



Warning Labels on Alcohol Containers: *A Consumer's Right to Know, a Government's Responsibility to Inform, and an Industry's Power to Thwart*

Webinar, Swedish Forum for Alcohol Policy, 19 October, 2023

Tim Stockwell, Scientist, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research and Emeritus Professor, Psychology Department, University of Victoria, Canada



Substance use harms/costs in Canada, 2020

Substance	Deaths	Productive Years of life lost	Hospital- isations	Economic costs
Alcohol	17,098	103,907	117,871	CA\$19.67b
Tobacco	46,366	52,938	116,027	CA\$11.15b
Cannabis	336	6,026	8,449	CA\$2.38b
Opioids	6,491	112,768	10,628	CA\$7.07b

Which substance can be sold without a health warning??

WARNING

RISK OF BLINDNESS

Smoking may increase your risk of age-related macular degeneration, a condition that can cause permanent vision loss. There is no effective treatment in most cases.

Need help to quit? 1-866-366-3667 gosmokefree.gc.ca/quit

© Health Canada

WARNING

When you smoke it shows.

Cigarettes are addictive and harmful.

You have the will. There is a way. 1-866-366-3667 gosmokefree.gc.ca/quit

Health Canada

WARNING

This is what dying of lung cancer looks like.

Barb Tarbox died at 42 of lung cancer caused by cigarettes.

You can quit. We can help. 1-866-366-3667 gosmokefree.gc.ca/quit

© Health Canada

Comparing Canadian alcohol labels with those mandated for other legal substances i.e. tobacco and cannabis



2012 FORTISSIMO
BC VQA Okanagan Valley

*Old world meets the New World.
39% Merlot, 38% Cabernet Franc,
17% Cabernet Sauvignon and
6% Sangiovese come together.
Paying their respects to the Tuscans who
challenged the tradition of winemaking at the time.
Aged in French and Slavonian
barrels and puncheons.
Fortissimo is true to its name.*

Lightly filtered & decant off sediments.

96 Magnum	LA STELLA Red Wine / Vin Rouge	14-9% alc./vol. 1.5 L
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8123 148th Ave, Osoyoos, BC V6H 1V1, CANADA
WWW.LASTECCA.CA

PRODUCT OF CANADA
PRODUIT DU CANADA
Contient du sulfite /
Contient des sulfites
Return for refund where applicable

8 08755 01145 2



University of Victoria

Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research

WARNING: Cannabis smoke is harmful. Harmful chemicals found in tobacco smoke are also found in cannabis smoke.

Health Canada

WARNING: Cannabis can be addictive. Up to half of people who use cannabis on a daily basis have work, social or health problems from using cannabis.

Health Canada

WARNING: Regular use of cannabis can increase the risk of psychosis and schizophrenia. Young people are especially at risk.

Health Canada

WARNING: Do not use if breastfeeding. Using cannabis during pregnancy may harm your baby and result in low birth weight.

Health Canada



Alcohol Labelling practices by WHO Region

WHO member country regions		Health and/or safety warnings	
	N	n	%
Americas	35	28	80.0
Africa	47	10	21.4
E.Mediterranean	21	0	0
Europe	53	18	34.0
South-East Asia	11	3	27.3
Western Pacific	27	7	25.9
Total	194	66	34.0



By comparison, for tobacco and cannabis:

- **69.1%** of WHO member countries require PICTORIAL warnings on tobacco packs
- Nearly all European countries (**96.2%**) require pictorial warnings on tobacco packs
- The three countries that have legalized cannabis use (USA, Canada, Uruguay) **ALL** ⁵ require health warnings on packages



Alcohol versus Tobacco mortality risks

- **10 UK units of alcohol** per week (=80g ethanol) carries the same risk for a cancer-related death as **10 tobacco cigarettes** (Hydes et al, 2018, BMJ Open) for women
- **One Canadian Standard Drink** (=13.45g ethanol) per day carries same overall mortality risk as **1 to 2 tobacco cigarettes** (Shield et al, forthcoming) – depending on N of drinks/day



Low public awareness of health risks

AWARENESS OF ALCOHOL-RELATED HEALTH RISKS

Study participants who were aware that alcohol can cause:



