

Excellence in Prevention – descriptions of the prevention programs and strategies with the greatest evidence of success

Name of Program/Strategy: Densities or Concentrations of Retail Outlets—Changing Conditions of Availability

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1. Overview and description

The number of outlets grows in response to population, and outlets are usually established along roadway systems. Outlet counts are either in terms of population densities (numbers of outlets per person) or geographic densities (numbers of outlets per kilometer of roadway). In developed societies, people may easily drive or use public transport to obtain alcohol. The number of outlets may be restricted directly or indirectly through policies that make licenses more difficult to obtain (e.g., by increasing the cost of a license). Several states limit the number of alcohol outlets and control the price of alcohol by maintaining state-run (rather than privately owned) outlets.

2. Implementation considerations (if available)

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3. Descriptive information

Areas of Interest	Substance abuse prevention
Outcomes	
Outcome Categories	Alcohol
Ages	
Gender	Male Female
Races/Ethnicities	American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Hispanic or Latino White Race/ethnicity unspecified
Settings	
Geographic Locations	Urban Suburban Rural and/or frontier Tribal
Implementation History	
NIH Funding/CER Studies	
Adaptations	
Adverse Effects	
IOM Prevention Categories	Universal

4. Outcomes

Scientific Evidence

Studies find significant relations between outlet densities and alcohol consumption, violence, drinking and driving, and car crashes (Gruenewald, Johnson, & Treno, 2002).

A study focusing on youth found that on- and off-license outlet density was positively related to frequency of driving after drinking and riding with drinking drivers among 16 to 20-year-old youth (Treno et al., 2003).

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Excellence in Prevention is a project of Oregon Addiction and Mental Health Services and Washington Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery. Information is drawn from many sources, including the National Registry for Effective Prevention Programs (NREPP), sponsored by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

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Outlet density surrounding college campuses has been found to correlate with heavy drinking, frequent drinking, and drinking-related problems among students (Weitzman et al., 2003). Such studies of outlet density are cross-sectional, however, and the causal nature of the relations between outlet density and alcohol consumption and problems among youth is an open question.

A longitudinal study examined the effects of neighborhood characteristics (socioeconomic status and alcohol outlet density) on availability of alcohol and drinking among adolescents. Average household income was positively related to ease of obtaining alcohol from parents and negatively related to ease of purchase without an ID. Density of alcohol-licensed restaurants was positively related to ease of obtaining alcohol from someone over 21 and ease of purchase without ID. Preliminary longitudinal analyses indicate that change in lifetime drinking status (from never drinker to ever drinker) was positively related to household income and density of alcohol-licensed restaurants but negatively related to density of off-premise alcohol outlets. Counter to expectations, preliminary findings indicate that underage alcohol use and growth in use appears to be negatively related to density of off-premise alcohol outlets (Todd, Grube, and Gruenewald, 2005).

Characteristics of off-premise alcohol outlets that may affect alcohol sales to youth were compared through random alcohol purchase surveys conducted in 45 Oregon communities using underage-looking decoys who were 21 years old but did not carry IDs. These decoys were able to purchase alcohol at 34 percent of the outlets. Purchase rates were highest at convenience (38 percent) and grocery (36 percent) stores but were relatively low (14 percent) at other types of outlets (e.g., liquor and drug stores). Alcohol purchases were also inversely related to the number of salesclerks present in a store, but were not related to salesclerks' age and gender. The study concluded that (1) more frequent compliance checks by law enforcement agents should target convenience and grocery stores, (2) owners of off-premise outlets should require training of all salesclerks to ensure reliable checks of young-looking patron IDs, and (3) owners should post underage alcohol sales warning signs in clear view of patrons (Paschall et al., 2007a).

Policy strategies can be used to reduce alcohol availability for young people, deter drinking by increasing the personal costs associated with it, and communicate norms to young people about the unacceptability of their drinking and to adults about the unacceptability of providing alcohol to them. Less strength of evidence is available concerning reductions in numbers of outlets or outlet densities, and reductions in hours or days of sale, all of which do have the potential to reduce levels of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems (Grube and Nygaard, 2001; 2005).

The Task Force on Community Preventive Services (2009) of the federal Centers for Disease Control found strong evidence of a positive association between outlet density and excessive alcohol consumption and related harms. As a result they recommended limiting alcohol outlet density through the use of regulatory authority such as licensing and zoning, as a means of reducing heavy drinking and related harms.

Alcohol outlets concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods can contribute to adolescent drinking (Truong and Sturm, 2009). Local efforts to reduce underage drinking should utilize environmental interventions in order to curb opportunities for youth to obtain alcohol from commercial sources by tightening licensure, enforcing minimum age drinking laws or other measures.

One of the first studies that examined geographic clustering of underage drinking within neighborhoods found that the greatest on-premise and off-premise alcohol outlet density was associated with youth reports

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of riding with a drinking driver, making an alcohol purchase attempt and making a successful alcohol purchase attempt (Reboussin, et al., 2011). While youth often receive alcohol from social sources, commercial alcohol access is geographically concentrated within neighborhoods with the greatest off-premise outlet density.

5. **Cost effectiveness report (Washington State Institute of Public Policy – if available)**
6. **Washington State results (from Performance Based Prevention System (PBPS) – if available)**
7. **Who is using this program/strategy**

Washington Counties	Oregon Counties

8. Study populations

9. Quality of studies

The documents below were reviewed for Quality of Research. The research point of contact can provide information regarding the studies reviewed and the availability of additional materials, including those from more recent studies that may have been conducted.

References

- Grube, J. W., & Nygaard, P. (2001). Adolescent drinking and alcohol policy. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 28, 87-131.
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- Gruenewald, P. J., Johnson, F. W., & Treno, A. J. (2002). Outlets, drinking and driving: A multilevel analysis of availability. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 63, 460-468.
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Reboussin, Beth A.; Eun-Young Song, and Mark Wolfson (2011) The Impact of Alcohol Outlet Density on the Geographic Clustering of Underage Drinking Behaviors within Census Tracts, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, Volume 35, Issue 8, pages 1541–1549.

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Todd, M., Grube, J. W., & Gruenewald, P. J. (2005, June). Neighborhood characteristics, alcohol availability, and changes in youth drinking. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism, Santa Barbara, CA.

Treno, A. J., Grube, J. W., & Martin, S. E. (2003). Alcohol availability as a predictor of youth drinking and driving: A hierarchical analysis of survey and archival data. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 27(5), 835-840.

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10. Readiness for Dissemination

11. Costs (if available)

12. Contacts

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Learn More by Visiting: <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/outletdensity.html>