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Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Alberta:

A Provincial Summary Report

Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Alberta: A Provincial Summary Report

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Centre for Addictions Research of BC

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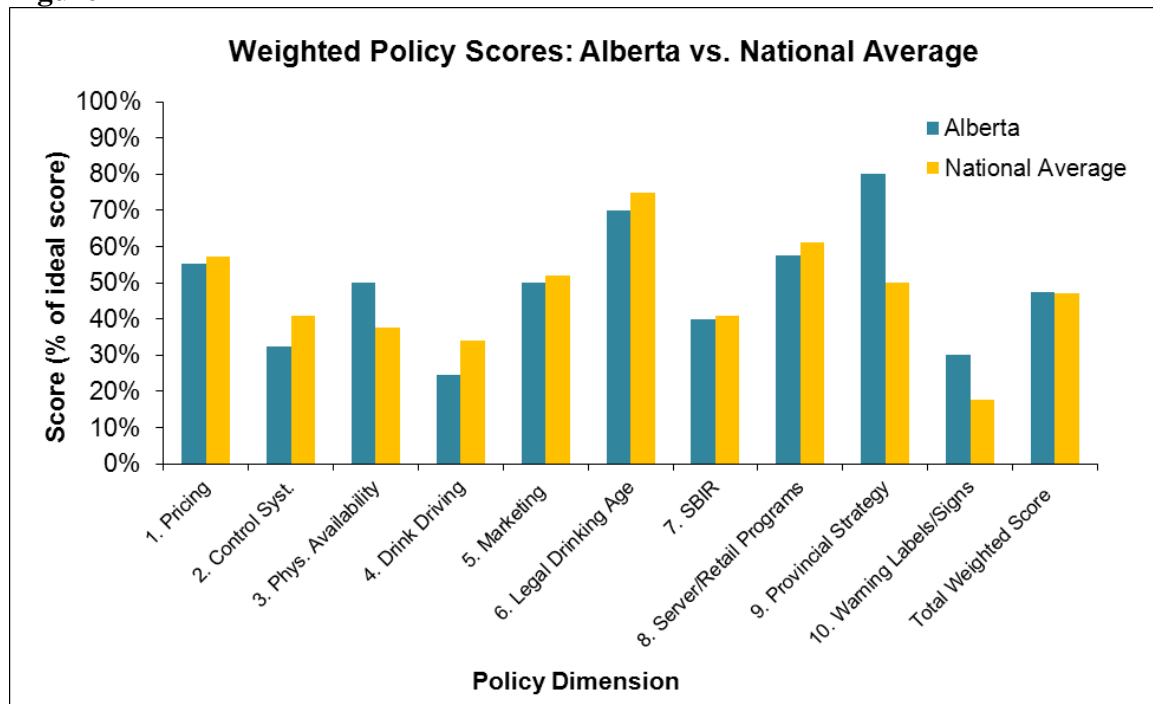
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Overview

- This report briefly summarizes the current state of alcohol policy in Alberta (AB) from a public health and safety perspective based on a comprehensive national study¹.
- Alberta’s alcohol policy strengths and weaknesses are highlighted in comparison with other provinces and specific recommendations for improvement provided.
- Ten alcohol policy dimensions were selected based on rigorous reviews of the effectiveness of prevention measures and weighted by their potential to reduce harm and reach the populations at risk. Data were collected from official sources and verified when possible by relevant agencies.
- Alberta ranked **5th** overall with **47.4%** of the ideal score, but it fared relatively poorly on some of the more important policy dimensions of pricing, regulatory controls and drinking and driving as well as server training. There remains much unrealized potential for improving public health and safety outcomes by implementing effective alcohol policies in Alberta (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



¹ Giesbrecht, N., Wettlaufer, A., April, N., Asbridge, M., Cukier, S., Mann, R., McAllister, J., Murie, A., Plamondon, L., Stockwell, T., Thomas, G., Thompson, K., & Vallance, K. (2013). Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Canada: A Comparison of Provincial Policies. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Highlights of Recommendations

(Listed in order of potential for impact on harms and costs)

Pricing: Introduce minimum prices of at least \$1.50 per standard drink in all off-premise outlets. Adjust alcohol prices to keep pace with inflation and to reflect alcohol content

Control System: Consider implementing a moratorium on issuing licenses for new private liquor retail outlets. Reduce access to alcohol through other channels such as online sales and home delivery services. Increase spending on social responsibility messaging

Physical Availability: Restrict outlet density based on population and reduce the hours of sale for on and off-premise establishments

Drinking and driving: Implement all drinking and driving countermeasures recommended by MADD Canada, such as strengthening the Graduated Licensing Program, licensing suspensions and vehicle impoundment programs while also increasing administrative sanctions for new drivers

Marketing and advertising: Restrict the number of alcohol advertisements and introduce a formal complaint process for advertising violations

Legal drinking age: Increase the legal drinking age to 19 years of age.

