

Controls on Alcohol Outlet Location and Density

What is alcohol outlet location/density and how is it controlled?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Alcohol outlet density regulation 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 (on-premises outlets, such as bars or restaurants) or elsewhere (off-premises outlets, such as liquor stores). Density refers to the number of alcohol outlets in a given area.”¹

How do controls on alcohol outlet location/density reduce underage drinking and its consequences?

Areas with higher alcohol outlet density have higher levels of heavy drinking and alcohol-related problems, including violence, crime, alcohol-involved traffic crashes, and injuries. Thus, reducing the density of alcohol outlets should result in fewer drinking-related problems.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (N.D.). Preventing excessive alcohol consumption: Regulation of alcohol outlet density. Guide to Community Preventive Services.

Research suggests that college students, for example, tend to drink more frequently and heavily and experience more alcohol problems when alcohol outlets are located within 2 miles of campus. Geographic buffer zones between an alcohol establishment and a youth-related area reduce the youth access to alcohol by making it less prevalent in their immediate environment.

How can my community take this action?

Take the following steps to reduce alcohol outlet density:

Assess alcohol density in your community, with special attention to density near schools and other youth-related areas. Work with community members to survey and map the number and locations of alcohol outlets in the targeted area or contact your State’s licensing board or local alcohol licensing authority for the locations of the alcohol licenses in the community.

Ascertain the rate of alcohol-related problems in the community, with an emphasis on drinking and driving, public intoxication, and alcohol-related violence and crimes. Based on the type of community problem, develop a local plan to control the density of alcohol-related outlets.

Recruit institutions responsible for establishing, maintaining, and enforcing compliance with zoning regulations within the community.

Use your findings to develop a local plan to control the density of alcohol-related outlets. Your plan might, for example, create geographic buffer zones of approximately 1,000 feet between alcohol outlets and schools, playgrounds, other youth facilities, and residential neighborhoods or promote conditional use permits that require alcohol establishments to meet minimal agreed-upon conditions in order to continue operating, such as conducting responsible beverage service training.

Build community support for controls on alcohol outlet location and density from merchants, other community members, and law enforcement. Conduct activities to show the link between the density of

alcohol outlets in the community and the rate/type of alcohol-related problems.

Measure and report successful outcomes. Some objective measures of the effectiveness of reduced alcohol outlet density are:

- ▶ Increased distance between alcohol outlets and between an alcohol outlet and a youth-related facility or area;
- ▶ Reductions in the number of alcohol-related crimes and other problems (e.g., alcohol-related crashes) in a targeted area;
- ▶ Decreased rates of underage drinking; and
- ▶ Decreased number of calls to law enforcement complaining of incidents related to specific alcohol outlets or near alcohol outlets.

Resources Supporting Action

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Task Force on Community Preventive Services, *Recommendations for Reducing Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Harms by Limiting Alcohol Outlet Density*, from <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/RecommendationsReducingExcessiveAlcoholConsumptionAlcohol-RelatedHarmsLimitingAlcoholOutletDensity.pdf>.

CDC, *The Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit*, from http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Preventing Underage Drinking Using the SAMHSA Strategic Prevention Framework and Getting To Outcomes® To Achieve Results*. Check the SAMHSA Store at <http://store.samhsa.gov> for availability. This publication includes planning, implementation, and outcome evaluation tools related to controls on alcohol outlet location and density.

SAMHSA, *Focus on Prevention*, from <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA10-4120/SMA10-4120.pdf>.