

Preventing Alcohol Problems: International Best Practices

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**With a lot of help from my colleagues:
Alcohol, No Ordinary Commodity:
Research and Public Policy**

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Context:

Policy making in modern times

- EU Amsterdam treaty: economic considerations (e.g. free trade) will have to step back if public health interests are crucially implicated
- WHO tobacco framework convention
- Work of UN/WHO/World bank: health is crucial for economic development
- ☞ Public Health is important consideration for all policy
- ☞ Alcohol policy as part of public good

Context:

Alcohol epidemiology

- Alcohol is the third most important risk factor for burden of disease in established market economies like Canada

Tobacco **12.2 % (mainly lung cancer and CHD)**

Blood pressure 10.9 % (mainly CVD)

Alcohol **9.2 % (chronic disease and injury)**

- Alcohol is the most important avoidable risk for burden of disease in adolescents and young adults
- Alcohol entails considerable cost to Canadian society
- Alcohol is the most undervalued risk factor in the current public discussion in Canada

SETTING THE POLICY AGENDA

- Alcohol policies have been implemented throughout history to minimize the effects of alcohol on the health and safety of the population.
- The purpose of *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity* was to describe recent advances in alcohol research that have direct relevance to alcohol policy on the local, national, and international levels.

What is alcohol policy?

- Any purposeful effort or authoritative decision on the part of governments or non-government groups to minimize or prevent alcohol-related consequences.
- Policies may involve the implementation of a specific strategy with regard to alcohol problems (e.g., increase alcohol taxes), or the allocation of resources that reflect priorities with regard to prevention or treatment efforts.
- Policies that unintentionally increase harm should also be examined, in order to provide insight into the public health risks associated with ill-advised policy decisions.

Prevention and Intervention Strategies Evaluated

- Regulating Physical Availability
- Pricing and Taxation
- Altering the Drinking Context
- Education and Persuasion
- Regulating Alcohol Promotion
- Drinking-Driving Countermeasures
- Treatment and Early Intervention

Ratings of 31 policy-relevant revention strategies and interventions

- 1) Evidence of Effectiveness^a – the quality of scientific information
- 2) Breadth of Research Support^a – quantity and consistency of the evidence
- 3) Tested Across Cultures^a, e.,g. countries, regions, subgroups
- 4) Cost to Implement and Sustain^b – monetary and other costs

^aRating Scale: 0, +, ++, +++, (?)

^b Rating Scale: Low, Moderate, High

Pricing and taxation

Strategy or Intervention	Effective-ness	Research Support	X-Cultural Testing	Cost	Target Group
Alcohol Taxes	+++	+++	+++	Low	General Population

Regulating Physical Availability

Strategy or Intervention	Effectiveness	Research Support	X-Cultural Testing	Cost	Target Group
Total ban on sales	+++	+++	++	High	General Population
Minimum legal purchase age	+++	+++	++	Low	High Risk Group
Rationing	++	++	++	High	General Population
Government monopoly of retail sales	+++	+++	++	Low	General Population
Hours and days of sale restrictions	++	++	++	Low	General Population
Restrictions on density of outlets	++	+++	++	Low	General Population
Server liability	+++	+	+	Low	High Risk Group
Different availability by alcohol strength	++	++	+	Low	General Population

Regulating the Availability Alcohol

Availability refers to the accessibility or convenience of obtaining and consuming alcoholic beverages.

Research on limiting alcohol availability demonstrates that:

- reductions in the hours and days of sale, numbers of alcohol outlets, and restrictions on access to alcohol are associated with reductions in both alcohol use and alcohol-related problems.
- Laws that raise the minimum legal purchasing age reduce alcohol sales and problems among young drinkers.
- Regulations directed at commercial vendors who sell to minors and ignore other restrictions can be effective, if the system can suspend or revoke a license
- Making available and promoting beverages of low alcohol content has the potential to reduce the level of absolute alcohol consumed and associated intoxication and impairment.
- Government-owned alcohol outlets (i.e., off-premise monopoly systems) can limit alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems
- Extreme restrictions (e.g., total prohibition) can lower drinking and reduce alcohol problems, but often have adverse side effects, such as the criminality associated with illicit markets

Modifying the Drinking Context

Strategy or Intervention	Effective-ness	Research Support	X-Cultural Testing	Cost	Target Group
Outlet policy to not serve intoxicated patrons	+	+++	++	Moderate	High Risk Group
Training bar staff and managers to prevent and better manage aggression	+	+	+	Moderate	High Risk Group
Voluntary codes of bar practice	O	+	+	Low	High Risk Group
Enforcement of on-premise regulations and legal requirements	++	+	++	High	High Risk Group
Community mobilization	++	++	+	High	General Population

Drinking-Driving Countermeasures

Strategy or Intervention	Effectiveness	Research Support	X-Cultural Testing	Cost	Target Group
Sobriety check points	++	+++	+++	Moderate	General Population
Random breath testing (RBT)	+++	++	+	Moderate	General Population
Lowered BAC Limits	+++	+++	++	Low	General Population
Administrative license suspension	++	++	++	Moderate	Harmful Drinkers
Low BAC for young drivers (“zero tolerance”)	+++	++	+	Low	High Risk Group
Graduated licensing for novice drivers	++	++	++	Low	High Risk Group
Designated drivers and ride services	O	+	+	Moderate	High Risk Group

Education and Persuasion

Strategy or Intervention	Effective-ness	Research Support	X-Cultural Testing	Cost	Target Group
Alcohol education in schools	O	+++	++	High	High Risk Group
College student education	O	+	+	High	High Risk Group
Public service messages	O	+++	++	Moderate	General Population
Warning labels	O	+	+	Low	General Population

Regulating Alcohol Promotion

Strategy or Intervention	Effectiveness	Research Support	X-Cultural Testing	Cost	Target Group
Advertising bans	+	+	++	Low	General Population
Advertising content controls	?	O	O	Moderate	General Population

Best Practices

- Minimum legal purchase age
- Government monopoly of retail sales
- Restriction on hours or days of sale
- Outlet density restrictions
- Alcohol taxes
- Random breath testing
- Lowered BAC limits
- Administrative license suspension
- Graduated licensing for novice drivers
- Brief interventions for hazardous drinkers

Extraordinary Opportunities

The research base is strong, presenting opportunities:

- To make choices rationally.
- To combine rationally selected strategies into an integrated overall policy.
- To implement policies at multiple levels.
- To strengthen public awareness and support.
- To enhance international collaboration in the response to alcohol.