Screening and Brief Intervention and Referral (SBIR): Support physicians by providing SBIR guidelines and fee for service codes for SBIR activities

Server Training, Challenge and Refusal: Require training for all staff at licensed venues and events; ensure programs use evidence-based practices with outcome evaluations and track challenge and refusals in all outlet types

Provincial alcohol strategy: Continue to implement alcohol specific policies and initiatives outlined in the Alberta Alcohol Strategy

Warning labels and signs: Implement mandatory warnings on alcohol containers and in all liquor outlets; include clear evidence-based information such as the low-risk drinking guidelines

Introduction

This bulletin reports on the current state of alcohol policies in Alberta (AB) from a public health and safety perspective using results from a comprehensive national study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research¹. Alberta's alcohol policy strengths and weaknesses are highlighted in comparison with other provinces and specific recommendations for improvement are provided. The objective of this project is to encourage greater uptake of these practices and thereby improve public health and safety in Canada.

Alcohol is widely consumed and enjoyed by many Albertans. Alcohol sales increased by 5.7% between 2011 and 2012 with more than two billion dollars' worth of beer, spirits and wine sold in the province last year alone (Stats Can, 2013). However, alcohol consumption also contributes to substance-related injuries and overdoses, violence and the development of many chronic diseases (e.g., pancreatitis, cirrhosis, ulcers, several cancers). Alcohol also has many second-hand effects with 1 in 3 Canadians reporting experiencing harm from someone else's drinking (Giesbrecht, Cukier, Steeves, 2010). Furthermore, the rate of alcohol-related deaths in Alberta increased from 6.11 per hundred thousand people in 2006 to 7.19 per hundred thousand people in 2009 (Alberta Vital Stats, 2013). Extensive international and national research has pointed to alcohol policies, regulations and control practices as being central to controlling and reducing the harm from alcohol and its associated costs to society. This report summarizes the current state of alcohol policy in Alberta relative to best practices and to other Canadian provinces. It highlights current policy strengths in Alberta and points to opportunities where further actions can be undertaken and which policies can be modified or enhanced.

Methods

The Alberta specific data in this report were collected as part of a national study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (Principal Investigator: Norman Giesbrecht). The 10 policy dimensions central to this project were selected based on rigorous reviews of the literature. Data was collected systematically from official sources and verified by representatives from the relevant ministries whenever possible. Each of the 10 policy dimensions were comprised of several scaled indicator measures (tabulated to obtain a raw score out of 10), and were weighted according to its potential both to reduce harm from alcohol and to reach the populations at risk. This study builds on the model implemented by MADD Canada in which the provinces are regularly rated on best practices to reduce impaired driving. A more detailed report of the national study is available at: http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/reports_and_books/Pages/default.aspx. The results of this study presented below are in order of potential impact on reducing alcohol related harms and costs.

Results

1. Pricing

Summary: Alberta was ranked sixth out of the 10 provinces on the extent to which alcohol pricing policies were assessed as consistent with public health objectives. Systematic reviews identify alcohol pricing as having the strongest evidence of effectiveness. Increasing the price of alcohol reduces alcohol consumption (Stockwell et al., 2012) and alcohol-related harm at the population level (Wagenaar, Salois & Komro, 2009; Babor et al., 2010). Strong pricing policies include (1) setting minimum prices on alcoholic beverages to reduce economic availability of cheap alcohol, (2) regularly adjusting alcohol prices to keep pace with the cost of living to prevent alcohol from becoming cheaper relative to other goods over time, and (3) setting prices based on alcohol content to encourage consumption of lower alcohol content beverages.

National Ranking: Pricing			Score breakdown for Pricing	
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /20	Indicators	Score
1	SK	15.26	a. Minimum Pricing	1.8/4
2	NS	14.56	b. Indexation to inflation	2.5/4
3	NB	13.54	c. Pricing on alcohol content	1.2/2
4	NL	13.00		
5	MB	11.90		
6	AB	11.06		
7	PEI	10.26		
8	ON	9.50		
9	BC	9.46		
10	QC	6.00	Total	5.5/10

Promising Practices: Alberta has minimum prices for all beverage categories sold in on-premise outlets and the average minimum price is relatively close to the recommended ideal of \$3.00 per standard drink recommended by the project team (average on-premise minimum price of products of typical strength and volume in Alberta = \$2.53 per standard drink) (see Figure 2).

