

Limiting Alcohol Advertising

Promotion of alcohol through advertising and sponsorships leads to increased consumption and added toll on public well-being. Communities can take action to mitigate this adverse impact.

1. Pursue local regulation

Municipal governments can

- ☑ Limit local advertising
 - impose constraints on the number of approved advertising locations
 - limit overall amount of advertising
 - define maximum size of signage
 - define appropriate content
- ☑ Approve and apply restrictions on civic events
 - limit sponsorship by alcohol industry interests
 - reduce publicity that draws attention to drinking opportunities
- ☑ Discourage “cheaper alcohol” sales
 - encourage drinking establishments to avoid offering drink deals (e.g., discounts on certain days/times, lower prices for larger-sized servings)

Some questions to consider

- ? Do we recognize the alcohol industry as contributing to the culture and economy of the community, but also recognize the need to limit marketing in view of the potential for harm?
- ? What impression does our current stance on advertising give the public? That alcoholic beverages are widely and readily available, hugely popular, a central feature of social interaction and a care-free commodity? Or that alcohol is a legitimate contributor to festivity (though not indispensable for it) but also a drug that must be managed with care?
- ? Do we enforce Liquor Control and Licensing Branch (LCLB) requirements on local advertising, supplemented by demands reflecting our concern to give drinking a modest, not major, profile?
- ? Do we have a shared sense of public responsibility to discourage excessive consumption?

Marketing has a strong impact on alcohol consumption. Greater exposure to alcohol promotion (including advertising) increases the likelihood of initiation and heavier drinking, among youth in particular (Anderson et al., 2009; Hastings et al., 2005; Collins et al., 2007). Studies show that the provision of cheaper alcohol attracts consumers and leads to faster, heavier drinking and, consequently, elevated harms. An appeal to retail outlets to reject such marketing (and perhaps also align with other safety-supporting measures) should indicate how such a stance can enhance the profile of their operation as one where patrons drink sensibly and are unlikely to engage in behaviour that disrupts or harms others.

2. Support counter-advertising

Municipal governments can

- ☑ Promote a balanced outlook on drinking
 - avoid messaging that gives the impression drinking is more common and popular than it actually is
 - resist coming across as averse to alcohol (demonizing it can unwittingly make it more attractive)
 - avoid being so information-heavy as to seem humourless, dull and boring
 - reject a simplistic stance on questions that suggests arbitrariness and artificiality
 - avoid scare tactics (playing on fear can desensitize the audience, hinder reflection and reduce efficacy)
- ☑ Reach out to young people
 - develop communication products that engage youth by demonstrating care and concern for their health, appreciation of their culture and respect for their capacity to make good choices
 - recognize them as contributing participants in community life
- ☑ Use a variety of communication tools including traditional and new media

Some questions to consider

- ? Have we been able to strike a balance in our messaging around alcohol, reflecting both an appreciation for social benefits and concerns about harms?
- ? Have we addressed common expectancies, motivations and situational prompters for drinking, and shown awareness of issues around them? Have we proposed realistic alternatives?
- ? Have we offered considerations favouring non-use and protective behavioural strategies that serve to reduce risk and experience of harm?
- ? Do we consciously try to undermine a common but artificial and unhelpful dissociation between what is really true and what is truly fun in connection with drinking?

Locally financed counter-promotion will always be at a real disadvantage to marketing conducted by the alcohol industry in view of the enormous disparity in available funding. The industry's affluence has allowed it to do sophisticated research and analysis on factors that deliver appeal and influence behaviour.

Various streams of messaging that run in the opposite direction to the huge waves of promotion endorsing use of alcohol will not off-set the full force of those tidal currents. But persistent strategic communication that aims at being an engaging reality check can at least serve as a meaningful counterpoint. Initiatives to encourage critical reflection on commercial "selling" tactics can be useful too (as opposed to thinly disguised militant vendettas that simply condemn rather than illuminate and motivate).

3. Appeal for healthier alcohol advertising practices in the wider context

This can be done by seeking more consistent application of existing general codes and by supporting adoption of more robust regulations.

Municipal governments can

- ☑ Report problems to Advertising Standards Canada (ASC)
 - file complaints about advertising examples that fall short of CRTC and BC code standards, particularly those that make drinking attractive to underaged youth, suggest enhanced status by drinking the product or imply alcohol is necessary to enjoy an event

- ☑ Request new national standards related to
 - volume or quantity of advertisements allowed
 - places and types of media in which advertising can be carried out
 - time slots in which it is permitted on television (in order to cut down on youth exposure)
 - content that is permissible in promoting the product
 - health messages that need to be included
 - internet marketing of alcohol under the auspices of Canadian-based operations

France's Évin Law, introduced in 1991, prohibits alcohol advertising in all media apart from specified exemptions (which exceptions do not include television, cinemas and sponsorships of cultural and sports events). Print, radio and billboard promotion is permitted under certain conditions and confined to information about the product (e.g., origin, concentration of alcohol, means of production). Instead of appealing images of drinkers and drinking environments, a health warning about the danger of misuse is attached.

Some questions to consider

- ? Do we encourage consumers to question alcohol sales pitches?
- ? Have we expressed dissatisfaction with the pervasiveness of alcohol advertising, given the harmful consequences of such massive exposure?
- ? Have we protested the largely one-sided nature of alcohol advertising by producers, which gives little recognition of harmful outcomes for various inappropriate patterns of use (not only those associated with severe dependence)?

Media advertising is subject to federal stipulations, with provincial regulations also applying to various forms of alcohol promotion. There is opportunity at both federal and provincial levels for public complaint to be registered over perceived non-compliance with official standards, though there are limitations in access to information about the extent of such complaints and enforcement response to them (Kendall, 2008). At the national level, alcohol advertising generates a sizable portion of complaints, and though most may not be upheld, they often prompt sponsors to withdraw offending ads (NASWG, 2007).

National regulations in Canada do not address the issue of amount of alcohol advertising allowable, but there is precedent in other jurisdictions for more encompassing restrictions, and precedent in the tobacco domain to indicate the value of more rigorous measures on marketing.

Steps to Success

How is Our Community Doing?

- We have strong regulations limiting public alcohol advertising around our community
- We have a policy restricting alcohol-interest sponsorship of local civic events
- We have a consensus among our on-premise suppliers not to offer price specials on alcoholic drinks
- We collaborate with a variety of stakeholders in promoting messaging that engages the public about the risks associated with alcohol use and encourages collective and individual responsibility in avoiding harm
- We provide leadership in protesting the problematic promotion of alcohol and seeking healthier marketing practices

Resource links

Liquor advertising (LCLB). Information available at: www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/lclb/LLinBC/advertising.htm

Code for Broadcast Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages. www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/GENERAL/CODES/ALCOHOL.HTM

Advertising Standards Canada. Available at: www.adstandards.com

ASC Alcoholic Beverage Advertising Clearance Guide. Available at: www.adstandards.com/en/Clearance/AlcoholicBeverages/ASCAcoholicBeverageAdvertisingClearanceGuide.pdf

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This is the fourth 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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