

Municipal Alcohol Policy in Ontario: A Public Health Approach

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction produced this profile in collaboration with partners to highlight how provinces and territories assist municipalities to develop or update municipal alcohol policies. Municipal alcohol policies are one element of a comprehensive approach to alcohol policy to encourage a culture of safety and moderation, which is a recommendation of Canada's [National Alcohol Strategy](#).

Ontario Definition of a Municipal Alcohol Policy

A municipal alcohol policy (MAP) is a civic policy tool that aligns with provincial liquor laws and outlines the appropriate use of alcohol on municipally owned or managed property such as parks, beaches, arenas, sport stadiums and community centres.

"MAPs are part of a comprehensive approach to alcohol policy. They aim to support existing provincial alcohol policies, and build on them to tailor the policy landscape to the local context."

Municipal Alcohol Policies and Public Health: A Primer

Goal

The goal of the Ontario MAP is to manage the drinking environment and to encourage moderate, responsible consumption by changing social norms in the community (Douglas, Rylett, Narbonne-Fortin, & Gliksman, 1999; DePape, Leonard, Pollet, & Heughan, 1995).

Developing and enforcing a MAP demonstrates a community's commitment to safe environments (Public Health Ontario, 2015).

Why MAP Is Important

Communities tend to be unaware of the public health concerns that are associated with alcohol and to underestimate its public impact (Barclay & Wonnacott, 2012). Alcohol is a popular legal substance that plays a role in the social and leisure activities of many Ontarians (Gliksman, Douglas, Rylett, & Narbonne-Fortin, 1995), but high-risk alcohol consumption is a public health concern due to its harmful effects (National Alcohol Strategy Working Group, 2007). The need to manage alcohol at the municipal level is seen as a means of mitigating acute harms such as injury, violence, crime and motor vehicle crashes (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health & Public Health Ontario, 2013). MAPs can help to address a social culture that accepts binge drinking by shifting it towards a culture of moderation (Barclay, & Wonnacott, 2012).

Community members and legislators often assume that addressing high levels of drinking is the responsibility of the individual (Gliksman et al., 1995). However, creating a culture of moderate drinking begins with the community as a whole (Barclay & Wonnacott, 2012), and relies on community collaboration. Municipalities have a role in developing, implementing, enforcing and refining the policy.



MAPs are one part of a comprehensive approach to alcohol policy. To maximize the impact of MAPs on alcohol-related harms, communities should include in them a combination of population-based and targeted policies and interventions (Canadian Public Health Association, 2011; World Health Organization, 2010). Population-based policies include management of alcohol pricing and physical availability, along with advertising and marketing. Targeted policies include anti-drinking and driving initiatives, practices that alter the drinking context, and early interventions and educational tools that promote positive behaviour change (Canadian Public Health Association, 2011).

Ontario Policy and Trends

Ontario alcohol sales are regulated at the provincial level and consist of a mixed private and government-run retail system. There are two main channels of alcohol sales in Ontario: 1) off-premise outlets that sell packaged alcohol products for consumption off site; and 2) on-premise licensed establishments that sell alcohol products for consumption on site.

In recent years, there have been a number of regulatory changes that have led to the relaxation of alcohol policies in Ontario (Giesbrecht et al., 2013). For example, the type of businesses that are permitted to apply for alcohol licences has been expanded to include salons, barbershops, cafes, movie theatres and book stores (Giesbrecht & Wettlaufer, 2013). Also, the way alcohol is sold at community events and festivals has changed with such events no longer required to serve alcohol exclusively in beer tents (Giesbrecht et al., 2013). Finally, the retailing of alcohol in Ontario is changing with wine sales now permitted at farmer's markets and, most recently, beer sales expanded to grocery stores (Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, 2014, 2015).

Ontario supports MAPs by:

- Including MAP as a public health policy within the Ontario Public Health Standards
- Encouraging public health staff to work with communities to implement MAP
- Funding the development of practical MAP resources and educational opportunities by Public Health Ontario

Harms related to alcohol are recognized by the Ontario's Injury Prevention Resource Centre in *Addressing Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Harms at the Local Level* (2014) and in Ontario's mental health strategy, *Open Minds, Healthy Minds* (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2011). Ontario is preparing the release of a comprehensive strategy specific to alcohol in 2017. Such a strategy has been recommended through position papers and resolutions from a variety of groups, including the Ontario Public Health Association and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, to help create awareness and guide both provincial and local action. A similar process was undertaken through the creation of the tobacco strategy in Ontario, which increased public awareness of the dangers of smoking and second-hand smoke. In turn, this increased the public's acceptance and demand for smoke-free spaces and policies (Tobacco Strategy Advisory Group, 2010). A similar path of progress is an aim for alcohol policy, where the development of a comprehensive strategy can lead to legislative acts.