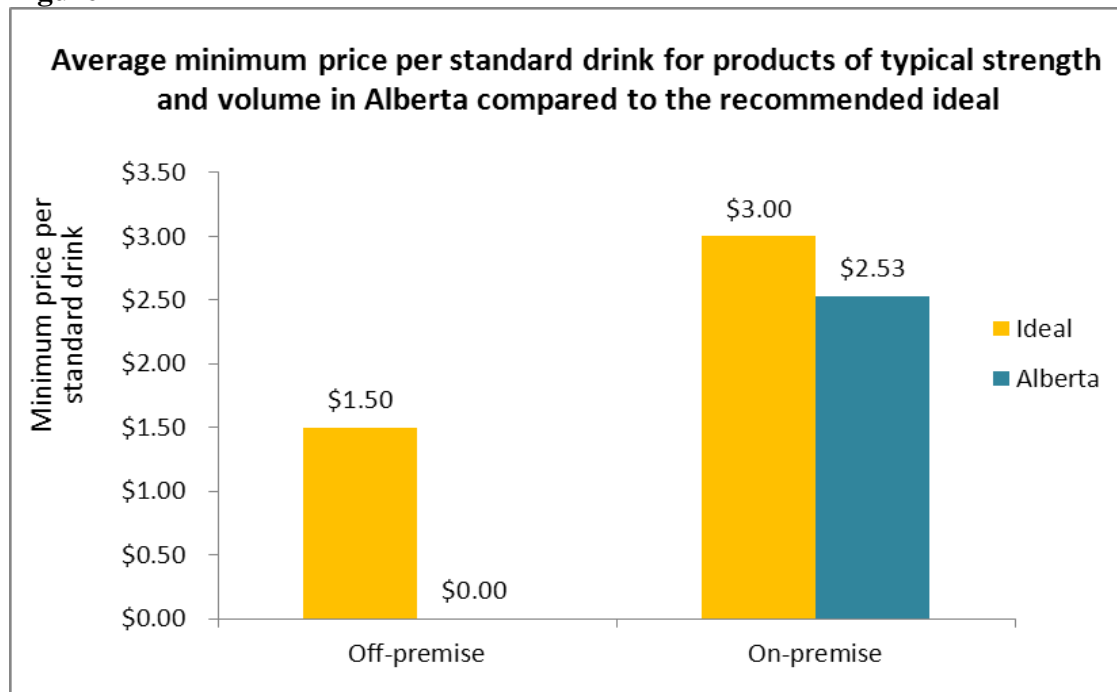
Areas for improvement: Alberta is meeting just over half of its potential for effective pricing policy. Most importantly, Alberta currently does not set minimum prices for purchase of alcohol at off-premise liquor stores. While average beer prices have kept up with inflation, the price of spirits and wine has been falling below inflation since 2006 and Alberta does not automatically index prices to inflation. Further, Alberta's pricing

structure does not take into consideration alcohol content, meaning many higher strength products may be cheaper per standard serving than lower strength products.

Recommendations:

- Set minimum prices for alcohol sold in off-premise liquor stores to at least \$1.50 per standard drink
- Increase minimum prices for alcohol sold in on-premise outlets to \$3.00
- Adjust alcohol prices at least annually to keep pace with inflation
- Adjust prices for alcohol content to make higher strength products more expensive

Figure 2



2. Alcohol Control System

Summary: Alberta was ranked seventh among the 10 provinces on this important indicator. In addition to the type of retailing system, important elements of an effective control system include restricting the sale alcohol beyond on-premise and off-premise outlets (i.e., on-line shopping and ferment on premise outlets where customers can make their own wine and beer products), maintaining a balance between social responsibility and product promotion, and aligning liquor retail and control under a ministry that is concerned with the health and safety costs of alcohol. Maintaining a government-controlled alcohol monopoly is associated with reduced alcohol consumption and related harms and facilitates the implementation of other evidence-based policies, such as social responsibility messaging (Babor et al., 2010; Stockwell, Zhao, Macdonald, et al, 2009). Alberta has a system of private retail outlets which increases the number of access points for alcohol and creates some challenges for implementing other evidence-based policies.

National Ranking: Alcohol Control System		
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /15
1	NB	9.38
2	PEI	8.63
3	NS	7.88
4	MB	7.50
5	ON	6.00
6	SK	5.63
7	AB	4.88
8	QC	4.50
9	NL	4.50
10	BC	2.25

Score breakdown Alcohol Control System	
Indicators	Score
a. Type of Retail System	0/4
b. Alcohol sales beyond on-premise and off-premise outlets	0.5/2
c. Emphasis on Social Responsibility	2.8/3
d. Ministry Responsible for alcohol control	0/1
Total	3.3/10

Promising Practices: The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC), the government agency responsible for administering the Gaming and Liquor Act and its regulations and related policy, places strong emphasis on social responsibility messaging. There have been extensive social responsibility campaigns targeting a number of different demographic groups such as pregnant women and young adults and social responsibility messages are disseminated many ways including: posters, pamphlets, print advertising, TV/radio advertisements and online.

Areas for Improvement: Alberta reached only a third of its potential for effective control system policy. Alberta’s relatively poor score on this dimension is a reflection of the following: (1) 100% of retail outlets in Alberta are privately owned; (2) alcohol is available through various additional private channels including liquor delivery services, online sales and ferment at home kits, which increase the number of alcohol access points. The province’s Treasury Board and Finance Ministry currently oversees alcohol retail and control, which does not have health and safety as a primary mandate.

Recommendations:

- Introduce a moratorium on new private liquor outlets in the province and consider returning to a government run system
- Reduce access to alcohol through other channels such as online sales and delivery services
- Maintain strong social responsibility initiatives and consider introducing a policy that dedicates funding for social responsibility and prevention initiatives.
- Move alcohol retail and control to a ministry where health and/or safety is a primary concern

3. Physical Availability

Summary: Alberta tied for second place with BC on policies that restrict the physical availability of alcohol. Reducing access to alcohol by restricting the number of alcohol outlets and limiting the hours and days when these outlets are open decreases the likelihood of experiencing alcohol-related harm, including assaults and alcohol-related crashes, as well as public disturbances (Wilkinson & Livingston, 2012).

National Ranking: Physical Availability		
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /15
1	ON	8.25
2	AB	7.50
2	BC	7.50
4	NS	6.75
5	MB	6.00
6	SK	5.25
6	NB	5.25
8	QC	4.50
8	PEI	4.50
10	NL	0.75

Score breakdown for Physical Availability	
Indicators	Score
a. Regulations for outlet density	1/2
b. Outlet Density, off-premise	2/3
c. Outlet Density, on-premise	1/2
d. Hours of operation	1/3
Total	5/10

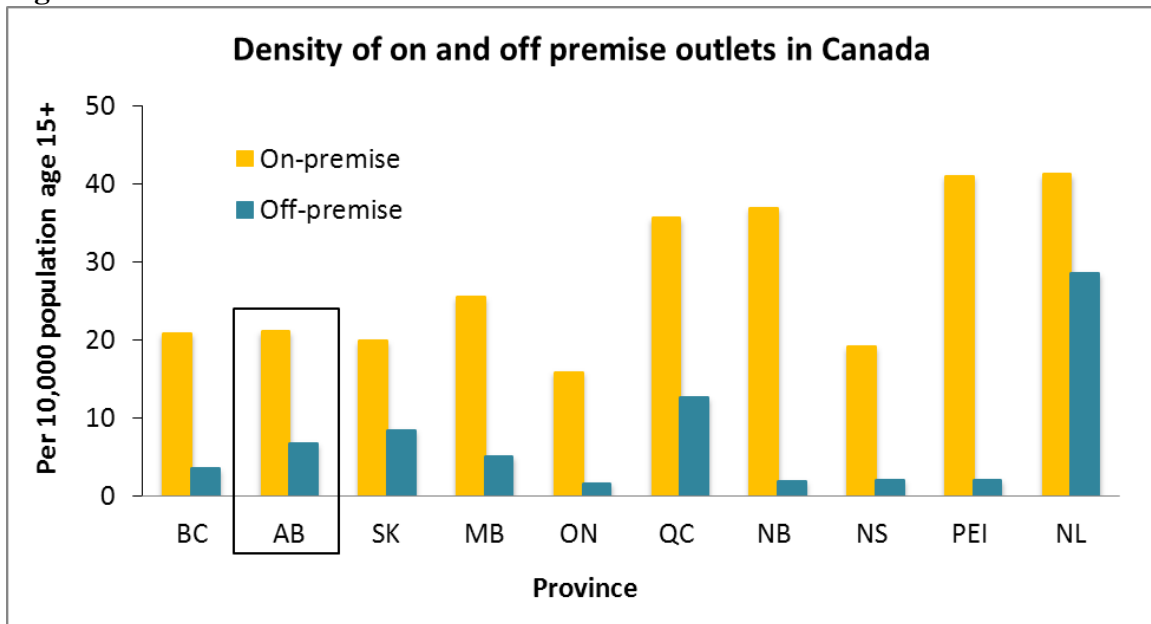
Promising Practices: The hours of operation for on-premise and off-premise outlets are provincially regulated. Regulations in Alberta also provide opportunity for citizen input with regard to the placement of certain alcohol outlets, including licensed establishments.