Source: Online survey in May 2014 with 2,000 adults in Ontario who consumed ≥ 1 alcoholic beverage in past 12 months. Public Health Ontario. https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/Alcohol_Infographics_Health-Risks-and-Labels.pdf



Public Support for Alcohol Labelling

➤ *Health warnings*

Range: 24% (UK) to 84% (India, China), others greater than 54%

➤ *Pregnancy warnings*

Range: 72% (USA) to 85% (China, India)

➤ *Standard drinks*

Range: 66% (Canada) to 95% (Australia)

Source: Forthcoming systematic review



The Yukon Alcohol Labelling Study

Co-PIs: Erin Hobin (Public Health Ontario), Tim Stockwell (CISUR)

Co-Is: David Hammond, Tom Greenfield, Catherine Paradis

Project Coordinator: Kate Vallance

12 peer-reviewed publications e.g. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol & Drugs special issue*

Funded by:

Substance Use and Addictions Program | Le Programme sur l'usage et les dépendances aux substances



Health
Canada

Santé
Canada

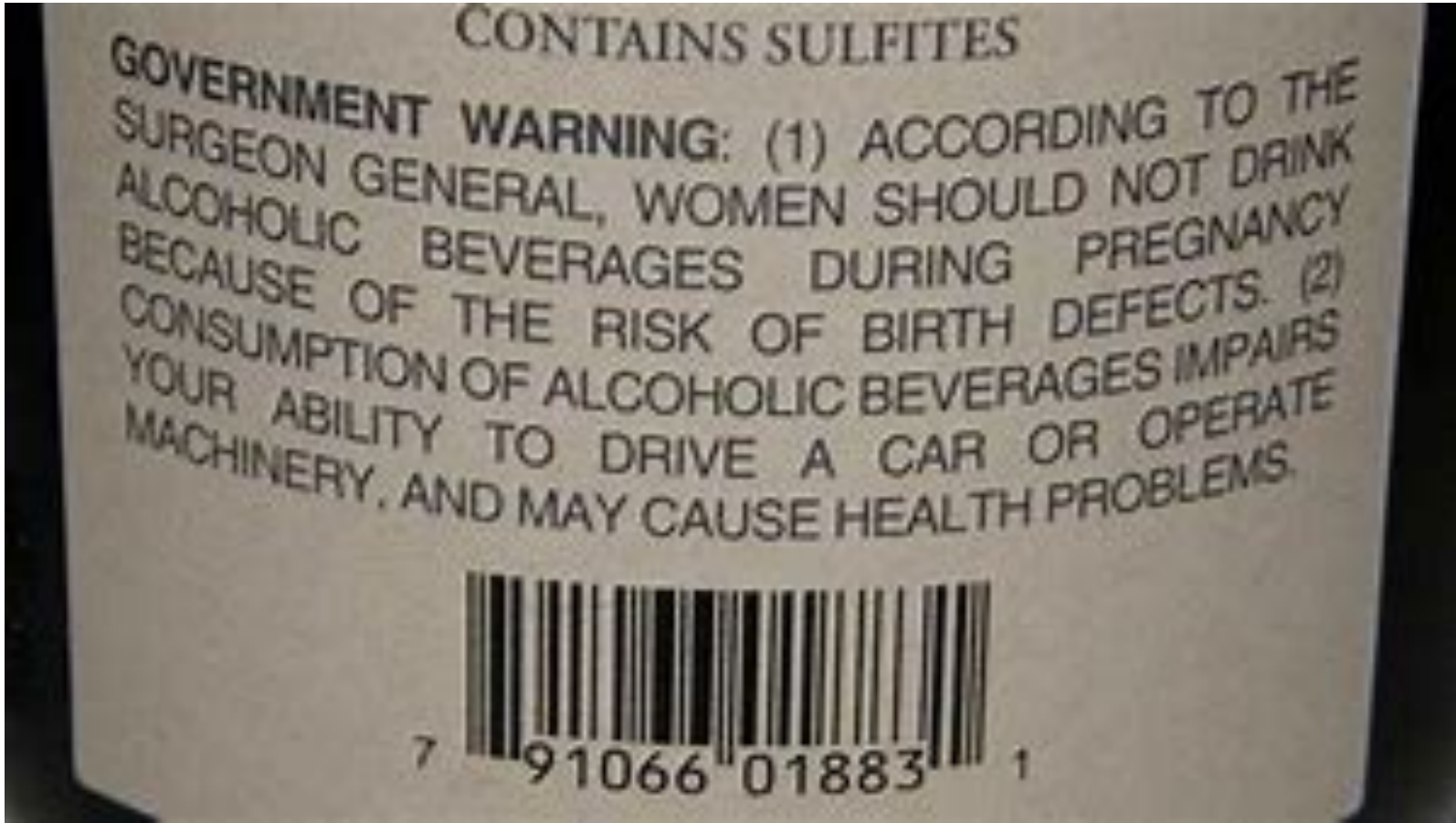


The Yukon labels were novel, colourful, included graphics, had impactful messages and were rotated





[Unlike the 1989 US Warning label represents the only previous real world policy experiment]



Timing and Content of Labels in Yukon

Label content

WARNING
DRINKING ALCOHOL DURING
PREGNANCY CAN CAUSE
BIRTH DEFECTS
AVERTISSEMENT
LA CONSOMMATION D'ALCOOL
DURANT LA GROSSESSE PEUT
PROVOQUER DES ANOMALIES
CHEZ LE FOETUS

**CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER
OF HEALTH ADVISES**
**MISE EN GARDE DU MÉDECIN
HYGIENISTE EN CHEF**

**Alcohol can
cause cancer**
including breast and
colon cancers

**L'alcool peut
causer le cancer**
y compris le cancer du
sein et du côlon

INFO: WWW.YLC.YK.CA/LABELS
HELP/AIDE: 1-855-667-5777

**To reduce health risks,
drink no more than:**

2 standard drinks
a day. **3**
Plan two or more
non-drinking days
each week.

**Pour réduire les risques
pour la santé,
ne pas boire plus de :**

2 verres standards
par jour. **3**
Prévoir deux
jours ou plus
sans alcool par
semaine.

