



## 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, and results in an average of more than 79,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. Excessive alcohol consumption also increases the risk of many health and social problems, including motor vehicle crashes, interpersonal violence, high blood pressure, sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancy.

### Strategies

The Task Force on Community Preventive Services 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.

**Dram Shop Liability** is intended to reduce illegal alcohol sales to minors and overservice to patrons who are intoxicated. This policy holds the owner or server of a retail alcohol establishment legally responsible for harms inflicted by a customer (e.g., the injury or death of the occupant of another motor vehicle struck by the customer) due to illegal beverage service prior to the event (e.g., service to someone who was already intoxicated). The extent of this liability can vary across states. In fact, some states impose restrictions on dram shop liability by capping the amount of compensation allowed in suits, by increasing the evidence required to demonstrate responsibility, or by imposing statutes of limitations.

**Increasing Alcohol Taxes** affects the price of alcohol, and reduces alcohol-related harms, raises revenue, or both. Alcohol taxes are implemented at the state and federal level, 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.

**Maintaining Limits on Days of Sale** aims to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms by regulating access to alcohol. Most policies target weekend days (usually Sundays), and they may apply 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 elsewhere (off-premises outlets, such as liquor stores). In the United States, policies may be made at the state level and, where not prohibited by state pre-emption laws, at local levels.

**Maintaining Limits on Hours of Sale** also is intended to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms by regulating access to alcohol. Approaches may include maintaining existing limits or expanding current limits on hours of sale. Policies may apply to on- or off-premises alcohol outlets. They may be made at the state level and, where not prohibited, by state pre-emption laws at local levels.

**Regulation of Alcohol Outlet Density** is defined as applying regulatory authority to reduce alcoholic beverage outlet density or to limit the increase of alcoholic beverage outlet density. 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. Density refers to the number of alcohol outlets in a given area.

**Maintaining Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) Laws** involves supporting legislation that specifies an age below which the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages are not permitted. MLDA laws have been shown to reduce alcohol-related crashes and associated injuries among 18- to 20-year-old drivers. All states currently have an MLDA of 21 years.\*

**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, and violators receive legal or administrative sanctions. Programs are often conducted as part of multicomponent, community-based efforts, and many include strategies to increase perceived risk of detection by publicizing the increased enforcement activities and cautioning proprietors against selling alcohol to minors.

### **What is the Guide to Community Preventive Services (Community Guide)?**

The Community Guide is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations and findings about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services (Task Force) -- an independent, nonfederal, volunteer body of public health and prevention experts -- makes these findings and recommendations based on systematic reviews of scientific literature conducted under the auspices of the Community Guide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides ongoing scientific, administrative and technical support for the Task Force.

**\*Visit [www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org) for more information on these and other strategies to prevent excessive alcohol consumption and related harms, including interventions to reduce alcohol-impaired driving.**