The Ontario Approach

Ontario has a history of MAP development since 1995 when the article, *Reducing Problems Through Municipal Alcohol Policies: The Canadian Experiment in Ontario*, highlighted that MAPs could reduce problems associated with excessive and inappropriate alcohol use (Gliksman et al., 1995). In 2003, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health produced *The Municipal Alcohol Policy Guide* (Narbonne-Fortin, Rylett, Douglas, & Gliksman, 2003), which contains suggestions for developing and implementing an effective MAP along with a grading criterion to assess the strength of policies.



In Ontario, regional boards of health are responsible for implementing the Ontario Public Health Standards, legislative requirements for public health units to develop and implement healthy public policies, including MAPs (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2008). Public health staff are encouraged to work with community stakeholders to implement MAPs throughout the province.

As a health promotion initiative, a MAP can assist in creating a healthier community and forge community collaborations. Public Health Ontario recently produced *Municipal Alcohol Policies and Public Health: A Primer* (2016), a resource that provides an eight-step process for developing and updating MAPs for health promotion and public health practitioners working with community partners.

Successes and Challenges

Public Health Ontario conducted an environmental scan in 2014–2015 to provide a snapshot of MAP implementation throughout the province. Results show that 53% of municipalities in Ontario (236 of 444) have an approved MAP (Public Health Ontario, 2015). The common themes that emerged from this scan related to successes and challenges in MAP development are summarized below.

Successes

1. Collaboration and engagement between public health units and municipalities;
2. Utility of MAP resources such as templates, models, guides and fact sheets;
3. Effective introduction of MAP development and updates through educational events such as workshops and information sessions;
4. Benefit of consulting with external experts; and
5. Concerns of liability from municipalities and businesses.

Challenges

Public health units indicated that a major challenge with MAP development and upkeep were issues of their human resource capacity, such as lack of training and knowledge, and high staff turnover. Related to this challenge was a lack of co-operation and collaboration among municipalities and public health units.

Lessons Learned in Ontario

Public health units play a key role in working with communities to develop and implement MAPs. The challenges identified by the MAP environmental scan can be mitigated through:

1. Involvement and collaboration of public health units with other stakeholders;
2. Workshops and information sessions led by public health units with municipalities;
3. Workshops provided to businesses that serve alcohol; and
4. Use of existing resources or MAPs from other organizations and other public health units to increase knowledge about MAPs.

Prepared in collaboration with Public Health Ontario



Selected Ontario Resources

Municipal Alcohol Policies and Public Health: A Primer

An in-depth look at Ontario alcohol policy to offer instruction and guidance on developing MAPs; based on a revised version of an evidence-based eight-step framework.

- www.publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/MAPs_Primer.pdf

The Municipal Alcohol Policy Guide

A practical resource to guide from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health for developing a comprehensive MAP.

- www.camh.ca/en/education/about/services/camh_library/Documents/Repository%20of%20OCAMH%20Documents/MAP_PolicyGuide.pdf

Making the Case: Tools for Supporting Local Alcohol Policy in Ontario

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health provides support for developing and implementing MAPs, capacity building to foster awareness, and access to evidence-based resources to underscore the need for Ontario local action on alcohol-related harms.

- www.camh.ca/en/hospital/about_camh/provincial_systems_support_program/Documents/Making%20the%20Case%20Tools%20for%20Supporting%20Local%20Alcohol%20Policy%20in%20Ontario.pdf

Evaluating Municipal Alcohol Policies

Presentation by B.C. Health Communities, B.C. Ministry of Health and Public Health Ontario.

- www.publichealthontario.ca/en/LearningAndDevelopment/Events/Documents/View%20presentation.pdf

Provincial Municipal Alcohol Policy (MAP) Scan: Summary of Findings from a Public Health Unit Survey

In 2015, Public Health Ontario conducted a scan of municipal alcohol policies by way of a survey of public health units in Ontario. Public health unit representatives provided information on MAPs in their area and the status of any existing MAPs.

- www.publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/MAP_Scan_Report.pdf



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