INFO: WWW.YLC.YK.CA/LABELS
HELP/AIDE: 1-855-667-5777

**How many standard
drinks? ?** **Combien
de verres
standards?**

750 ml **12%
ALC** = **5**

750 ml **15%
ALC** = **7**

INFO: YLC.YK.CA/LABELS
HELP/AIDE: 1-866-456-3838

Whitehorse

Jul 2015 –
Nov 19, 2017
+
Aug – Dec,
2018

Nov 20 – Dec 19,
2017

**INDUSTRY
LEGAL
THREATS**

Nov 20 – Dec 19,
2017
+
Apr 1 – Jul 31,
2018

May 28 – Jul 31,
2018

Five Rural Areas

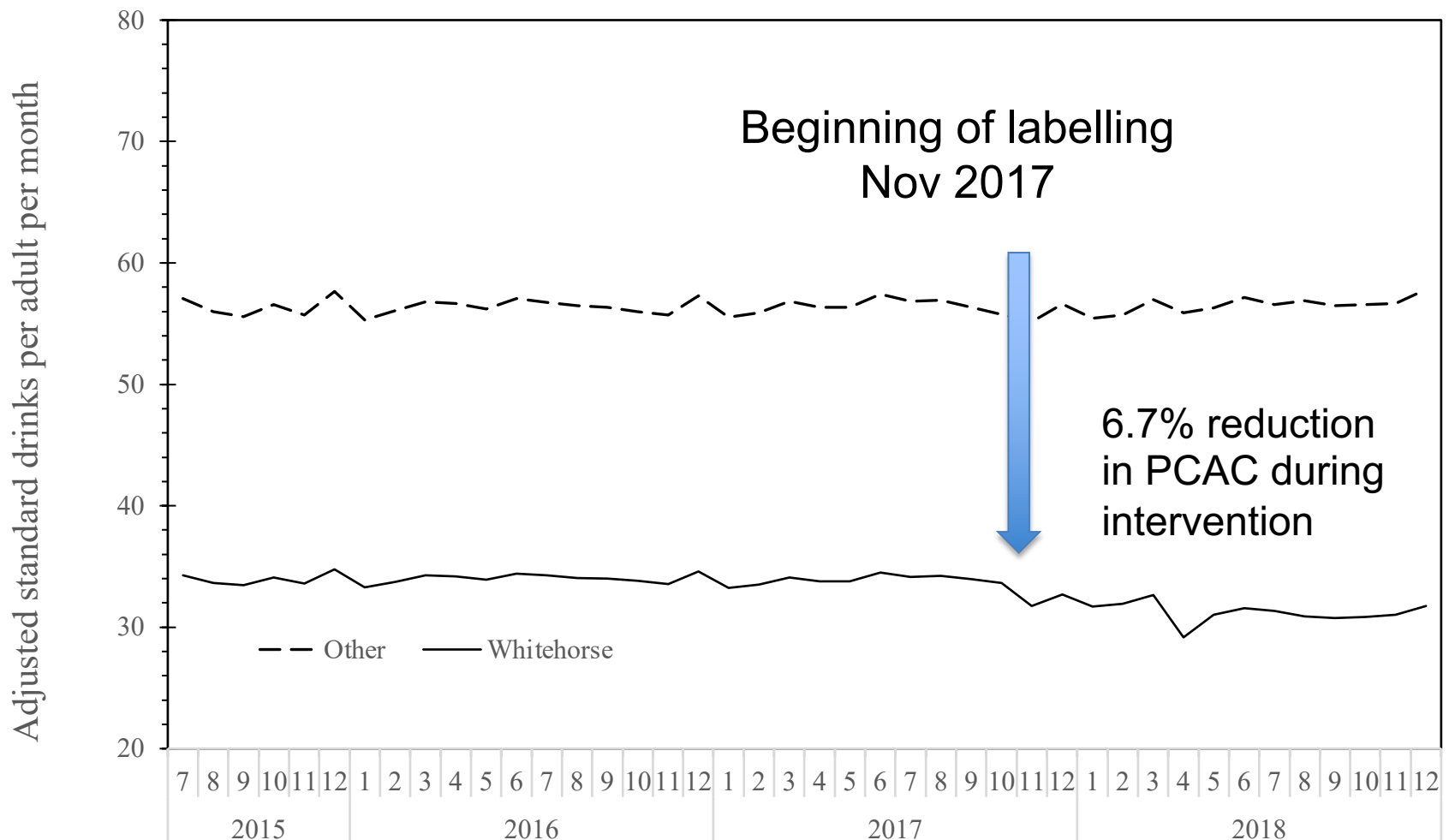
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Adjusted Intervention vs Control Area Yukon Alcohol Sales



Accumulating Reduction in Per Capita Alcohol Sales over Time

Labels †	Time Period	Adjusted monthly drinks per adult aged 15+		
		% change	Mean	t-test P
No new labels (BD only)	July 2015 – Oct 2017	0.00	51.17	ref
Ca/LRDG	Nov 2017 – Dec 2017	-2.64	49.82	0.0002
No new labels added	Jan 2018 – Mar 2018	-4.67	48.78	0.0030
LRDG+SD	Apr 2018 – July 2018	-7.23	47.47	0.0000
Post-Intervention (BD only)	Aug 2018 – Dec 2018	-12.29	44.88	0.0000



Other Findings: 12 publications

- Very low awareness of cancer risks, Low Risk Drinking Guidelines and Standard Drinks at Baseline
- Significant increases in knowledge and awareness of messages during and post intervention
- Significantly increased intentions to cut down alcohol use among those who recalled seeing the labels
- Good public support for labelling interventions
- Increased awareness of cancer risk associated with increased support for alcohol pricing policies (e.g. MUP)



Conclusions

- The observed reductions in alcohol sales were consistently observed for labelled products
 - This pattern of results was observed across multiple models and comparisons
 - The accumulating effect was not predicted
 - It is possible that these colourful, impactful and rotating labels (including the birth defect labels) had a cascading impact on alcohol consumption in this high consuming region of Canada



What might Systembolaget do?

