

Evidence-Based Strategies to Prevent Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Related Harms

Background

Excessive alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States (Mokdad et al., 2004), and results in an average of more than 80,000 deaths in the U.S. each year (CDC, 2012a). More than half of these deaths are due to binge drinking, defined as consuming 4 or more drinks for women or 5 or more drinks for men on an occasion (CDC, 2012a). Excessive alcohol consumption also increases the risk of many other health and social problems, including motor vehicle crashes, interpersonal violence, heart disease, cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, and birth defects (CDC, 2012b). Furthermore, excessive drinking was responsible for \$223.5 billion in economic costs in 2006, or approximately \$1.90 a drink (Bouchery et al., 2011).

Strategies

The Community Preventive Services Task Force [recommends](#) several strategies to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms. These strategies are based on systematic reviews of the scientific evidence on intervention effectiveness.

[Increasing Alcohol Taxes](#) has been shown to reduce alcohol-related harms in addition to raising revenue. Alcohol taxes are implemented at the state and federal levels, and are beverage-specific (i.e., they differ for beer, wine and spirits). These taxes are usually based on the amount of beverage purchased (not on the sales price), so their effects can erode over time due to inflation if they are not adjusted regularly.

[Regulation of Alcohol Outlet Density](#) is defined as applying state, county, city, or other type of governmental control to reduce or limit the number of places that can legally sell alcohol within a given area. Regulation is often implemented through licensing or zoning processes. An alcohol outlet is a place where alcohol may be legally sold for the buyer to drink there or elsewhere.

[Dram Shop Liability](#) laws set out circumstances in which alcohol retail establishments may be held accountable for injuries or harms caused by underage or intoxicated customers who were served alcohol. Some states impose restrictions on dram shop liability laws by capping the amount of compensation allowed in suits, requiring more evidence to demonstrate responsibility, or imposing statutes of limitation.

[Maintaining Limits on Days of Sale](#) prevents excessive alcohol consumption and related harms by regulating access to alcohol. Most policies target weekend days (usually Sundays), and they may apply either to alcohol outlets in which alcohol may be legally sold for the buyer to drink at the place of purchase (on-premises outlets, such as bars or restaurants) or to outlets in which alcohol may be sold for the buyer to drink elsewhere (off-premises outlets, such as liquor stores). In the United States, policies may be made at the state level and local level, where not prohibited by state pre-emption laws.

[Maintaining Limits on Hours of Sale](#) also prevents excessive alcohol consumption and related harms by regulating access to alcohol. Policies may apply to on- or off-premises alcohol outlets. They may be made at the state level and local level, where not prohibited by state pre-emption laws.

Enhanced Enforcement of Laws Prohibiting Sales to Minors initiates or increases the frequency of retailer compliance checks for laws against the sale of alcohol to minors. These “sting operations” are conducted by or coordinated with local law enforcement or alcohol beverage control (ABC) agencies. Violators receive legal or administrative sanctions. Programs are often conducted as part of multicomponent, community-based efforts. Many include strategies to increase perceived risk of detection by publicizing the increased enforcement activities and cautioning proprietors against selling alcohol to minors.

Electronic Screening and Brief Interventions (e-SBI) to reduce excessive alcohol consumption use electronic devices (e.g., computers, telephones, or mobile devices) to facilitate the delivery of key elements of traditional screening and brief intervention. At a minimum, e-SBI involves screening individuals for excessive drinking, and delivering a brief intervention, which provides personalized feedback about the risks and consequences of excessive drinking. Delivery of personalized feedback can range from being fully automated, to interactive. At least one part of the brief intervention must be delivered by an electronic device. Interventions can be delivered in various settings, including health care systems, universities, or communities.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force **recommends against**

Privatization of Retail Alcohol Sales—is the repeal of state, county, city, or other type of governmental control over the retail sales alcohol, which allows commercial retailing. States with government control of alcohol sales are referred to as *control* states, and states with privatized sale are referred to as *license* states. The privatization of retail alcohol sales generally applies only to off-premises alcohol outlets and does not generally affect the retail sales of alcoholic beverages at on-premises alcohol outlets.

The Task Force and Community Guide

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based findings and recommendations about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) is an independent, nonfederal, unpaid panel whose members are appointed by the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Task Force bases its findings and recommendation on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. These reviews are conducted, with oversight from the Task Force, by scientists and subject matter experts from CDC in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners. The reviews and the Task Force findings and recommendations are compiled in The Community Guide.

Visit www.thecommunityguide.org for more information about these and other strategies to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms, including interventions to reduce alcohol-impaired driving.

References

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Mokdad AH, Marks JS, Stroup DF, Gerberding JL. Actual causes of death in the United States, 2000. *JAMA* 2004;291(10):1238–45.