being.

She points out that Sophia assists women at all stages of substance use, not just addiction and, in some cases, complete abstinence isn't the ultimate goal. This new research may be helpful to women looking to make a change in their lives.

Julie Atkinson, the centre's executive director, says existing clients have already made that decision but if this new information helps other women make that decision, it is beneficial.

"Anybody who's already a client at Sophia Recovery Centre is not going to be

impacted by these new guidelines," said Atkinson.

She went on to say the new guidelines may help change people's thinking about what the centre does and who may benefit from their services.

"There are women who are drinking more heavily than is good for them and it is having negative impacts on their life," admitted Atkinson, adding some are unsure what steps to take and are worried about it in isolation.

Having information about the harms of alcohol more widely available and understood makes it easier for women to evaluate their alcohol use and how they can start looking for answers and help.

What may be missing in the immediacy of the negative reaction to the guidelines is the longer term impact on health-care systems.

"It is something that people might want to think about because our health-care system can't sustain this level of illness," Atkinson said. "We're not resourced for it."

Meyer's hope is that these new guidelines may spur the beginning of a societal change and help instill the idea that alcohol isn't necessary to enjoy oneself.

"In the past few years we've gone toward a normalization of drinking and, especially for women, there's a lot of talk of wine culture," said Meyer. "It would be nice to see more of a normalization of viewing a low-drinking lifestyle as part of your own search toward wellness."

Atkinson shares Meyer's view that the new guidelines may help normalize the choice to look at and moderate how alcohol is used and provides an opportunity for reflection.

"It's affirming for women to see that health institutions are confirming they've made good decisions about cutting back on their drinking," said Atkinson, while adding, as a society, we still have a long way to go to reducing the stigma around talking about addiction.

"It's a great idea to be reflective about the impact (a person's) drinking has on (their) life," Atkinson added. "There are women who don't meet the definition of being addicted to alcohol, or who suffer from alcohol abuse syndrome, who simply want to drink less, be healthier and be well," and that's where the centre can be helpful.

robertfisher@stcroixcourier.ca



Local Advertising for Local Businesses



When it comes to marketing your business to local consumers, nobody does it better than your community newspaper!

Print Ads • Digital Advertising • Logos & Design • Social Media • Special Sections • Event Promotions

How Can We Help Your Business Thrive?

Find Out With a **Free Marketing Consultation!** Call or email to set up an appointment today.

Municipal District of St. Stephen council welcomes new members

Continued from page 6

Tim Tozer presented the treasurer's report. Highlights include a surplus of \$1,009,116 in the general operating fund and surplus of \$116,582 in the water and sewage operating fund.

Newly appointed president of Future St. Stephen, Ian Williams, informed council about the housing situation and a Welcome St. Stephen program. There will be a job fair on March 15 at the Garcelon Civic Center.

Council conducted first reading to amend a bylaw regarding council procedures.

An election between Greenlaw and Wheaton for deputy mayor saw Wheaton come out on top.

Council approved a motion to continue the Communication Services Agreement with the Saint John Board of Police Com-

missioners for Fire Service Dispatch under the umbrella of the new municipal district.

Council acknowledged it was aware of the impact of property tax changes on capital projects and the desire to continue with the financing applications for the projects.

Royal Bank of Canada and Scotiabank were appointed as bankers for the municipality with appropriate signing authorities. Council approved short-term borrowing facilities with both financial institutions totalling approximately \$1.8 million.

Council approved a motion to spend up to \$40,000 to upgrade the audio and visual equipment for recording and streaming of meetings.

Council approved the makeup and rules of standing committees and the members to serve on the committees. The committees and members can be found on the municipal website.

robertfisher@stcroixcourier.ca

THE SAINT CROIX
COURIER

P.O. Box 250, 47 Milltown Blvd., St. Stephen, NB
Tel: 506 466-3220 | stcroixcourier.ca