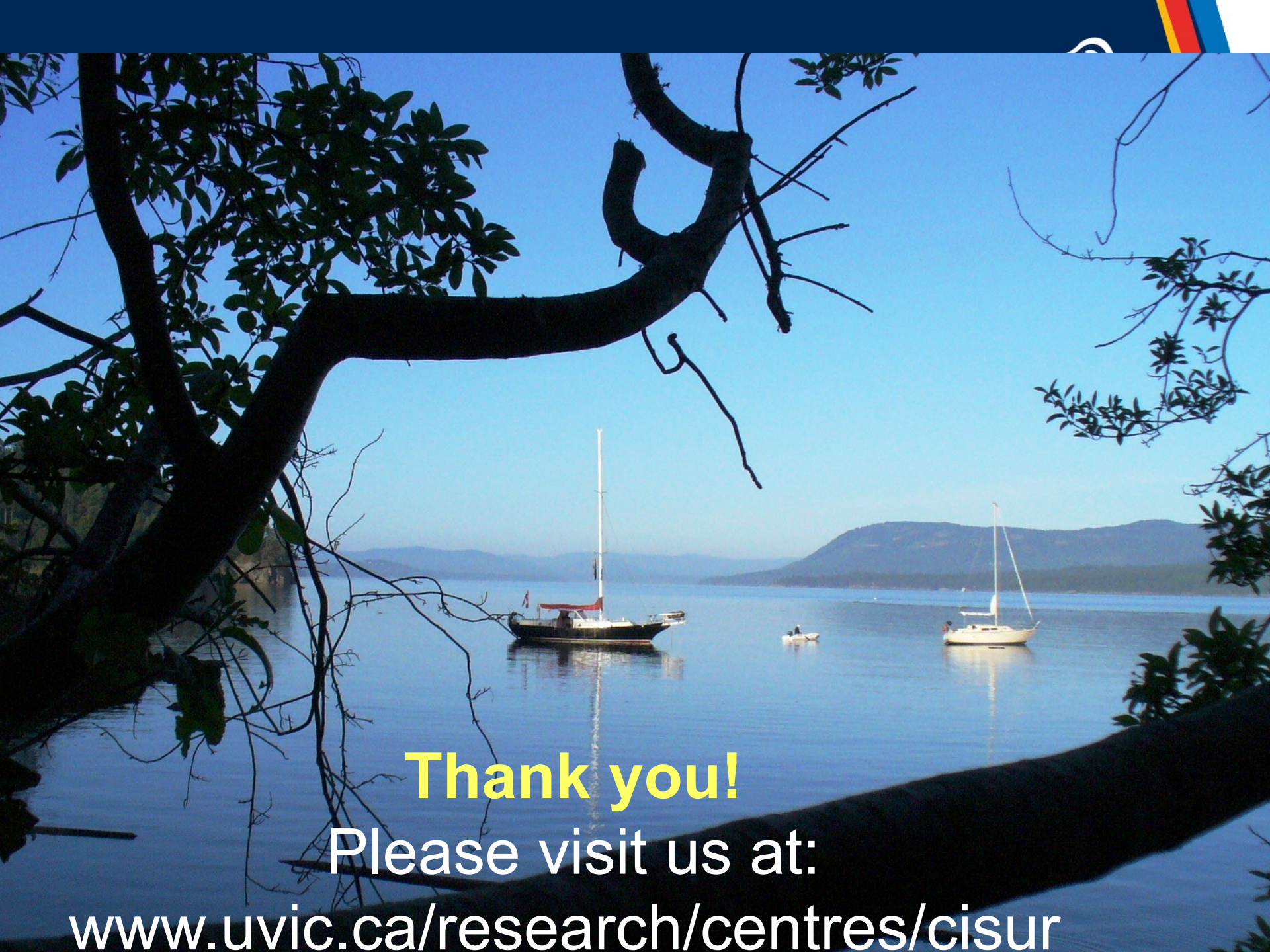
Some research ideas.....

For internet sales:

- Trial different messages next to product images
- Recruit customers to participate in research and have delivery of labelled products

For in-store sales:

- Trial alternative health messages on product shelving
- Customers sign up to participate in research and have products purchased labelled by hand at check-out



Thank you!

Please visit us at:

www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur