

Advocating to Other Levels of Government

Other levels of government have jurisdiction over certain policy responses to harmful alcohol use. But local governments can contribute by voicing the concerns and opinions of their collective and individual constituents, especially when it comes to policy stances that greatly affect them.

1. Appeal to provincial government

Pricing is perhaps the best attested factor for widespread impact on levels of alcohol consumption and related harms. Making alcohol less affordable would achieve substantial reductions on both counts, even among heavier drinkers, with net fiscal benefit to the larger public and greater safety for all. Local government can appeal for changes to pricing policy and also encourage provincial authorities to improve public safety and well-being in other ways.

Municipal governments can ask the provincial government to

- Make alcohol less affordable
 - assign a socially relevant minimum price per standard drink (annually updated to correspond to the rate of inflation)
 - adjust pricing mark-ups (within different beverage classes) to create marketing and purchasing incentives for lower-strength products and disincentives for higher-strength products
 - direct a portion of any increased revenues from such measures to fund other effective initiatives responding to alcohol-related concerns
- Enhance certification requirements for management and staff of licensed venues
 - make the *Safer Bars* violence prevention training program a mandatory element of certification, along with *Serving it Right*
 - require recertification in *Serving it Right* at five year intervals
- Maintain the moratorium on private liquor store licences, with no reliance on them to succeed government-operated stores
- Impose mandatory liability insurance on licensees
- Increase monitoring of licensed establishments
 - allocate funding for more frequent inspection of drinking venues to further deter the serving of patrons who are underage or nearing intoxication

Some questions to consider

- ? What avenues are open for multiple expressions of concern and appeal to the provincial government? How effectively have we used these different routes to communicate concerns and request action?
- ? What indications can we give the provincial government of our commitment to do our part in supporting such initiatives? How well have we scored in regard to positive stances the province has already taken?
- ? How rigorous are our own efforts to reduce alcohol-related harms?

The purchase price of alcohol for consumers relative to their overall income has shrunk considerably over time, while consumption and alcohol-associated costs for British Columbians (among other Canadians and constituencies around the globe) have gone up. Municipal governments can communicate their desire for the province to implement pricing policies aimed at reducing immoderate use, recognizing that periodic heavy drinking by people who usually drink moderately causes a sizable portion of alcohol-related harm (Kendall, 2008; Thomas et al., 2009; Segal & Stockwell, 2009; NASWG, 2007; Stockwell, Zhao & Thomas, 2009; Wagenaar et al., 2009; Elder et al., 2010; Babor et al., 2010).

Actions taken in the other areas enumerated above would contribute to safer drinking environments (Kendall, 2008; Stockwell, 2010; Stockwell et al., 2009; Babor et al., 2010). Advocacy for such measures should demonstrate familiarity with the issues and specific advantages of proposals rather than just broad sentiment in their favour.

In the fall of 2010, the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) unanimously endorsed a resolution calling for a provincial pricing strategy that would give greater incentive for the production, promotion and consumption of lower strength alcoholic beverages within the different classes of drinks. This active civic consensus came in response to a proposal from the BC Coalition for Action on Alcohol Reform, picking up on recommendations issued in 2008 by BC's Provincial Health Officer and further in 2009 by University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions Research of BC (CARBC). Source: Vancouver Sun, October 6, 2010.

2. Appeal to federal government

Municipal governments can ask the federal government to

- Introduce random compulsory breath testing nationwide
- Carry out various strategies in the national alcohol strategy
 - promote low-risk drinking guidelines
 - introduce standard drink labelling on beverage containers
 - provide adequate funding for extension of the alcohol and other drug monitoring initiative
 - support community health prevention initiatives around alcohol concerns
 - enhance public consciousness of alcohol's contribution to chronic disease
- Limit the amount and extent of alcohol advertising through more comprehensive legislation and enforcement

Some questions to consider

- ? What vehicles are there for multiple expressions of concern and appeal to the federal government? How effectively have we used these channels to communicate concerns and request action?
- ? What indications can we give the federal government to show both our commitment to current initiatives and contribution to practical implementation?
- ? What leadership have we shown to address alcohol-related issues under our own jurisdiction?

Random breath testing, when conducted in a visibly consistent fashion (as in Europe, New Zealand and especially Australia), is recognized internationally as one of the most effective strategies to reduce harms from impaired driving, a front on which Canada's progress has been somewhat stalled (Babor et al., 2010; Elder et al., 2002; Pursell et al., 2009; Solomon et al., 2009).

Actions in some of the other areas mentioned above are complementary to other efforts and can contribute to the cultivation of a climate of more careful consumption that would cut down considerably on casualties and costs (Kendall, 2008; NASWG, 2007; Babor et al., 2010).

Steps to Success

How is Our Community Doing?

- We have identified alcohol-related issues in our community and understand the jurisdictional responsibilities of the various levels of government
- We have addressed those concerns lying within our jurisdiction
- We have demonstrated support for sound initiatives taken by other levels of government
- We are committed to being a constructive critic and partner in the implementation of strong alcohol policies and have made positive proposals to other levels of government

Resource links:

Union of BC Municipalities. Available at: www.ubcm.ca

Alcohol Policy Network, Ontario Public Health Association. Available at: www.apolnet.ca

MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) Canada. Available at: www.madd.ca

Reference material:

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Stockwell, T., Zhao, J. & Thomas, G. (2009). Should alcohol policies aim to reduce total alcohol consumption? New analyses of Canadian drinking patterns. *Addiction Research and Theory*, 17(2), 135-151.

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This is the sixth 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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