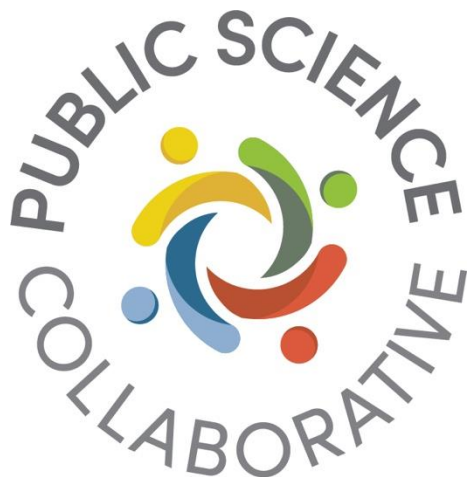




Local Alcohol Policies to Improve Community Health & Safety in Iowa



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ALCOHOL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to alcohol, Iowa is a high-consumption state, with [one of the highest binge drinking rates](#) in the country. That places Iowans and their communities at especially high risk for alcohol-related harms such as cancer and heart diseases, intoxicated driver car crashes, domestic violence, property crimes, public disturbances, and lost worker productivity. For these reasons, cities and counties are advised to use a mix of the policy mechanisms listed below to reduce excessive alcohol consumption and its associated harms.

Local Policies		Conditional Use Permits represent a flexible, customizable tool that can be strategically deployed to limit hours of sale and excessive advertising to youth, for example.
		Nuisance Ordinances can be used to ensure that alcohol establishments respect community norms and comply with ordinances concerning excessive noise and light, including the actions of patrons on or near the establishment.
		Alcohol Advertising Ordinances enable communities to limit the type or prevalence of alcohol advertising signage, especially where advertising will result in high child exposure.
		Enforcement can take the form of targeted bar checks (e.g., establishments known to sell to minors), intoxicated driver checkpoints at high-risk locations and alcohol-heavy community events, or place-of-last-drink programs. These efforts produce useful data for licensure hearings and tailored local policies.
		Screening and Intervention is an individual-level public health tool that increases the odds that an individual with an alcohol use disorder will seek treatment. The SBIRT tool can be scaled up using electronic methods (e-SBI).
		Responsible Beverage Service Training can be especially effective when targeting high-risk establishments, such as those with a history of over service, prior alcohol violations, or establishments appearing in place-of-last-drink databases.
State Policies		Excise Taxes and Minimum Unit Pricing leverage market forces relating price and quantity demanded to reduced alcohol consumption. These mechanisms have been shown to have a targeted effect on the highest-risk drinkers. The Iowa alcohol excise tax was last revised in the mid-1980s.
		Dram Shop Liability policies ensure that alcohol-selling establishments can be held liable when an overserved patron (e.g., highly intoxicated) causes an accident or property damage. Iowa currently has limited dram shop liability.
		Limiting Days and Hours of Sale has been shown to reduce excessive alcohol consumption. The State of Iowa allows alcohol to be sold every day of the week from 6:00 AM to 2:00 AM.

Local Alcohol Policy

As one of 18 alcohol control states, the Iowa state code empowers the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division (ABD) as the sole wholesaler of distilled spirits. The ABD is also empowered to approve (and rescind) the licensing of establishments for the sale of alcohol, engage in some enforcement activities, and to partner with businesses and local officials in various alcohol-related matters. Communities have an important role to play in setting local alcohol policy that aligns with community norms, standards, and health and safety goals.

Place-Based Regulation

When alcohol establishments become densely clustered, they increase neighborhood risk of violence, crime, public nuisances, and other harms. Alcohol outlet densities (AOD) in close proximity to sensitive locations such as schools, parks, and churches, or near at-risk populations, including children, pose an especially high risk to individuals and families. Communities can reduce AOD risk and harm by closely monitoring them, reducing their density, and implementing ordinances that improve health and safety.

CONDITIONAL USE PERMITS

One tool communities can leverage to regulate alcohol establishments is the [conditional use permit](#) (CUP). In contrast to alcohol licenses, which are largely outside the control of local policymakers, CUPs represent a customizable layer of local regulation over which the community has substantial control. CUPs come in different forms, as determined by city ordinances.

Typically, a zoning board or commission has the authority to approve or deny CUPs based on established criteria, such as its impacts on community health and wellbeing. In the context of alcohol establishments, CUPs can be used to reduce establishment clustering, place additional requirements on alcohol outlets that limit their harms in sensitive areas, or support enforcement of problem establishments. Des Moines has used CUPs to place restrictions on alcohol establishments with a history of problem incidents (e.g., noise ordinance violations, assaults, DWIs).

ALCOHOL ESTABLISHMENT REGULATIONS

In some cases, using CUPs to limit or reduce alcohol clusters may be difficult, due to local political realities and the influence of preexisting establishments. Where these conditions exist, communities can protect community health and improve safety by crafting local ordinances specific to alcohol-selling establishments.

