

# OPHA Issue Series

## Controlling Physical Availability of Alcohol Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Ontario

### Facts

- Physical availability refers to how easy or convenient it is to buy or obtain alcohol through commercial or social outlets.
- In Ontario, alcohol is available for off-premise consumption through a mix of private and publicly-owned retailers including the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) and its Agency stores, The Beer Store, grocery stores, winery retail stores, ferment-on-premise facilities, liquor delivery services and alcohol manufacturers/manufacturer representatives.
- Alcohol availability increased by 22% between 2007 and 2017 in the province.<sup>i</sup>
- Research repeatedly shows alcohol-related problems increase as alcohol becomes more available.<sup>ii</sup> For example, increasing access to alcohol was found to be related to a range of alcohol-related harms such as pedestrian injuries, child maltreatment, and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>iii</sup> Controlling availability of alcohol is an effective strategy to decrease alcohol-related harms and costs.
- Across the country, 90% of Canadians live within 10 km of an alcohol retail outlet. Using this 10 km measure, the provinces where alcohol is most accessible are Ontario (95%), British Columbia (95%), Alberta (91%) and Quebec (89%).<sup>iv</sup>
- Compared to 2016-2017, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) in 2017-2018 issued 1,166 more liquor licenses (from 19,947 to 21,113 licenses) and 1,686 more special occasion permits (from 64,643 to 66,329 permits). Within those same years, the AGCO reported compliance inspections to be 25,379 for 2016-2017 and 20,755 for 2017-2018.<sup>v</sup>

### What Works

Proposed Policy	Rationale	Current Ontario Landscape
Restrictions on density of outlets  Recommended practice indicator: <sup>vi</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt; 2.0 <b>off-premise (retail)</b> outlets per 10,000 capita ages 15+</li> <li>• &lt; 2.0 <b>on-premise</b> outlets per 10,000 capita ages 15+</li> </ul>	An increase in the number of alcohol retail outlets results in an increase in alcohol consumption and related harms such as violence, assault, injuries and public disturbances. <sup>vii</sup>  The impact of outlet density on high-risk drinking is especially prominent among younger drinkers. <sup>viii,ix</sup>	Ontario has low outlet density for on-premise locations. <sup>vi</sup>  Retail alcohol availability increased by 22% between 2007 and 2017 in the province. <sup>x</sup>  As of 2018, more than 350 grocery stores sell beer and cider, including 70 that sell wine. Planned expansion to 450 grocery stores, which will add to the 450 Beer Stores and more than 660 LCBO stores. <sup>xi</sup> Increased availability of beer and wine in convenience stores is promised. <sup>xii</sup>

Proposed Policy	Rationale	Current Ontario Landscape
<p>Restrictions on hours and days of sale</p> <p>Recommended practice indicator: <sup>vi</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11am to 8pm for <b>off-premise</b></li> <li>• 11am to 1am for <b>on-premise</b> with no extensions</li> </ul>	<p>An increase in alcohol-related harms and heavy drinking are outcomes of increased hours and days of sale. <sup>xiii</sup></p> <p>Extended hours of sale attract a younger drinking crowd and result in higher Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) levels for males. <sup>xiv</sup></p>	<p><b>On-premise:</b> allowable hours for sales are Monday to Sunday 11am to 2 am. Licensees are permitted to extend hours of sale and service for special events (e.g., World Cup).</p> <p><b>Off-premise:</b> extended hours of sale in 2018 to 9am to 11pm seven days a week. Previously, Sunday hours were 11am to 6pm. <sup>xv</sup></p>
<p>Government monopoly of retail alcohol sale</p>	<p>Government outlets can be positioned within a strong health and safety mandate.</p> <p>Strong evidence shows privatizing alcohol sales leads to excessive drinking and increased harms. <sup>xvi</sup></p> <p>The rapid rise of private liquor stores in BC from 2003 to 2008 was associated with a significant increase in rates of alcohol-related death, especially in privatization areas. <sup>xvii</sup></p>	<p>The LCBO launched online sales in 2016.</p> <p>Using just the number of outlets as a measure, only about 23% of retail outlets are publicly owned in Ontario. <sup>vi</sup></p> <p>The Ontario government proposes to expand private sales to big-box stores and convenience stores. <sup>xi</sup></p> <p>Earmarked funding for prevention and/or health and safety messaging is not explicitly stated in the LCBO mandate. <sup>vi</sup></p>

## Recommendations

- Monitor and restrict the density of outlets based on population.
- Research the impact of new store locations and density changes.
- Research the impact of changes in hours and days of sale and adjust hours if there is a correlation with an increase in alcohol-related problems.

