

# Public Safety

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**“[T]here is a direct correlation between the number, density, location and operational practices of alcohol outlets and the rates of violence, drunk driving, physical injuries, underage drinking, public nuisance activities and other social problems in communities. In short: Alcohol outlets pose a serious, documented health risk to citizens, especially those in urban settings.”**

*-Leana Wen, MD, Health  
Commissioner, Baltimore*



## WHAT ARE ALCOHOL OUTLET DENSITY RULES?

Regulations – from licensing to zoning – can allow cities to specify the number and density of alcohol outlets in a given neighborhood. Limiting alcohol outlet density can have a significant impact on residents' safety, well-being, and health.

## HOW DO RULES AROUND ALCOHOL OUTLET DENSITY IMPROVE THE LIVES OF BIG CITY RESIDENTS?

Neighborhoods with high concentrations of alcohol outlets, including bars, restaurants and liquor or package stores, are [linked](#) to heavy drinking and higher rates of violence and other negative consequences, including alcohol-impaired driving, neighborhood disruption, and public nuisance activities.

According to the [US Surgeon General](#), alcohol misuse contributes to 88,000 deaths in the United States each year. [Alcohol misuse and alcohol use disorders cost the United States approximately \\$249 billion in lost productivity](#), health care expenses, law enforcement, and other criminal justice costs.

According to a study for the U.S. Department of Justice, 36% of the 5.3 million convicted offenders currently in jail, report that they were drinking at the time of their arrest.

The Centers for Disease Control [linked](#) 44% of all U.S. homicides with drinking.

[Studies in numerous cities](#) have found an association between the number of alcohol outlets and increased violence, including intimate partner violence and youth homicides.

Nearly [one-third](#) (31%) of all traffic-related deaths in the United States are a result of alcohol-impaired driving. Every day 36 people die and approximately 700 are injured in motor vehicle crashes that involve an alcohol-impaired driver.

Reducing the density of alcohol retail outlets results in safer communities with fewer drinking-related crimes, accidents, and underage drinking.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) find that excessive alcohol use can lead to chronic diseases and other serious problems including high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, a range of cancers, and depression and anxiety. Misuse and abuse of alcohol is also linked to risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners, which can result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

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## WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE THAT ALCOHOL OUTLET DENSITY RULES WORK?

According to the recently published [Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs and Health](#), four longitudinal studies of communities that reduced the number of alcohol outlets showed consistent and significant reductions in alcohol-related crimes, compared to communities that had not taken similar measures.

Laws that reduce the concentration of retail alcohol establishments can be one of the [most cost effective](#) approaches to reducing excessive drinking by limiting the physical availability of alcohol.

Based on a comprehensive literature review, the Community Preventive Services Task Forces [determined](#) there is strong evidence that zoning and licensing rules for alcohol outlets can reduce excessive alcohol consumption and related harms.

Alcohol outlet density rules are also [effective strategies](#) for [reducing](#) binge drinking and drinking [among underage youth](#).

## ISSUES FOR FUTURE POLICY IMPROVEMENT

Many cities already have substantial laws about alcohol and underage drinking on their books. Dedicated funding for enforcement of alcohol laws has been shown to make these laws more effective in reducing alcohol problems. Cities can also take action to restrict alcohol advertising on billboards and retail establishments within their borders, as numerous long-term studies have linked exposure to alcohol marketing with greater likelihood of underage drinking. Finally, the [US Surgeon General](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Hi-5 Initiative](#), which identifies cost-effective policies proven to improve community health within five years, both recommend increased taxes on alcohol as an evidence-based strategy to improve public safety and reduce the risks associated with alcohol abuse and misuse. Some US cities already have the authority to institute higher excise taxes as a means to discourage excessive alcohol consumption, especially among underage youth.

## RESOURCES FOR CITIES ON IMPLEMENTING ALCOHOL OUTLET DENSITY RULES

[United States Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs and Health](#)

[CAMY-Alcohol outlet density](#) - Sparks M, Jernigan DH, Mosher JF. Strategizer 55 - Regulating alcohol outlet density: An action guide. Alexandria: Community for Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA); Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY), Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; 2011.

[Jernigan 2013](#) - Jernigan D, Sparks M, Yang E, Schwartz R. Using public health and community partnerships to reduce density of alcohol outlets. Preventing Chronic Disease. 2013;10.

[CDC Task Force on Community Preventive Services](#). (2009). Recommendations for reducing excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms by limiting alcohol outlet density.

[CDC 2013 Prevention Status Reports](#)

[Model ordinances used in cities](#)