

Understanding How Alcohol Policies Impact Public Health

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Supporting research to inform the development and implementation of alcohol policies and to evaluate their effectiveness has been an important priority of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) for many years.

Alcohol policy represents a broad approach for intervening with alcohol misuse and related problems that can affect all individuals within a jurisdiction. Alcohol policy strategies commonly consist of federal, state, and local laws and regulations that govern a wide range of alcohol issues from the manufacture and sale of alcohol to directives about underage drinking. Alcohol policies are also set by non-governmental organizations such as colleges and universities to address alcohol consumption and access on their campuses and in their communities.

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that several types of alcohol policies are effective in reducing unsafe alcohol-associated behaviors and related harms. For example, increasing alcohol beverage taxes has been shown to reduce binge drinking, traffic crash fatalities, and other adverse outcomes.^{1,2,3} Increasing the minimum legal drinking age (MLDA) to 21 years, supported by a federal act established in 1984, has been studied extensively and shown to reduce mortality, crime, and other adverse consequences among the age groups affected by the law.^{4,5,6}

Research on policy interventions to reduce driving under the influence has also demonstrated effectiveness in reducing alcohol-related consequences. A series of NIAAA-supported studies have examined the effectiveness of the 24/7 Sobriety approach, which involves frequent alcohol monitoring of individuals with DUI convictions as well as swift, certain, and modest penalties

for alcohol use violations. Although implemented in a limited number of jurisdictions, evidence to date indicates the program not only contributes to reduced incidence of rearrests for impaired driving among participants but may also reduce overall death rates among program participants and in the broader community.^{7,8,9,10,11}

Since alcohol-related behaviors and outcomes may be influenced by multiple policies at the same time, NIAAA supports research to assess the overall alcohol policy environment. Studies have found associations between the policy environment and multiple important outcomes, including binge drinking rates, traffic crash fatalities, cirrhosis death rates, cancer mortality rates, alcohol-involved suicides, and the harms that people who drink impose on others.^{12,13,14,15,16,17,18} More research is needed on alcohol-related public policies to understand which policies affect which behaviors or outcomes and for whom.

In addition to supporting past and ongoing policy research, NIAAA encourages new studies through a Notice of Special Interest on “Public Policy Effects on Alcohol-, Cannabis-, Tobacco-, and Other Drug-Related Behaviors and Outcomes” ([NOT-AA-21-028](#)). NIAAA also offers information resources for researchers, policymakers, and the general public. The [Alcohol Policy Information System](#) (APIS) provides detailed information on alcohol-related policies in the U.S. at both the state and federal levels, as well as policy information regarding the recreational use of cannabis. The *College Alcohol Intervention Matrix* ([CollegeAIM](#)) helps academic institutions address harmful and underage student drinking in their campus communities and provides information about alcohol policies relevant to college students and communities.

NIAAA’s [Alcohol Interventions for Young Adults](#) extracts individual- and policy-level interventions that are described in *CollegeAIM* and are relevant to young adults who are not in college.

Alcohol misuse affects not only the person who drinks but also their family and communities. Alcohol policies can be effective, evidence-based strategies to improve public health by reducing alcohol misuse and related consequences within a population. Research on alcohol policies will continue to play a key role in informing the development, implementation, and assessment of policy efforts to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms.

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