

Summary of Studies Related to Overconsumption of Alcohol

Community-specific Studies

What specifically can a city do?

This section highlights the tools available to the city to help reduce overconsumption of alcohol and change the culture surrounding alcohol use in the community.

A great resource for communities to address overconsumption of alcohol is [The Community Guide](#) website, which is managed by the Community Preventive Services Task Force, a service arm of the U.S. Department of HHS.

How to Use Local Regulatory and Land Use Powers to Prevent Underage Drinking

This U.S. Department of Justice study focuses on policies and potential land use/zoning solutions. The recommendations in the study, while focused on curbing underage drinking, could be applied to address overconsumption of alcohol by all age groups. The recommendations below are most applicable to zoning, as they refer to “place”:

1. Restrict the location/number of commercial alcohol outlets (e.g., *prohibit alcohol outlets from locating within specific distances from other alcohol outlets*);
2. Restrict the types of commercial alcohol outlets (e.g., *clearly distinguish between bars/nightclubs and restaurants by limiting alcohol sales to a maximum of 40 percent of their total receipts, restricting late-hour operations, and prohibiting separate bar areas*);
3. Require commercial alcohol outlets to use responsible serving/sales practices (e.g., *good management policies and training*). This is firmly in place in Boulder, although it is not explicitly required by the city; and
4. Restrict access to noncommercial sources of alcohol (e.g., *create alcohol-safe, free community events*).

The study also recommends a number of restrictions on advertising and promotion of alcohol, as well as fees and taxes on alcohol (e.g., no discounts) similar to other study findings. While this approach may be effective, restrictions related to alcohol advertising are governed by the Colorado Liquor Code and would require changes to that state code to implement local restrictions.

The study suggests the following “best practices” for local government:

- ⇒ “Alcohol is a legal but potentially hazardous product that requires special regulatory and planning attention. To the extent permitted by law in each state, local governments should retain oversight and promote public involvement to ensure a safe alcohol environment. This means that communities should maintain an active regulatory posture regarding land use controls for alcohol outlets. Permits should not be issued automatically based on an unvarying set of criteria.

Each case should be considered individually based on its potential to be an asset to the community rather than a liability.”

- ⇒ *“State alcohol licensing agencies usually examine the character and business history of the applicant in making decisions about granting a license. In order to complement the state review, community planning and land use decisions about alcohol outlets should focus on the nature of the business activity and its community impacts. Business owners come and go, but an alcohol outlet once approved is often a permanent fixture in a community. Land use permits should include conditions that define business practices and the manner and mode of business operations consistent with community values and standards, independent of the qualifications of current or future business owners.”*
- ⇒ *“No local planning process can predict the problems or conditions that may occur in the future. As a consequence, when there is a proposed change in ownership or in the manner and mode of operation of an alcohol outlet, local governments should require a new public hearing to review the conditions placed on the alcohol outlet. The sale of alcohol is a regulated public privilege, and land use ordinances provide important opportunities to bring and retain balance between public and private interests.”*

One of the specific recommendations of the Community Preventative Services Task Force is to limit alcohol outlet density through licensing and zoning. This concept is supported by a number of studies that have found a direct correlation between alcohol outlet density and instances of overconsumption of alcohol.

Reducing current density levels or limiting density growth

In the two studies referenced below, the Community Preventative Task Force recommends limiting the density of alcohol outlets, either by reducing current density levels or limiting density growth.

- [The Effectiveness of Limiting Alcohol Outlet Density As a Means of Reducing Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Harms](#)
- [Recommendations for Reducing Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Harms by Limiting Alcohol Outlet Density](#)

Two additional studies prepared by the Harvard School of Public Health, listed below, discuss alcohol outlet density with specific review of college towns.

- [The relationship of alcohol outlet density to heavy and frequent drinking and drinking-related problems among college students at eight universities](#)
- [Secondhand effects of student alcohol use reported by neighbors of colleges: the role of alcohol outlets](#)

The studies found that there is a “*significant correlation between outlet density and heavy drinking,*” and that “*heavy alcohol consumption by college students and others may be encouraged by a ‘wet’ environment, that is, an environment in which alcohol is prominent and easily accessible.*”

The studies also state that “*colleges with large numbers of binge drinkers are characterized by greater visibility and availability of alcohol in their environment.*” The results of the studies, like those above, suggest that “*neighborhood disruptions around colleges due to heavy alcohol use may be reduced by limiting the presence of alcohol outlets in those areas, and the marketing practices that this engenders*” and that “*alcohol use rates and related problems have been reduced by strategies to restrict alcohol availability.*”

Broader Studies

The following studies are broader and are intended to inform a variety of stakeholders about how alcohol overconsumption may be addressed in the community.

The problem of alcohol overconsumption

The first two studies focus more broadly on the problem, with the first highlighting alcohol use nationwide and the second discussing college binge drinking trends.

- [Drinking in America](#) - U.S. Department of Justice
- [Trends in College Binge Drinking During a Period of Increased Prevention Efforts](#)
- Journal of American College Health

The “environmental approach” and need for multi-agency involvement

The studies discussed below include a broad focus on the “environmental approach.”

- [How to Reduce High-Risk College Drinking](#) - U.S. Department of HHS
- [Five Year Report, 1998-2003](#) - University of Nebraska Campus-Community Coalition
- [Evidence-based strategies and interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm](#) - World Health Organization