Areas for Improvement: Alberta is still only reaching half of its potential for physical availability policies. Alcohol outlet density is not provincially regulated and the density of Alberta stores, based on population, is average compared to other provinces (See Figure 3). Further, across all alcohol sales channels, alcohol is available for the greater part of the day. Both on- and off-premise outlets are permitted to sell alcohol from 10am to 2am. These hours exceed the recommended maximum opening hours of 11am to 8pm for off-premise outlets and 11am to 1am for on-premise outlets.

Recommendations:

- Introduce provincial legislation that restricts the density of outlets based on population size to reduce high-density areas
- Reduce the hours of operation for on and off-premise establishments; specifically limit the availability of alcohol very late at night

Figure 3



4. Drinking and Driving

Summary: Alberta ranked eighth out of the 10 provinces on drinking and driving policies. Alcohol-related collisions remain one of the leading sources of alcohol-related deaths and injuries in Canada (Lim, Vos, Flaxman, Danaei et al., 2012). To effectively reduce alcohol-related collision rates, provinces should implement a comprehensive three year graduated licensing program, sanctions for impaired drivers and remedial programs for repeat offenders (Solomon, Cardy, Noble et al., 2012).

National Ranking: Drinking and Driving		
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /12
1	BC	6.20
2	ON	5.86
3	MB	5.47
4	SK	4.32
5	PEI	4.13
6	NS	3.57
7	NB	3.05
8	AB	2.94
9	NL	2.89
10	QC	2.44

Score breakdown for Drinking and Driving policy	
Indicators	Score
a. Licensing	0.63/4
b. Licensing suspensions and revocations	0.7/3
c. Vehicle and remedial programs	1.13/3
Total	2.45/10

Note: Data is based on information provided by MADD Canada in their recent report entitled [Mapping Our Progress to Safer Roads: The 2012 Provincial and Territorial Legislative Review](#).

Promising Practices: Alberta has a three year Graduated Licensing Program (GLP) that includes restrictions on night time driving and number of passengers. Alberta also has some other promising practices such as keeping a record of licence suspensions on individuals driving records. At the time of data collection Alberta had a number of pending changes to the province's drinking and driving policies which have since been implemented. Changes included improvements to the graduated licensing program, strengthening the short-term administrative licensing suspension (ALS) program for drivers with suspected alcohol impairment and implementing mandatory alcohol interlock orders on all federal impaired driving offenders. For more details see the **Recent Developments** section on page 19.

Areas for Improvement: The effectiveness of Alberta's graduated licensing program is reduced due to a lack of police enforcement powers. For example, police are not authorized to demand an approved screening device test from all new drivers who fall under the graduated licensing program and their supervising drivers. Furthermore, police do not have the authority to suspend the license of drivers who are judged to be impaired by alcohol. Further, Alberta lags behind other provinces in their sanctions for impaired drivers. For example, AB does not have licensing impoundment sanctions or remedial programs.

Recommendations: (more detailed recommendations can be found in the [MADD Canada report](#)):

- Strengthen the graduated licensing program in Alberta by broadening police enforcement powers and introducing a mandatory BAC of 0.00% for supervising drivers
- Strengthen administrative sanctions for new and young drivers who violate the graduated licensing program
- Introduce seven-day 0.05% ALS or vehicle impoundment programs with minimum reinstatement fees, escalating suspensions, impoundment sanctions and remedial programs
- Offer reduced provincial license suspension to encourage participation in interlock programs and introduce escalating ALS, vehicle impoundments and program extension for repeat offenders
- Introduce mandatory vehicle forfeiture and mandatory remedial programs for drivers with three or more repeat offences within 10 years

5. Marketing and Advertising

Summary: Alberta is tied with Saskatchewan and New Brunswick for fifth place for policies that regulate alcohol marketing and advertising. Alcohol advertising encourages drinking, reinforces positive attitudes about alcohol and associated drinking behaviors and is linked with increased drinking, particularly among young people (Anderson, De Bruijn, Angus et al., 2009). Alcohol advertising regulations should control the content of ads, the placement of ads (e.g., reduce exposure to minors) and the number of ads in circulation to reduce overall exposure. Moreover, regulations need to be enforced to hold alcohol advertisers accountable for advertisements that violate the regulations.

