

Ensuring Safer Drinking Environments

Some of the key factors in addressing alcohol-related harm involve “context” or the conditions in which alcohol is being consumed (i.e., where, when, how and why alcohol is being served). In two important ways, municipal governments can help improve the safety conditions of public drinking environments.

1. Regulate public special-occasion events

Without careful management of public festivities that include drinking, these celebrations can lead to various harms associated with excessive consumption. Provincial regulations should be augmented by local initiatives in an effort to better protect people in attendance from getting sick, having an accident, experiencing violence or causing trouble for others.

Municipal governments can

- ☑ Get familiar with BC regulations pertaining to special occasion licences (public and private)
 - learn the rules regarding liquor distribution
 - understand the *Serving It Right* program
- ☑ Craft a special events policy regarding alcohol
 - list community venues and events where alcohol can (or cannot) be served
 - outline management practices that must be followed prior to and during an event
 - specify prevention strategies to be employed in conjunction with an alcohol-serving event
 - describe enforcement procedures and penalties for non-compliance
 - provide details regarding signage required to accent safety measures
- ☑ Develop a plan for strengthening community support for the local policy and for evaluating its ongoing effectiveness
- ☑ Ensure hosts of special occasions are aware of their policy and licensing obligations
 - develop and distribute a policy handbook
- ☑ Improve quality control at alcohol-serving events
 - require that an authorized municipal representative be present at a special event to monitor compliance, administer enforcement and report results

Penticton learned a lot from Wakefest 2007, where event-goers went on a free-for-all at local nightclubs, leading to 150 people being arrested and more than 200 people receiving liquor-related tickets. Penticton's municipal government made a series of in-depth changes to their alcohol policy in preparation for hosting Wakefest in 2008. These changes included putting \$50,000 toward additional policing during the event, scheduling the event at the end of June instead of during busy summer months, and shutting down festivities at 7:00 pm each day instead of at 10:00 pm.

Source: *Vancouver Province*. March 13, 2008.

Some questions to consider

- ? Has the event host fulfilled all commitments for necessary arrangements beforehand?
- ? Are any additional precautionary measures appropriate for a given event?
- ? Is there enough event management staff to preside over all alcohol-related proceedings? Are they adequately prepared to deal with alcohol-related issues?
- ? Are stipulated harm prevention strategies in place?

The most rigorous model for implementing special events regulations can be found in the Municipal Alcohol Policy (MAP) program developed in Ontario. A guide has been drawn up to facilitate its adoption by communities. It can be ordered from ORFA (Ontario Recreational Facilities Association), a partner with CAMH (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health) in constructing and publishing that tool. The most recent report from BC's Provincial Health Officer recommends that the MAP thrust be considered for application in BC (Kendall, 2008, pp. 39, 47).

2. Improve on-premise venues

The risk of harm to patrons increases in alcohol-serving establishments that lack safety regulations and feature few prevention measures. Reducing harm, therefore, may require improving the conditions of alcohol-serving outlets such as bars, pubs, nightclubs and restaurants.

Municipal governments can

- Make sure design standards are rigorous enough to reduce the likelihood of alcohol-related harm
 - interiors are well-lit, well-ventilated, with clear accessible pathways and exits to avoid congestion
 - washrooms are adequately sized and clean
 - comfortable seating arranged on multiple levels to facilitate monitoring by staff and customers
 - tempered glassware
 - exteriors have ample lighting, security cameras, and clean clear sidewalk space that provides enough room for relaxed line-ups
- Collaborate with alcohol-serving establishments
 - develop mutual agreements on a common code of practice and a commitment to shared public safety strategies among outlets
 - encourage outlets to provide high quality entertainment, suitable food options, alternative beverages (low-strength beer, soft drinks and water) at lower cost, free non-alcoholic drinks for designated drivers, and safe-ride assistance
 - encourage and support on-premise establishments in implementing the *Safer Bars* program, which can help staff diffuse volatile situations and avert violence
 - seek agreement on how increased visible police presence might help to enhance security at certain time slots or in special situations
- Collaborate with provincial inspectors and local police
 - develop a plan to help inspectors and local police ensure that service standards and other requirements (e.g., not allowing overcrowding) are met in an ongoing manner
 - consider using police-sanctioned “pseudo-patrons” to check adherence to prohibitions concerning minors

- work together with police, emergency personnel and LCLB inspectors to establish joint action in collection, sharing and follow-up of information regarding place of “last drink” when addressing alcohol-related risks and damages (e.g., driving while impaired or violent incidents)

Some questions to consider

- ? What has our municipality done to encourage licensed establishments to mutually assume greater responsibility for providing safer drinking environments?
- ? How has our municipality shown leadership in working with other stakeholders (e.g., police, health, LCLB) to respond to alcohol-related episodes in the community?