Nuisance ordinances are one way that narrowly tailored local regulations can be used. Many communities have a nuisance ordinance of one kind or another in their city code to regulate noise or limit loitering, for example. A

Des Moines, IA requires CUPs for a variety of building uses, including alcohol sales. Among other requirements, the business location must safeguard “the health, safety, and general welfare of persons residing in the adjoining or surrounding residential area.”

In December 2022, Des Moines used the CUP [to limit hours of sale](#) and place greater restrictions on a downtown alcohol establishment, citing extensive 911 calls as evidence of neighborhood harms.

In 2017, the Des Moines Zoning Board of Adjustment [denied a CUP to a Shop N Save](#), citing the problematic history of the location. The decision was appealed to the judicial system, where it was affirmed by both the district court and the Iowa Court of Appeals.

nuisance ordinance that focuses on alcohol establishments or outlet clustering might involve stricter regulations around noise, fights, and other harms associated with excessive and irresponsible alcohol consumption; boundaries delineating a downtown area or entertainment district for stricter regulation or enforcement; or more substantial penalties for businesses that fail to prevent nuisances on or immediately adjacent to their property.

Regulating alcohol advertising is another example of locally tailored ordinances. Iowa law prohibits alcohol advertising on the exterior of establishments but allows interior signage, including outward-facing advertisements on windows. State code offers no distinction between bars, where patronage is restricted to 21 and older individuals, and restaurants or convenience stores, where youth are present. Cities can use local ordinances to distinguish between these kinds of alcohol-selling establishments to limit advertising near schools, parks, libraries, and other places where children are present. The latter is an important way for communities to [reduce youth drinking intentions](#).

Enforcement

Most alcohol sales and consumption enforcement reside with local law enforcement in Iowa. There is significant evidence that increased bar checks, [especially for sales to minors](#), can decrease actual sales to minors and reduce excessive drinking (e.g., extreme public intoxication). A benefit of precision enforcement of alcohol sales and consumption laws is that it can yield long-run savings by reducing reactive service calls, limiting property damage near problem establishments, and lead to higher work productivity and fewer sick days.

Between November 2022 and January 2023, the **Ames, Iowa** City Council denied liquor licenses to three alcohol establishments ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)) on the basis of failed compliance checks and underage citations. In two of the three cases, the failed compliance checks triggered an automatic 30-day suspension and \$1,500 fine, irrespective of the appeal review by the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division.

Bar checks that result in citations can also be used to identify problem alcohol establishments and as evidence in local and state decisions to renew, deny, or suspend liquor licenses. This was the case in Ames, Iowa, as seen in the case study to the right. The Public Science Collaborative created an interactive [map of the locations of alcohol establishments](#) cited for sales violations in recent years.

Screen and Intervene

Beyond city ordinances, community organizations can also promote interventions at the individual level, such as an electronic screening and brief intervention (e-SBI). This process involves a short series of questions to evaluate whether the individual has, or is at risk of, an alcohol use disorder. If this is the case, a brief intervention takes place with feedback describing the risks of excessive drinking. The [Community Preventive Services Task Force](#) found that e-SBI is among the most effective alcohol interventions currently available. Although this strategy focuses on individuals, it can be scaled up for implementation in schools, colleges, or with at-risk groups such as those who receive public intoxication or operating while intoxicated citations.

Responsible Beverage Service Training

Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) training programs train bartenders and other alcohol-serving employees in a range of practices, including how to check identification cards, recognize excessive consumption and intoxication, and ways to intervene and prevent patrons from driving intoxicated. Research on these programs varies, as there are many different styles of implementation and issues that can be covered in RBS training. The [Community Preventive Services Task Force](#) found insufficient evidence to conclusively determine that RBS programs reduce excessive consumption, primarily due to uncertainty in how the RBS programs in academic studies are scaled up for application to a larger areas. However, the RBS literature generally shows these programs to be effective, at least

with individual alcohol establishments that undergo intensive training. For this reason, RBS programs may be at their most effective when targeted to problem establishments with a history of over service.

State Alcohol Policy

Many of the policy mechanisms that most significantly reduce excessive alcohol consumption and its downstream harms to public health and safety reside with the state in Iowa. Unfortunately, wine and beer excise taxes have not changed since the mid-1980s. As shown in the graph below, the effect of non-action on alcohol tax policy in Iowa is that alcohol has become more affordable over recent decades. Not surprisingly, sales by volume have also increased over this same period.

Price Interventions

A basic principle of economics is that as prices increase, quantity demand decreases. This principle also holds true when it comes to alcohol sales, such that a straightforward way to reduce the most harmful effects of excessive alcohol consumption is to increase prices. In this regard, there are two key mechanisms by which Iowa can increase the price of alcohol.

