

OPHA Issue Series

Alcohol Marketing & Advertising Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Ontario

Facts

- Alcohol promotion contributes to the normalization of alcohol consumption, especially among youth.¹
- Exposure to alcohol marketing not only lowers the age of initiation but also increases the amount consumed by current drinkers.²
- Research indicates that the earlier that youth begin consuming alcohol the greater the likelihood of developing dependence or other alcohol related issues later in life.³
- Alcohol is promoted through a variety of media including television, radio, posters, billboards, transit ads, branded merchandise, sponsorship of sports and music events and social media.
- Non-traditional media, including social media allows for greater reach and targets vulnerable populations, including youth.
- Product pricing, development, packaging and design are also a means to attract specific segments of the population (e.g., youth, women).⁴

What Works

To effectively restrict alcohol marketing, population-based policies and interventions are required at all three levels of government, with the following actions feasible for implementation.⁵ A decrease in marketing and advertising would lead to a reduction in consumption, harms, and health and social costs.

Restricting Alcohol Marketing and Advertising: Proposed Policy, Rationale and Current Ontario Landscape		
Proposed Policy	Rationale	Current Ontario Landscape
Strengthen content restrictions (e.g., content appealing to youth). Reinstate federal mandatory pre-screening process. Improve the current complaints system to ensure a quicker and simpler process. Develop and implement a public health informed advertising standards code for alcoholic beverages. Create an independent panel of representatives to review the appropriateness of alcohol marketing and advertising.	Youths' intention to drink is affected by awareness of and liking alcohol advertising. Increased exposure to alcohol marketing/ advertising contributes to increased drinking among youth. ⁶	Alcohol advertisements must adhere to guidelines from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising Standards Canada • Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission • Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario Adherence to standards is self-regulated. Reviews are based on consumer complaint. Often, inappropriate advertising has been viewed publicly before it is removed.
Prohibit advertisement of price or other sale incentives by all alcohol retailers. ⁷	Reduced pricing increases alcohol consumption. ²	Regulations do not restrict the advertisement of price by off-premise outlets. ⁷

Encourage the provincial liquor board to reduce the volume of alcohol advertising it distributes. ⁷	Each additional dollar spent on advertising can result in a 3% rise in alcohol use. ²	Ontario has no restrictions on the quantity of alcohol advertising. There is an abundance of advertising that makes use of the LCBO logo and branding, often depicting sales and other marketing incentives such as customer loyalty programs. ⁷
Tighten restrictions on sponsorship, specifically banning corporate or brand identified scholarships or bursaries and other forms of sponsorship that target youth and young adults. ⁷	Infusion of alcohol marketing and advertising into youth events and interests normalizes alcohol among this population.	No restrictions exist on alcohol sponsorship. ⁷

- Establish stricter advertising standards for alcohol at the federal and provincial levels
- Prohibit alcohol advertising by price or other sale incentives
- Reduce the volume of alcohol advertising
- Tighten restrictions on alcohol sponsorships of youth events and interests

Call to action for Ontario

- Review existing advertising regulatory systems with a view to updating the standards
- 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

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