

Municipal Alcohol Policy: A Role for Canadian Governments

Purpose

This document explains how provincial and territorial governments can help their communities shift to a culture of safety and moderation around alcohol by supporting the development of local municipal alcohol policies (MAPs). It accompanies documents that provide sample approaches and lessons learned from some Canadian provinces. Developing such policies is a recommendation of Canada's [National Alcohol Strategy](#) (National Alcohol Strategy Working Group, 2007).

What Is a Municipal Alcohol Policy?

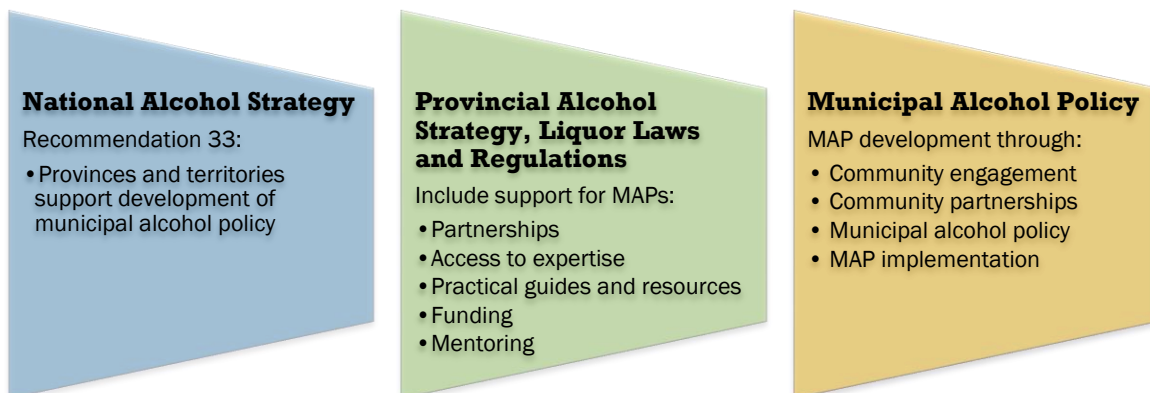
A MAP is one part of a comprehensive approach to alcohol policy. A multi-faceted approach to alcohol policy is needed to change attitudes and behaviours related to alcohol, similar to the cultural change that led to a decrease in tobacco use or to acceptance of mandatory seat belt use. This approach includes aligning federal, provincial/territorial and municipal alcohol policies and strategies. A MAP provides a set of rules for alcohol use in the community and aligns with, or strengthens, local liquor laws and regulations.

What is in a MAP?

A MAP contains guidance to help run safer events on municipally owned or managed property where alcohol is available, such as festivals, sport stadiums and community centres. A MAP also informs the public about their responsibilities and potential liability.

A MAP can contain elements such as roles and responsibilities of management; strategies to manage over drinking, such as standard servings, low-alcohol drinks and no last call announcement; and enforcement procedures and penalties to be used when rules are not followed.

Figure 1: Alignment of alcohol policies





Are Municipal Alcohol Policies Effective?

Earlier work evaluating initiatives by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health to support the development of MAPs in Ontario demonstrated that comprehensive MAPs were linked with reductions in harms related to alcohol (Douglas, Rylett, Narbonne-Fortin, & Gliksman, 1999).

Implementing a MAP has resulted in positive changes such as:

- Reduced underage access to alcohol;
- Reduced community disruption due to drinking;
- Fewer injuries and hospital visits;
- Reduced impaired driving;
- Enhanced safety and reduced demand on security and police resources;
- Reduced costs to taxpayers; and
- Reduced legal risks for local governments.

For discussion of changes due to MAPs, see Gliksman, Douglas, Rylett, and Narbonne-Fortin (1995), Narbonne-Fortin, Rylett, Douglas, and Gliksman (2003), and Public Health Ontario (2016).

Benefits to Provinces and Territories from Supporting Municipalities in Developing MAPs

Provincial and territorial governments have a role in supporting healthy communities and encouraging the development and implementation of MAPs furthers this work.

Increases local level implementation of provincial alcohol policies and regulations

Provincial/territorial alcohol policies, laws and regulations are challenging to implement in a comprehensive way at the local level. However, municipal authorities have considerable scope to implement bylaws and policies that help to manage the availability of and access to alcohol within their boundaries. A MAP can implement or strengthen provincial policies adapted to address the unique local context that might contribute to risks of alcohol harms. A MAP can take into account a cluster of bars, a rural setting, events close to post-secondary schools and one-time special events overseen by well-intentioned but untrained community volunteers.

Recognizes the complex realities of communities regarding alcohol

Communities might be reluctant to address the local negative effects of alcohol if alcohol is part of the local economic base through tourism and hospitality, or agriculture (e.g., vineyards, craft breweries). Governments can provide incentives such as financial stipends, access to expert advice, and partnerships or mechanisms to learn from other communities as starting points for communities to work together to address alcohol-related problems.

Demonstrates leadership

Shifting to a culture of moderation takes awareness, time and commitment, but a range of competing issues challenge municipalities. Setting the development of MAPs as a priority for provincial/territorial governments can bring focus to the impacts of alcohol and put it on the municipal agenda. Government partnerships with sectors such as public health can also aid in bringing attention and solutions to local alcohol-related issues.



Key Considerations for Provincial/Territorial Governments

What Other Provinces Are Doing

See the accompanying profiles describing how British Columbia, Ontario and Nova Scotia support MAPs at the provincial level:

- [Nova Scotia](#) has taken a comprehensive community engagement approach.
- [Ontario](#) has taken a public health approach.
- [British Columbia](#) has combined a public health approach with the goal of a culture of moderation.

Provincial/territorial governments should keep some success factors in mind when developing MAPs:

- Develop collaborative partnerships with provincial/territorial community associations or public health representatives to support and liaise with communities;
- Provide access to financial stipends sufficient to aid MAP development through community engagement (approximately \$7,000–10,000 grants); offer grants in a phased approach as the MAP progresses from consultation to development to implementation;
- Provide a list of expert consultants who can inform on particular aspects of a MAP (e.g., alcohol policy experts, public health consultants);
- Facilitate regional workshops for representatives of communities developing and implementing MAPs to exchange ideas and strategies, and to strengthen cross-community networks;
- Include MAP development as part of the provincial/territorial alcohol strategy; and
- Formalize public health responsibilities in efforts to reduce alcohol harms as part of public policy work towards healthy communities.

References

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