National Ranking: Marketing and Advertising		
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /10
1	BC	6.50
1	ON	6.50
3	MB	6.00
3	NL	6.00
5	AB	5.00
5	SK	5.00
5	NB	5.00
8	QC	4.50
9	NS	4.00
10	PEI	3.50

Score breakdown for Marketing and Advertising	
Indicators	Score
a. Provincial marketing regulations	2/4
b. Enforcement of regulations	2/3
c. Practice Indicator - Focus of the liquor board's website	0/1
d. Ad. Sponsorship	1/2
Total	5/10

Promising Practices: Alberta's advertising content regulations include restrictions on the placement of ads (i.e., ads cannot be placed in any medium targeted specifically at minors), as well as restrictions on advertising price (i.e., cannot advertise '2 for 1' specials or 'happy hour' specials). The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Control board is responsible for the enforcement of the provincial advertising regulations and has large financial penalties for violations of the regulations. Further, Alberta has clear restrictions on ad sponsorship (i.e., signs advertising liquor may not be used at events involving minors)

Areas for Improvement: Alberta is currently only reaching half of its potential for marketing and advertising of alcohol. Current advertising content regulations do not extend much beyond those required by the Canadian Radio Television Commission (CRTC) and there are no restrictions on the quantity of alcohol advertisements in Alberta. Despite having strong penalties for violating the advertising regulations, Alberta has yet to implement a formal system for reporting advertisements or marketing campaigns that may be in violation of the advertising regulations.

Recommendations:

- Introduce restrictions on the quantity of alcohol advertisements
- Introduce a formal process for complaints and violations of advertising regulations
- Consider extending advertising content regulations beyond those required by the CRTC, such as implementing specific restrictions on alcohol advertising at community events.

6. Legal Drinking Age

Summary: Alberta is tied with Manitoba and New Brunswick for seventh place on legal drinking age policies. Minimum legal drinking age laws play an important role in reducing alcohol use and related harm among younger populations (Babor et al., 2010). There are two minimum legal drinking ages in Canada, 18 and 19, depending on the province. A comprehensive review of the evidence concluded that a legal age of 21 is the most effective for reducing related problems among younger drinkers (Wagenaar and Toomey, 2002). However, the effectiveness of a minimum legal drinking age is also strongly influenced by the level and consistency of law enforcement efforts.

National Ranking: Legal Drinking Age		
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /8
1	BC	6.40
1	SK	6.40
1	ON	6.40
1	NS	6.40
1	PEI	6.40
1	NL	6.40
7	AB	5.60
7	MB	5.60
7	NB	5.60
10	QC	4.80

Score breakdown for Legal Drinking Age	
Indicators	Score
a. Legal drinking age and supporting legislation	2/5
b. Enforcement of legal drinking age (off-premise)	3/3
c. Enforcement of legal drinking age (on-premise)	2/2
Total	7/10

Promising Practices: Alberta is reaching 70% of its potential for legal drinking age policies. The minimum legal drinking age in Alberta is supported by legislation prohibiting the sale of alcohol to a minor and the purchase of alcohol by a minor under the age of 18. Enforcement of the minimum legal drinking age in Alberta is strong in both off and on-premise outlets. The AGLC has a liquor inspection program to enforce

the legal drinking age and also collaborates with law enforcement to enforce the legal drinking age in on-premise establishments.

Areas for Improvement: The minimum legal drinking age in Alberta is 18 years, below the recommended age of 21 and below legal drinking ages in the majority of Canadian provinces.

Recommendations:

- At minimum increase the minimum legal drinking age in Alberta to 19 years of age and consider increasing the minimum drinking age to 21 years of age.

7. Screening, Brief Intervention and Referrals

Summary: Alberta is tied with Quebec for fifth place for Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral (SBIR) policies. Systematic reviews indicate that the use of SBIR in health care settings reduces alcohol consumption and related problems, reduces demand for health care and health care costs (Rehm, Gnam, Popova et al., 2008). The uptake of SBIR in practice requires dissemination of practice guidelines or a position paper to physicians and financial support for SBIR activities (Babor & Higgins-Bridle, 2000; Johnson, Jackson, Guillaume et al., 2010).

National Ranking: Screening, Brief Intervention and Referrals			Score breakdown for Screening, Brief Intervention and Referrals	
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /8	Indicators	Score
1	BC	8.00		
2	ON	7.20		
3	SK	4.80		
3	NL	4.80		
5	AB	3.20	a. The inclusion of SBIR in a provincial strategy	2/2
5	QC	3.20	b. Practice guidelines and/or position paper	0/3
7	NS	1.60		
8	MB	0.00		
8	NB	0.00	c. Fee for service codes	0/5
8	PEI	0.00	Total	2/10

Promising Practices: SBIR practices are included in Alberta’s provincial alcohol strategy and work is underway as part of the Alberta Alcohol Strategy to get SBIR into the new Family Care Clinics and out to other health care workers in the province.

