

## **Increased Alcohol Availability Affects Sales, Price, and Alcohol-Related Deaths**

The presence of more alcohol outlets in an area increases alcohol sales, decreases prices and increases the rate of alcohol related deaths, recent research finds. The Canadian Province of British Columbia has changed its policies on the licensing of alcohol outlets. As a result of this change, over the period between 2002 and 2007 there has been an increase of over 34% in the number of private alcohol outlets in the Province. Research carried out by the Prevention Research Center and the Centre for Addictions Research of British Columbia, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada and others has examined the impact of this change in alcohol availability.

In one study, the researchers found that the increased number of outlets resulted in increased alcohol sales. Among 89 communities in that province, there was a significant association between increasing density of liquor stores and local per capita alcohol sales even when other variables were controlled. Furthermore, this study also found that when density of liquor outlets was held constant, the proportion of liquor stores in private hands, as compared to government-owned stores also significantly predicted the level of local per capita alcohol sales.

In another study of alcohol availability in British Columbia, the researchers surveyed liquor stores concerning the price of a number of popular brands of beer, wine, and spirits. These prices were analyzed as they related to the number of alcohol outlets per capita in the community. The results indicated that where there are more private liquor stores, alcohol is available at a lower price. These lower prices seemed to result primarily from stores carrying cheaper brands – particularly of beer.

In a third study of availability in British Columbia, the researchers examined the impact of the increase in the number of alcohol outlets on deaths in the Province. They used government reports of the cause of deaths between 2003 and 2008. Alcohol-attributable deaths included such things as alcoholic liver cirrhosis, alcohol poisoning, and alcohol-related accidents. The researchers found that each additional private liquor store per 1000 residents and (aged 15 years or more) increased local alcohol-related mortality by 27.5%—or a 20% increase in private store density increased local alcohol-related mortality by 3.25%.

These findings reinforce the existing body of research showing that increased alcohol availability, especially as reflected in the density of alcohol outlets, has consequences for behavior and health.

The studies discussed here can be found in the following:

Stockwell T., Zhao J., Macdonald S., Pakula B., Gruenewald, P., Holder H. Changes in per capita alcohol sales during the partial privatization of British Columbia's retail alcohol monopoly 2003–2008: a multi-level local area analysis. *Addiction* 2009; **104**: 1827–36.

Treno, A., Ponicki, W., Stockwell, T., Macdonald, S., Gruenewald, P., Zhao, J., Martin, G., Greer, A. Alcohol Outlet Densities and Alcohol Price: The British Columbia Experiment in the

Partial Privatization of Alcohol Sales Off-Premise, Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, Volume 37, Issue 5, pages 854–859, May 2013

Stockwell, J.; Zhao, J.; MacDonald, S.; Vallance, K.; Gruenewald, P.; Ponicki, W.; Holder, H.; and Treno, A. "Impact on alcohol-related mortality of a rapid rise in the density of private liquor outlets in British Columbia: A local area multi-level analysis," Addiction, 106(4):768-776, 2011.