A substantial measure to lower the likelihood of harm in alcohol-serving outlets is the provincial imposition of the responsible beverage service program *Serving it Right*. The primary focus of the program is to discourage sales and service to minors, and to those either approaching or already at a stage of intoxication. It also aims to guide staff further in fulfilling duty of care to impaired patrons. Besides a training component for staff, the program provides direction for management, since managerial support is crucial for continuing staff compliance with service standards. Even more decisive is external monitoring and enforcement (Stockwell, 2010; Babor et al., 2010).

The LCLB administers the program through the agency of *go2* (the human resources association for BC tourism) and conducts regular inspections of existing licensed premises, with a published process for dealing with alleged contraventions (of service and other obligations) and exercising enforcement penalties. This arrangement allows local police and municipal governments to register concerns about non-compliance with regional inspectors and be part of a meeting speaking to that complaint (if one is held at a stage before a more formal enforcement hearing).

Grande Prairie's Safe City Nights Program is based on the idea that increasing police presence on certain occasions saves money and lives in the long run. A pilot program in 2004, Safe City Nights was so successful that it is now a permanent tool used to reduce inappropriate behaviours in and around Grande Prairie's late-night bars and night clubs.

Source: City of Grande Prairie. 2005 *State of the City Address*.

Steps to Success

How is Our Community Doing?

- We have a well-designed special events policy that is adhered to for all events at which alcohol is served
- Our design standards for facilities serving alcohol incorporate all features recognized as generally conducive to a safer drinking experience
- We do regular enforcement checks to monitor compliance with service standards
- Service staff regularly participate in on-premise violence prevention training
- We have developed voluntary agreements among licensees to publicly commit to specific measures that contribute to a safer experience in their premises
- A partnership of relevant public services exists, with the goal of working together to prevent and respond to incidents of harm arising from drinking in licensed establishments

Resource links:

Liquor Control and Licensing Branch (LCLB). Available at: www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/lclb/branch/index.htm

What everyone should know about BC's liquor laws. Available at: www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/lclb/LLinBC/basics.htm

Role of Local Government and First Nations in the Provincial Liquor Licensing Process. Available at: www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/lclb/docs-forms/PSSG-LocalGovt-Fst-Nation.pdf

Special occasion licence. Information available at: www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/lclb/apply/special/index.htm

Municipal Alcohol Policy Guide. Order form available at: <http://orfa.com/orfaoldweb/MAP/MAP%20Guide.pdf>

Serving it Right. Information available at: www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/lclb/LLinBC/serving_it_right.htm. Program site: www.servingitright.com

Safer Bars. Information available at: www.camh.net/Publications/CAMH_Publications/safer_bars_program.html

Reference material:

Babor, T., Caetano, R., Casswell, S., Edwards, G., Giesbrecht, N., Graham, K. et al. (2010). *Alcohol: No ordinary commodity. Research and public policy* (2nd ed.) (pp. 147-163). New York: Oxford.

BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information (2009). *Tips for a Safe Night Out*. Available at: www.heretohelp.bc.ca/sites/default/files/images/safenightout.pdf

Graham, K. & Homel, R. (2008). *Raising the Bar: Preventing Aggression in and Around Bars, Pubs and Clubs* (pp. 197-205). UK: Willan Publishing.

Graham, K., Osgood, D.W., Zibrowski, E., Purcell, J., Gliksman, L., Leonard, K. et al. (2004). The effect of the Safer Bars program on physical aggression in bars: Results of a randomized control trial. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 23(1), 31-41.

Kendall, P.R.W. (2008). *Public health approach to alcohol policy: An updated report from the Provincial Health Officer*. Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport. Available at: www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2008/alcoholpolicyreview.pdf

Stockwell, T. (2010). *Operator and regulatory best practices in the reduction of violence in and around licensed premises: A review of Australian and Canadian research*. Centre for Addictions Research of BC, University of Victoria. Available at: www.carbc.ca/Portals/0/PropertyAgent/2111/Files/29/Alcohol&Violence1004.pdf

This is the second in a series of tools designed to help Municipal Governments reduce the harm related to alcohol. The complete resource is available at: <http://carbc.ca/HelpingCommunities/HelpingMunicipalGovernments.aspx>

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Funding for this resource was provided by the Ministry of Health Services. The views expressed, however, are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the Ministry.



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