Areas for Improvement: Alberta is reaching less than a quarter of its potential for screening, brief intervention and referral. The use of SBIR by primary health care

providers has not be supported by practice guidelines or a position paper issued by a credible health professional association and there is no fee for service code in Alberta that primary care providers can use to conduct SBIR activities.

Recommendations:

- Consider issuing SBIR guidelines for primary health care providers to encourage uptake and support consistency of implementation.
- Consider introducing a fee for service code specific to SBIR activities to increase utilization of SBIR protocols by primary health care providers
- Alberta is encouraged to make use of the [SBIR web-based resource](#) released in November 2012 by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) and the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC)

8. Server Training and Challenge and Refusal

Summary: Alberta ranked seventh out of the 10 provinces on server training and challenge and refusal programs. Much work remains to improve the quality of such programs in the province. The goal of server training programs is to reduce service of alcohol to minors and intoxicated patrons. Research suggests that the effectiveness of such programs is greatest when the programs are mandatory, comprehensive, valued by provincial alcohol management authorities, actively enforced and periodically evaluated (Babor et al., 2010).

National Ranking: Server Training Challenge and Refusal		
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /6
1	BC	4.65
2	PEI	4.35
3	NL	4.20
4	ON	3.90
5	NS	3.75
6	MB	3.60
7	AB	3.45
8	QC	3.30
9	NB	3.00
10	SK	2.40

Score breakdown for Server Training and Challenge and Refusal		
Indicators		Score
Server and management training program (on-premise)	a. Program status	0.75/1
	b. Quality of the program	2/2
	c. Program enforcement	0/2
Challenge and refusal program (off-premise)	d. Program status	1/1
	e. Quality of the program	2/2
	f. Program enforcement	0/2
Total		5.75/10

Promising Practices: Alberta has a mandatory server training program for both on- and off-premise retailers called *Proserve*, which includes a comprehensive set of challenge

criteria including challenging those who look under age or who appear to be intoxicated. The training uses a face-to-face training protocol and is based on evaluated server interventions and managers and staff are required to take periodic retraining. Alberta also evaluates its off-premise program through the use of ‘secret shopper’ programs.

Areas for improvement: While the *Proserve* program is mandatory, there are several exceptions including servers in private clubs, canteens and travel lounges and servers at community special events. Alberta does not track challenges and refusals for on- or off-premise outlets making it difficult to monitor the effectiveness of their server training program.

Recommendations:

- Consider making server training mandatory for all licensed venues and events
- Strengthen challenge and refusal programs by tracking the number and type of challenge and refusals activities for monitoring and evaluation purposes
- Alberta may also consider offering the Safer Bars program. Safer Bars is a 3-hour training program designed to increase bar staff’s ability to manage aggressive customers and keep customers and others from becoming violent, aggressive or injured. More information on the Safer Bars program can be found [here](#).

9. Provincial Alcohol Strategy

Summary: Alberta tied for first with Nova Scotia on this policy dimension. A provincial alcohol strategy provides a comprehensive set of goals that address a wide range of population level policies including health services' responses, community action, pricing and marketing policies as well as monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, a provincial strategy marks alcohol as an important health and social issue worthy of government attention and helps shape a coordinated response to address these goals (Babor et al., 2010).

National Ranking: Provincial Alcohol Strategy		
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /5
1	AB	4.00
1	NS	4.00
3	BC	3.50
3	QC	3.50
5	SK	2.50
5	NB	2.50
5	ON	2.50
5	NL	2.50
9	MB	0.00
9	PEI	0.00

Score breakdown for Provincial Alcohol Strategy Indicators	
Indicators	Score
a. Focus of the provincial strategy	2/2
b. Range of WHO policy interventions	6/8
Total	8/10

Promising Practices: Alberta has an alcohol-specific provincial strategy document called “Alberta Alcohol Strategy”, which recognizes the importance of nine out of 10 of the priorities in the World Health Organization Global Strategy on Alcohol including:

- ✓ leadership, awareness and commitment
- ✓ a health services response; mobilizing community action
- ✓ drunk-driving policies and counter measures
- ✓ availability of alcohol
- ✓ marketing of alcoholic beverages
- ✓ pricing policies
- ✓ reducing negative consequences of drinking and alcohol intoxication
- ✓ monitoring, surveillance and evaluation activities

Areas for Improvement: While Alberta’s alcohol-specific strategy has been in place since 2008, it has not yet been fully implemented throughout the province.

