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.
- Regulating the physical availability of alcohol is an effective strategy to decrease alcohol consumption and related harms and costs.\(^1\)
- Research repeatedly demonstrates that consumption and related problems increase as alcohol becomes more available and vice versa.
- In Ontario, alcohol is available through a mix of private and publicly-owned retailers including the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) and its Agency stores, The Beer Store, Wine outlets, ferment-on premise facilities, liquor delivery services and alcohol manufacturers and manufacturer representatives.
- Using just the number of outlets as a measure, only about 26% of retail outlets are publicly owned.\(^2\)
- Alcohol is also available for purchase at over 17,000 licensed establishments (e.g., bars, restaurants) in Ontario.
- Additionally, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario issues over 60,000 special occasion permits which allow for the sale and service of alcohol at special events.\(^3\)

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<th>Proposed Policy</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Current Ontario Landscape</th>
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<td>Restrictions on density of outlets</td>
<td>An increase in the numbers of retail outlets for alcohol results in an increase in alcohol consumption and associated harms such as violence, assault, injuries and public disturbances.(^4) The impact of outlet density on high-risk drinking is especially prominent among younger drinkers.(^5)</td>
<td>Ontario recently expanded alcohol sales into “non-traditional” venues (e.g., Farmers’ Markets, hair salons). There is a current movement to modernize and expand alcohol sales in the province, and to increase market share for Ontario wines and craft beer.</td>
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<td>Restrictions on hours and days of sale</td>
<td>An increase in alcohol-related harms (e.g., impaired driving, injury, assaults, and disease) and heavy drinking are outcomes of increased hours and days of sale.(^6) Extended hours of sale attract a younger drinking crowd and result in higher Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) levels for males.(^7)</td>
<td>Regulated by province On-premise outlets 11am – 2 am (unless exemption granted for significant events) Retail outlets 9am – 11pm Mon – Sat and 11am – 6pm Sundays Days and hours of operation have expanded to enhance alcohol sales and tourism</td>
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Government monopoly of retail sales

There is strong evidence that privatization is correlated with increased excessive drinking and increased alcohol-related harms to society. 8

A rapid rise of private liquor stores in BC from 2003 to 2008 was associated with a significant local increase in alcohol-related deaths. 9

Despite occasional calls for privatization, the Ontario government remains firm in its commitment to maintain the LCBO and existing retail system in Ontario.

- Restrict the density of outlets based on population.
- Maintain the current LCBO monopoly on alcohol sales and resist pressures to privatize alcohol sales with density limits and guidelines that create a balanced approach to sales.
- Research the impact of changes in hours and days of sale at the LCBO and The Beer Store in the last 15 years and adjust accordingly if there is a correlation with an increase in alcohol-related problems.
- Research the impact of new store locations and density changes the LCBO has made in the past 15 years.

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

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