

**MIDDLESEX-LONDON BOARD OF HEALTH**

**REPORT NO. 36-25**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Board of Health

**FROM:** Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health  
Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer

**DATE:** 2025 May 22

---

**RETHINK YOUR DRINKING CAMPAIGN - SOUTHWEST POLYSUBSTANCE  
WORKING GROUP**

**Recommendation**

*It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 36-25 re: “Rethink Your Drinking Campaign – Southwest Polysubstance Working Group” for information.*

---

**Report Highlights**

- The Southwest Polysubstance Working Group created the Rethink Your Drinking website and subsequent social marketing campaign to promote the website and increase community awareness of alcohol-related harms.
- The website and campaign assets translate the Canadian Guidance on Alcohol and Health, developed by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA), into accessible public messaging designed to promote behavioural changes.
- The CCSA was a key partner in the project, enhancing website and campaign reach.
- The campaign resulted in a significant increase in website traffic, especially for alcohol and cancer messaging, which will inform the group’s 2025 plans.

**Background**

The Southwest Polysubstance Working Group (SWPSWG) is comprised of staff from the seven public health units in Southwestern Ontario. Through collaborative program planning and implementation, the SWPSWG collectively contributes to the development and dissemination of resources, tools, and public health messaging with the goal of preventing and reducing alcohol and other substance-related harms.

The website [www.RethinkYourDrinking.ca](http://www.RethinkYourDrinking.ca) was created by the SWPSWG in 2012 to promote Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines which were released in 2011. When these guidelines were updated in 2023 (now referred to as Canada’s Guidance on Alcohol and Health [CGAH]), the group updated the website to reflect the new guidance, to improve website functionality for mobile device access, and to provide a refreshed look. The SWPSWG subsequently created a Rethink Your Drinking (RYD) social media campaign to promote the

updated website and the CGAH, and to raise awareness about alcohol-related health harms. A microsite was embedded within the website and promoted to public health partners, housing social media assets for free download and use by other health organizations. This approach to campaign asset sharing helps to reduce duplication of efforts, shares public health staff capacity and expertise, and contributes to consistent messaging under a unified brand.

### Key Partnerships

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA), the lead agency responsible for the updated CGAH, has played a key partnership role with the SWPSWG. SWPSWG has been able to capitalize on CCSA's subject matter expertise, connections with other agencies involved in alcohol prevention and harm reduction, and expansive reach:

- CCSA provided input on website content with multiple experts' review
- SWPSWG representatives presented at CCSA's "Roundtable on Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health and Ontario's Alcohol Policy" in May 2024 in Toronto.
- SWPSWG representatives presented at the Association of Local Public Health Associations (alPHA) Fall Symposium in November 2024.
- The website was featured as a partner resource on the CCSA "Drink Less, Live More" website.
- The website and SWPSWG's campaign assets were mentioned during various provincial and national alcohol presentations including "the Truth About Alcohol Symposium" hosted by Senator Patrick Brazeau in February 2025.

### SWPSWG Social Media Campaign Metrics

The regional three-month campaign targeted women aged 30-60 years (and their families) who live in Southwestern Ontario to: 1) increase exposure to RYD's alcohol harm reduction and prevention messaging; 2) increase awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer; 3) motivate the target audience to think about their own alcohol consumption and consider reducing use; and 4) increase awareness of the website as a resource. The campaign featured [12 advertisements](#) created by the group via Meta (Facebook and Instagram) and Google advertisements in Southwestern Ontario between December 2024 and February 2025. With a modest \$5,310 advertising spend, the group was able to achieve a good return on investment, with 3,767,400 impressions (total number of times the RYD ads were shown), and 11,069 engagements (including clicks through to the website, reactions, comments, or shares). A full summary report of the SWPSWG three-month campaign is attached as [Appendix A](#).

### Next Steps

The next phase of the project is under exploration, including a possible regional survey to assess awareness of alcohol's causal relationship with cancer, to help inform future campaigns. The SWPSWG also intends to complete a broader website and campaign evaluation to gauge message resonance and to measure reach and utilization of the assets across Ontario.

This report was written by the Social Marketing and Health System Partnerships Team, Family and Community Health Division.



**Alexander Summers, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCPC**  
Medical Officer of Health



**Emily Williams, BScN, RN, MBA, CHE**  
Chief Executive Officer

**This report refers to the following principle(s) set out in Policy G-490, Appendix A:**

- The Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being and the Substance Use and Injury Prevention standards as outlined in the [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services and Accountability](#).
- The following goal or direction from the [Middlesex-London Health Unit's Strategic Plan](#):
  - Our public health programs are effective, grounded in evidence and equity

**This topic has been reviewed to be in alignment with goals under the Middlesex-London Health Unit's [Anti-Black Racism Plan](#) and [Taking Action for Reconciliation](#), specifically recommendation "Create Supportive Environments – ensure the use of culturally-respectful terminology".**