Recommendations:

- Prioritize completion of implementation of Alberta Alcohol Strategy and continue support for ongoing initiatives

10. Warning Labels and Signs

Summary: Alberta ranked third on this policy dimension. Warning labels on alcohol containers and warning signs at points of sale are important components of a comprehensive alcohol strategy. They inform consumers of the health and safety risks associated with alcohol consumption and improve public discourse so that more effective alcohol policies can be implemented (Giesbrecht, 2007). However, their effectiveness is contingent on the quality and content of the messages.

National Ranking: Warning Labels and Signs		
Rank	Prov.	Weighted Score /4
1	ON	1.50
2	MB	1.00
3	AB	1.20
4	SK	0.70
5	BC	0.50
5	QC	0.50
5	PEI	0.50
5	NL	0.50
9	NS	0.40

Score breakdown for Warning Labels and Signs	
Indicators	Score
a. warning labels on alcohol containers	0/1
b. The quality of warning label messages	0/3
c. The status of warning signs, on-premise and off-premise outlets (1pt. each)	0/2
d. The quality of warning signs, on-premise and off-premise outlets (2pts. Each)	3/4
Total	3/10

Promising Practices: The AGLC produces warning signs that licensees can voluntarily display in their establishments. These warning signs include messages about drinking and driving, drinking during pregnancy and messages indicating that individuals who appear to be under the age of 25 will not be served without proper government issued identification. Licensees can download printable versions of these warning signs from the AGLC website.

Areas for Improvement: Alberta is reaching a third of its potential to reduce alcohol related harms and costs in this policy area. Alberta, along with all other provinces, does not have mandatory warning labels about the health risks of alcohol on beverage containers or alcohol packaging. Further, Alberta does not have mandatory warning signs for on- and off-premise establishments, leaving it up to individual private retailers to post social responsibility messages. Current warning signs made available by the AGLC do not make reference to the risks of chronic diseases associated with alcohol or how to reduce these risks (i.e., the low-risk drinking guidelines). For example, messages offering concrete advice on daily and weekly drinking limits, as well as specific advice on how the drinker can achieve more responsible levels of alcohol consumption should be offered.

Recommendations:

- Implement mandatory warning labels about the health risks of alcohol consumption on alcohol beverage packaging
- Make the posting of warning signs in on and off-premise outlets mandatory
- Consider including warning messages about alcohol as a modifiable risk factor for chronic diseases
- Messages should be clear, visible, and concise, have a health focus and use graphics

Recent Developments in Alcohol Policy in Alberta

(since data collection for this project was completed)

Alberta has implemented changes in order to strengthen their drinking and driving policies. Alberta has lengthened their administrative licence suspensions. Drivers having blood alcohol content of 0.05 or higher are now subject to an immediate 3-day licence suspension and parallel 3-day vehicle seizure, towing and impound charges as well as escalating sanctions and a remedial driving course for subsequent offenses within 10 years. The Alberta Zero Alcohol Tolerance Program, which is part of the Graduated Driver's Licence, now has strengthened sanctions of 30-day suspension, 7-day vehicle seizure and towing and impound charges for blood alcohol concentration greater than .00. There is also a mandatory Ignition Interlock Program (IIP) for all individuals who have been convicted of an impaired driving offense in Alberta. A recent report showed a 46% reduction in alcohol-related fatalities since these changes came into effect in 2012 (Alberta Transportation, 2013).

Conclusion

Extensive international and national research has pointed to alcohol policies as being central to controlling and reducing the harm from alcohol and its associated costs to society. This bulletin summarizes the current state of alcohol policy in Alberta relative to best practices and other Canadian provinces. It highlights current policy strengths in Alberta and points to future opportunities where further actions can be undertaken, and which policies can be modified or enhanced. While ranking 5th place overall, Alberta has only reached 47.4% of the ideal score, suggesting there are still significant areas for improvement. In addition, Alberta was placed 6th and 7th in terms of performance in relation to the two most important policies from a public health and safety perspective: alcohol pricing and the system of regulatory control. It is hoped that this review will act as a catalyst to facilitate discussion and change regarding alcohol policy in Alberta. In order to refine and implement these recommendations it will require leadership, commitment to reducing alcohol-related harm and a spirit of collaboration among key stakeholders including various ministries and sectors of government, NGOs working on health issues, public health advocates and representatives from the private sector.

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