

Alcohol & Community Violence

Alcohol use and gun violence, leading causes of preventable injury and death in the United States, are most deadly where they intersect. Research suggests that limiting access to alcohol in communities afflicted by gun violence may be a viable strategy to improve health and safety in those communities. Community leaders have used this approach successfully in the tobacco, firearm, and fast-food contexts to improve public health.¹

Reviews by the WHO and SAMSA found that outlet density control is an effective means of reducing alcohol-related harms.^{2, 3, 4} Therefore, public health experts have focused on reducing alcohol retail density to reduce community violence.

It follows that reducing alcohol density could be part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce community gun violence. Other elements of the strategy could include violence interruption programs, hospital-based intervention programs, and social programs to promote wellness. Federal funds are available for these community violence intervention (CVI) programs. For more information about how to apply for this funding, see the [Mayors Guide to the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.](#)



“1 in 3 gun homicide perpetrators were found to have drunk heavily”



What is Alcohol Retailer Density?



*AI-Generated Photo

Alcohol Retailer Density refers to the number of physical locations where alcoholic beverages are available for purchase for on-premises or off-premises consumption. On-premises consumption includes restaurants, bars, and settings such as ballparks. Off-premises consumption includes grocery stores, convenience stores or bodegas, and liquor stores.

The CDC has prepared resources mayors can use to determine alcohol density:

- [Guide to Measuring Alcohol Outlet Density \(2017\)](#) provides detailed instructions.
- [Measuring Alcohol Outlet Density: A Toolkit for State and Local Surveillance \(2021\)](#) provides comprehensive information.

Legal Tools to Reduce Density



A mayor can consider one or more of the following approaches to reduce alcohol density.

1. Change Licensing Criteria

In many states, alcohol licensing is a municipal responsibility. In these states, each municipality may decide on the number and placement of alcohol outlets. Some set numerical limits for outlets based on population density formulas; however, these limits may fail to factor in safety concerns. Other municipalities develop specific criteria that allow municipal leaders to consider the potential impact of proposed licenses on community safety as part of the application process. The [Wisconsin Alcohol Policy Project report](#) recommends conducting a comprehensive review to determine policy goals and provides examples of specific criteria municipal leaders may want to consider.

2. Treat Buy-outs and Transfers as New Applicants

It takes time to reduce alcohol density, as existing licenses cannot be revoked without cause. One way to reduce the number of outlets is to treat each transfer or sale of an existing outlet as a new application. The municipality can apply newly developed criteria to deny the application or impose new restrictions. For example, in a community underserved by grocery stores, the municipality may require the applicant to operate a grocery store as a condition of granting the license to sell alcohol.

3. Establish Conditional Use Permits

Although existing licenses cannot be revoked, a municipality can change or limit the hours or days an alcohol outlet may sell alcohol. Additionally, the municipality can regulate proximity to specific land uses such as schools, churches, parks, and residential neighborhoods[SPI] .

4. Pass “Deemed Approved” Ordinances (DAOs)

Deemed Approved Ordinances (also called “Public Nuisance Ordinances”) can be used to regulate existing outlets through zoning. A DAO focuses on outlet activities that cause public nuisances rather than the sale of alcohol. If an outlet violates “general performance standards,” it is subject to a review process. The city, the public, and the licensee participate in a public hearing to decide whether the outlet must conform to “conditions of approval” to keep its license.

5. Change the Type of Sale Permitted

A municipality can also how alcohol can be sold. An example of a change in the type of sale is requiring an outlet to serve food when serving alcohol. This change has been shown to reduce risk factors for community violence.

Additional Resources

For in-depth information on how municipalities have used these strategies to reduce alcohol density, please consult the resources below.



*AI-Generated Photo

Wisconsin Alcohol Policy Project: Measuring Alcohol Outlet Density in Wisconsin

<https://www.mcw.edu/-/media/MCW/Departments/Comprehensive-Injury-Center/WI-Alcohol-Policy-Project/Measuring-Alcohol-Outlet-Density-in-Wisconsin-Does-Your-Community-Have-a-Problem.pdf>

Best Practices in Municipal Regulation to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms from Licensed Alcohol Outlets

https://mail.venturacountylimits.org/resource_documents/VC_BestPractAlcSales_Jan2014fnl.pdf

Regulating Alcohol Outlet Density: An Action Guide

<https://www.eugene-or.gov/DocumentCenter/View/16345/Outlet-Density-Strategizer-Final?bidId=>

Liquor Retailer Density Analysis: Council District 3 (Denver Public Health)

<https://www.phidenverhealth.org/-/media/dph-files-and-docs/health-info-and-reports/dph-district-3-alcohol-density-report-final-20170415.pdf>

CDC Guide for Measuring Alcohol Outlet Density

<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/pdfs/CDC-Guide-for-Measuring-Alcohol-Outlet-Density.pdf>

CDC Alcohol Outlet Density Surveillance Toolkit

<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/pdfs/CDC-Alcohol-Outlet-Density-Surveillance-Toolkit.pdf>

References

1 Silvia Villarreal, Amy Barnhorst, Richard Bonnie, Kami Chavis, Ari Davis, Shannon Frattaroli, Kelly Roskam, Jeffrey Swanson, Joshua Horwitz, The Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy and the Center for Gun Violence Solutions at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Alcohol misuse and gun violence: an evidence-based approach for state policy. Last accessed October 19, 2023.

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2023-05/2023-may-cgvs-alcohol-misuse-and-gun-violence.pdf>

2 Carla Alexia Campbell, Robert A. Hahn, Randy Elder, Robert Brewer, Sajal Chattopadhyay, Jonathan Fielding, Timothy S. Naimi, Traci Toomey, Briana Lawrence, Jennifer Cook Middleton, Task Force on Community Preventative Services. The Effectiveness of Limiting Alcohol Outlet Density As a Means of Reducing Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Harms. *Am J Prev Med* 2009; 37(6): 556-569.

3 Thomas F. Babor, Sally Casswell, Kathryn Graham, Taisia Huckle, Michael Livingston, Esa Osterberg, Jurgen Rehm, Robin Room, Ingeborg Rossow, Bundit Sornpaisarn. *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and public policy*. Oxford University Press 2022

4 P L Grovery, R Bozzo. *Preventing problems related to alcohol availability: environmental approaches*. Rockville MD: SAMHSA/CSAP 1999.