

FACT SHEET

Alcohol - Liquor Policy Review and Health Impacts

ISSUE

Of the 78 recommendations contained in the *BC Liquor Policy Review: Final Report*, 18 are directly targeted at reducing the health harms from alcohol consumption.

KEY FACTS

- Alcohol remains the most widely-used psychoactive substance in the province, with close to 80% of British Columbians reporting drinking in the past year¹.
- While alcohol brings pleasure to many, its use is also associated with a number of health and social problems, including acute harms related to intoxication (e.g., overdose, injury, and violence) and harms resulting from long-term chronic use (e.g., certain cancers, cardiovascular diseases, and liver disease).
- Alcohol causes almost 10% of the total burden of illness in BC and Canada².
- Between 2002-2011, over 188,000 hospital admissions in BC were due to alcohol, a significant driver of health system costs³. Of these admissions, approximately 12,000 were children and teens.
- Although the impact of a depressed economy has slowed the rise in overall consumption, alcohol-related hospitalizations are still increasing, and are projected to overtake tobacco-related hospitalizations in 2016⁴.
- In Canada the top three causes of death due to alcohol are malignant cancers, digestive diseases, and intentional injuries⁵; as a group, chronic diseases account for over 70% of all deaths due to alcohol in Canada⁶.
- Alcohol generates approximately \$1 billion in annual revenue for the provincial government⁷; however, its use also puts a significant burden on society and the economy through direct costs associated with the health care and criminal justice systems, and indirect costs involving lost productivity and social disruption.
- In 2002, the last year for which cost data are available, the direct costs of alcohol-related harms exceeded the direct revenue to the BC government by \$65 million⁸.
- The global evidence base indicates that the existence of legislation and regulations for alcohol (e.g., pricing, controls on availability) contributes to reducing alcohol-related injuries, chronic diseases, and dependence.
- The government has already committed to reducing alcohol-related harms through *Healthy Minds, Healthy People: A 10-Year Plan to Address Mental Health and Substance Use in British Columbia* (HMHP).

¹ Health Canada. (2012). Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey. Accessed on September 23, 2014 from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/stat/2012/tables-tableaux-eng.php#t7>.

² Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse & Health Canada. (2007). Reducing Alcohol Related Harm in Canada: Toward a culture of moderation. Accessed on January 30, 2015 from: <http://www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/ccsa-023876-2007.pdf>.

³ BC Alcohol and Other Drug Monitoring Project. Number of Alcohol Attributable Hospital Admissions in BC, 2002-2011. Accessed on January 30, 2015 from: <http://www.carbc.ca/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=2tdD4uQOpZM%3d&tabid=90&mid=775>.

⁴ Ministry of Health Services, Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2010). *Healthy Minds, Healthy People: a 10-year plan to address mental health and substance use in British Columbia*. ISBN 978-0-7726-6358-0.

⁵ Shield, K., Kehoe, T., Taylor, B., Patra, J., Rehm, J. Alcohol-attributable burden of disease and injury in Canada 2004. *Int J Public Health*. (2012); 57(2): 391-401.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lavaughn Larson, Manager Marketing & Social Responsibility, Liquor Distribution Branch, BC Ministry of Justice, personal communication, September 30, 2014.

⁸ Thomas, G., Stockwell, T., Zhao, J., Reist, D., Martin, G., Zeisser, C. Alcohol Price Policies in British Columbia: Options for Reducing Alcohol-Related Health and Social Harms. Prepared for the British Columbia Ministry of Health, November 2011.

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- Of the six milestones in HMHP, two are related to alcohol: reducing hazardous drinking, and delaying initiation of drinking by young people. Both milestones have been met ahead of schedule.
- On January 31, 2014, the Ministry of Justice released the *BC Liquor Policy Review: Final Report*, which contains 73 recommendations to modernize liquor policy in the province based on extensive public consultation⁹. The dominant theme is a balanced approach to protecting public health and safety while streamlining regulations and convenience.
- While the absolute moratorium on the number of liquor sales outlets in the province will be maintained as recommended by the Ministry of Health and others, implementing some of the Liquor Policy Review's recommendations may lead to a modest increase in availability, due to eased restrictions on licensing, Special Occasion Licences, and permitting alcohol sales in more public venues.
- There is a robust body of research evidence that indicates that alcohol-related problems and costs increase when alcohol becomes more physically or economically available¹⁰.
- The impact of availability increases on population health should be offset by implementation of recommended and accepted pricing measures (minimum prices announced in June, 2014, and volumetric pricing - tying the price to the concentration of pure alcohol in the product – details yet to be announced).
- The Ministries of Health and Justice are working together to implement key recommendations in the category of Health, Safety, and Social Responsibility of the Liquor Policy Review. These include:
 1. Expanding public education about health and safety risks related to alcohol use, with particular emphasis on the harmful effects of binge drinking by youth and post-secondary students.
 2. Identifying and focusing all of Government's alcohol education initiatives.
 3. Providing easily understood information about Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines to consumers in licensed establishments and liquor stores.
 4. Expanding and enhancing Serving it Right, the provincial government's responsible beverage service program.
 5. Developing an in-person educational program to educate licensees and their staff about the Province's liquor laws and how to operate their establishments in a responsible manner.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

Approved by:

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⁹ BC Ministry of Justice. *BC Liquor Policy Review: Final Report*. Accessed on September 23, 2014 from: http://www2.gov.bc.ca/local/haveyoursay/Docs/liquor_policy_review_report.pdf.

¹⁰ Babor, T. F., Caetano, R., Casswell, S., Edwards, G., Giesbrecht, N., Graham, K., Grube, J., Gruenewald, P., Hill, L., Holder, H., Homel, R., Osterberg, E., Rehm, J., Room R., and Rossow, I. (2010). *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity. Research and Public Policy*. 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press.