## Call to action for Ontario

- Conduct a formal review and impact analysis of the health and economic effects of alcohol in Ontario.
- Support and develop a provincial alcohol strategy.
- Bring all government ministries together to ensure health and safety implications are considered when developing new public policy or making changes to existing policies.

## Contact

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## What's Possible...

# A healthy alcohol culture supported by a comprehensive provincial strategy to reduce harm and costs.

<sup>i</sup> Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Evidence Exchange Network (EENet) (2018). [Alcohol availability in Ontario Infographic](#).

<sup>ii</sup> Babor, T., Caetano, R., Cassell, S., Edwards, G., Giesbrecht, N., Graham, K., Grube, J., Hill, L., Holder, H., Homel, R., Livingston, M., Osterberg, E., Rehm, J., Room, R., Rossow, I. (2010). *Alcohol no ordinary commodity: Research and public policy* (Second Ed.). New York, USA: Oxford University Press

<sup>iii</sup> Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Evidence Exchange Network (EENet), 2018. [Raising alcohol prices and decreasing availability reduces alcohol-related harms](#).

<sup>iv</sup> Statistics Canada (2018). [Access by Canadians to regulated liquor and cannabis retail outlets](#).

<sup>v</sup> Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (2018). [Annual Report 2017-2018](#).

<sup>vi</sup> Stockwell, T., Wettlaufer, A., Vallance, K., Chow, C., Giesbrecht, N., April, N., Asbridge, M., Callaghan, R.C., Cukier, S., Davis-MacNevin, P., Dube, M., Hynes, G., Mann, R., Solomon, R., Thomas, G., Thompson, K. (2019). *Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Canada: A Review of Provincial and Territorial Policies*. Victoria, BC: Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria.

<sup>vii</sup> Livingston, M. (2012). Implications of outlet density, type and concentration on alcohol consumption & harm. Seminar presentation, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, April 25, 2012

<sup>viii</sup> Popova, S., Giesbrecht, N., Bekmuradov, D. and Patra, J. (2009). Hours and days of sale and density of alcohol outlets: Impacts of alcohol consumption and damage: A systematic review. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 44 (5), 500-516

<sup>ix</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada (2018). [The chief public health officer's report on the state of public health in Canada: Preventing problematic substance use in youth](#).

<sup>x</sup> Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Evidence Exchange Network (EENet), 2018. [Alcohol availability in Ontario Infographic](#).

<sup>xi</sup> Government of Ontario (2018). [Beer, wine and cider sales in grocery stores](#).

<sup>xii</sup> Government of Ontario (2018). [Have your say: Alcohol choice and convenience for the people](#).

<sup>xiii</sup> Stockwell, T., & Chikritzhs, T. (2009). Do relaxed trading hours for bars and pubs mean more relaxed drinking? A review of international research on the impacts of changes to permitted hours of drinking. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 11(3), 153.

<sup>xiv</sup> Chikritzhs, T. and Stockwell, T. (2007) The Impact of Later Trading Hours for Hotels (public houses) on Breath Alcohol Levels of Apprehended Impaired Drivers. *Addiction*. Vol. 102, pp.1609-1917.

<sup>xv</sup> Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (2018). Info Bulletin No. 54: [Changes to Permitted Sunday Retail Sale Hours](#).

<sup>xvi</sup> Hahn, R. A., Middleton, J. C., Elder, R., Brewer, R., Fielding, J., Naimi, T. S., Toomey, T., Chattopadhyay, S., Lawrence, B., Campbell, CA. The Task Force on Community Preventative Services. (2012). Effects of alcohol retail privatization on excessive alcohol consumption and related harms: A community guide systematic review. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 42(4), 418.

<sup>xvii</sup> Stockwell, T., Zhao, J., Macdonald, S., Vallance, K., Gruenewald, P., Ponicki, W., Holder, H. and Treno, A. (2009, 2011, 2013), Impact on alcohol-related mortality of a rapid rise in the density of private liquor outlets in British Columbia: a local area multi-level analysis. *Addiction*, 106: 768-776