

## Safer Alcohol Sales Policies

Where and how alcohol is sold plays an important role in family safety. Neighborhoods that have fewer alcohol stores experience significantly less crime. When communities have smart policies and practices around alcohol sales, we keep everyone safer — and physically and mentally healthier — by reducing excessive drinking and related violence.

### The Alcohol and Violence Challenge

- Alcohol is responsible for approximately 178,000 deaths per year in the U.S., including more than 7,000 homicides.<sup>1</sup>
- Neighborhoods with high concentrations of alcohol sales are linked to an increase in individual drinking habits — including young people binge drinking<sup>2</sup> — and higher rates of violence<sup>3-5</sup> and driving under the influence.<sup>6</sup>
- Multiple studies have found that more homicides, aggravated assaults, sexual assaults, and robberies are committed in areas with more alcohol outlets.<sup>3-5</sup>
- Alcohol outlets are more likely to be located in low-income neighborhoods, despite the fact that alcohol consumption rises with income, and in majority non-white communities.<sup>7</sup>

### A Healthy Solution: Safer Alcohol Sales

- **Reduces violence** — By limiting the density of alcohol outlets, research suggests that cities can reduce alcohol-related violence<sup>8</sup> and binge drinking.<sup>2,9</sup>
- **Falls within city authority** — Most cities have the authority to limit, suspend, revoke, or deny liquor or business licenses that can affect the number and location of outlets that sell alcohol. Cities can also use other local powers (such as zoning) to affect a wide range of service practices and activities in or near alcohol outlets.
- **Makes communities safer** — By taking straightforward actions, such as limiting hours and days during which alcohol sales are permitted or requiring minimum distances between alcohol outlets and sensitive land uses (like schools and parks), cities can help make neighborhoods safer for everyone.

## What is the Evidence that Safer Alcohol Sales Can Improve Health?

- The Community Preventive Services Task Force, the CDC's expert advisory group on what works best in public health, found strong evidence that limiting alcohol outlet density, often done through local powers such as zoning and licensing, can reduce excessive alcohol consumption and related harms.<sup>10</sup>
- When Atlanta policymakers intentionally decreased the availability of alcohol in the city's Buckhead neighborhood by 3% from 2003 to 2007, researchers compared the outcomes to those in similar Atlanta neighborhoods. While overall crime went down across the city, Buckhead's drop in crime was two times greater than the decrease in comparable neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup>
- Reducing opening hours among the most common type of alcohol outlet in one neighborhood of Baltimore led to an immediate 14% drop in violent crime and a 29% annual decrease in violent crime, compared to similar neighborhoods in the city.<sup>11</sup>

## How Can Safer Alcohol Sales Policies Help Address Health Disparities?

- Multiple studies have found that, despite the fact that alcohol consumption rises with income,<sup>12,13</sup> alcohol outlets are more likely to be located in low-income neighborhoods and in neighborhoods whose residents are predominantly people of color.<sup>14-17</sup>
- Researchers have explored a variety of explanations for why alcohol outlets are clustered in certain neighborhoods, and the reason that stands out statistically is the long history of racially discriminatory lending practices – known as redlining – by private and public lenders that stigmatized neighborhoods of color and subjected them to decades of disinvestment.<sup>7,18</sup>
- Conversely, reducing the number of alcohol outlets in these neighborhoods could lessen the level of risk residents face from violence on a daily basis, as was found in the Atlanta and Baltimore studies.<sup>8,11</sup>

## What Are Some Future Issues to Consider?

The role of alcohol in health and safety is often overlooked. Alcohol is the drug most commonly used by young people,<sup>19</sup> and on average each year, almost 4,000 people under 21 die because of alcohol use.<sup>1</sup> Many cities already have substantial alcohol-related laws on their books, and dedicated funding for enforcement of such laws has been shown to make them more effective in reducing related problems.<sup>20</sup> Cities can also take action to restrict alcohol advertising on billboards and retail establishments within their borders, as numerous long-term studies have linked exposure to alcohol marketing with a greater likelihood of underage drinking.<sup>21,22</sup> Finally, the U.S. Surgeon General and the CDC's Hi-5 Initiative,<sup>23,24</sup> which identifies cost-effective policies proven to improve community health within five years, both recommend increased

taxes on alcohol as an evidence-based strategy to improve public safety and reduce the risks associated with alcohol abuse and misuse. Some U.S. cities already have the authority to institute higher excise taxes as a means to discourage excessive alcohol consumption, especially among underage youth.<sup>25</sup>

## Resources for Cities

United States Surgeon General's Advisory on Alcohol and Cancer Risk:

<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/alcohol-cancer/index.html>

*Strategizer 55* - Regulating alcohol outlet density: An action guide. Alexandria: Community for Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA); Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY), Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; 2011.

[https://wwwapp.bumc.bu.edu/BEDAC\\_Camy/docs/resources/reports/alcohol-availability/strategizer-55-regulating-alcohol-outlet-density.pdf](https://wwwapp.bumc.bu.edu/BEDAC_Camy/docs/resources/reports/alcohol-availability/strategizer-55-regulating-alcohol-outlet-density.pdf)

ChangeLab Solutions. Alcohol Outlet Density; An evidence-based strategy to reduce alcohol consumption and related harms. <https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/alcohol-outlet-density>

ChangeLab Solutions. Status of Local Authority to Regulate Alcohol Outlet Density.

<https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/status-local-authority-regulate-alcohol-outlet-density>

Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. Preemption Tool: What can my community do about alcohol outlets?

[https://wwwapp.bumc.bu.edu/BEDAC\\_Camy/ResearchToPractice/Place/AlcoholOutletDensity/PreemptionDataTool](https://wwwapp.bumc.bu.edu/BEDAC_Camy/ResearchToPractice/Place/AlcoholOutletDensity/PreemptionDataTool)

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