

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.
- 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

What Works

Controlling Physical Availability of Alcohol: Policy, Rationale and Current Ontario Landscape		
Proposed Policy	Rationale	Current Ontario Landscape
Restrictions on density of outlets	<p>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</p> <p>The impact of outlet density on high-risk drinking is especially prominent among younger drinkers.⁵</p>	<p>Ontario recently expanded alcohol sales into “non- traditional” venues (e.g., Farmers’ Markets, hair salons).</p> <p>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.</p>
Restrictions on hours and days of sale	<p>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</p> <p>Extended hours of sale attract a younger drinking crowd and result in higher Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) levels for males.⁷</p>	<p>Regulated by province</p> <p>On-premise outlets 11am – 2 am (unless exemption granted for significant events)</p> <p>Retail outlets 9am – 11pm Mon – Sat and 11am – 6pm Sundays</p> <p>Days and hours of operation have expanded to enhance alcohol sales and tourism</p>

<p>Government monopoly of retail sales</p>	<p>There is strong evidence that privatization is correlated with increased excessive drinking and increased alcohol-related harms to society.⁸</p> <p>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</p>	<p>Despite occasional calls for privatization, the Ontario government remains firm in its commitment to maintain the LCBO and existing retail system in Ontario.</p>
--	---	--

- 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

Ontario Public Health Association

www.opha.on.ca

1 (416) 367-3313

admin@opha.on.ca

@OPHA_Ontario

1. 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.
2. Giesbrecht, N., & Wettlaufer, A. (2013). *Reducing alcohol-related harms and costs in Ontario: A provincial summary report*. Toronto, Ontario: Centre for Addictions and Mental Health.
3. Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, 2012-2013. http://www.agco.on.ca/pdfs/en/ann_rpt/2012_13Annual.pdf (accessed on January 26, 2015)
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. Stockwell, T., Zhao, J., Macdonald, S., Vallance, K., Gruenewald, P., Ponicki, W., Holder, H. and Treno, A. (2011), 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.