ALCOHOL EXCISE TAXES

Similar to taxes that target tobacco products and snack foods—two classes of products that are also known to harm health—alcohol-specific taxes can be used to decrease overall and excessive alcohol consumption. In Iowa, the excise tax for a gallon of beer is \$0.19, and for wine, it is \$1.75. Because the rates have not changed since 1986, the inflation-adjusted tax rates decreased to \$0.08 and \$0.71 for beer and wine, respectively. Accommodations of high-ABV craft beers into the beer tax have also decreased the average tax for high-ABV beverages.

MINIMUM UNIT PRICES

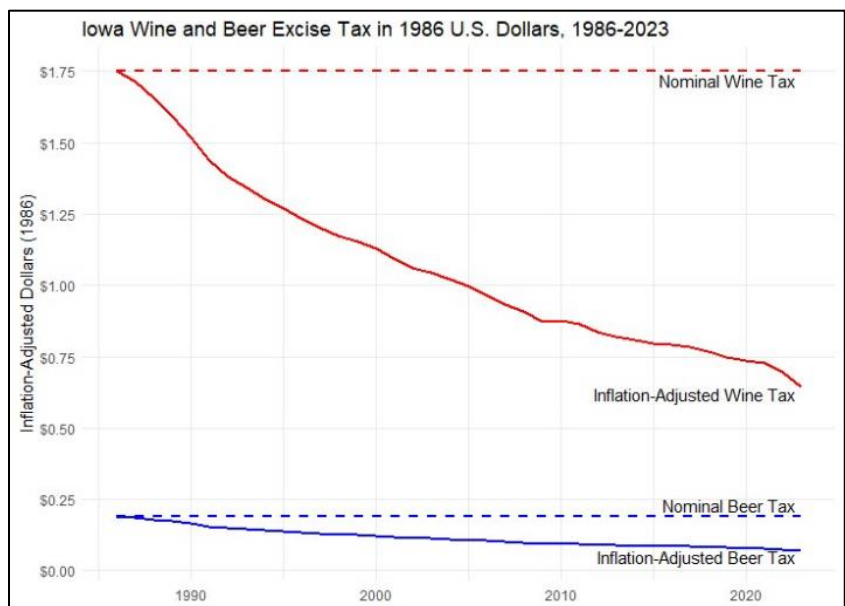
With Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP), the state sets a minimum price under which alcohol cannot be sold. This effectively raises the price of alcohol by limiting special deals or sales, such as happy hours, two-for-one, or all-you-can-drink specials. States can also implement [restrictions on drink specials](#) rather than implementing a more sweeping MUP for all alcoholic beverages. Evidence shows that even this modest intervention can be a very effective policy to reduce consumption among the highest-risk drinkers.

Dram Shop Liability

Dram shop liability is a policy mechanism that enables the state to hold alcohol establishments legally responsible for customers who, upon leaving the establishment highly intoxicated, violate municipal and state laws. This might include property damage, driving while intoxicated, assault, or a fatal car crash, for example. Iowa's current dram shop liability law was revised in 2018 to limit non-economic damages to \$250,000.

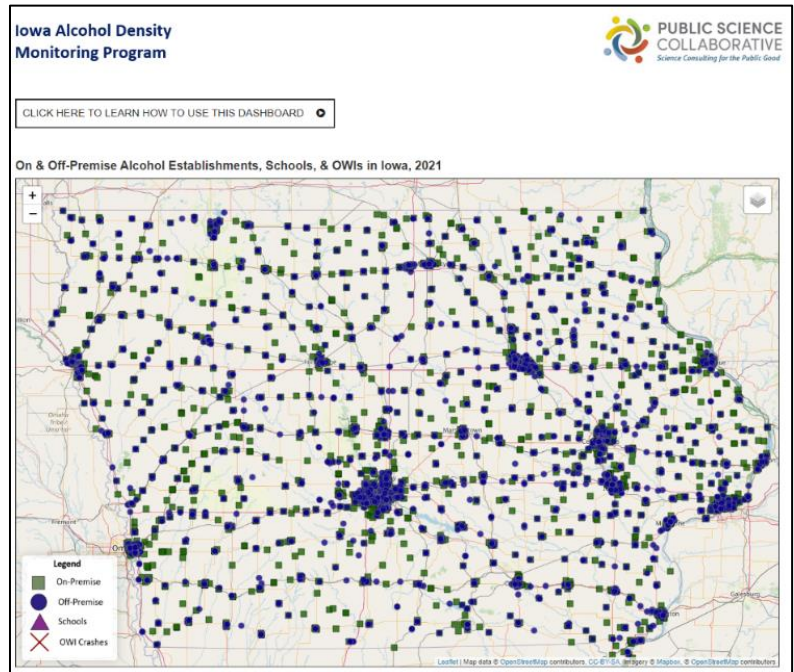
Limits on Days and Hours of Sale

Iowa code prohibits the sale of alcohol between 2:00 AM and 6:00 AM every day of the week. However, there is evidence that further limiting hours and days can reduce excessive alcohol consumption. With the exception of conditional use permits, limiting hours and days of sale can only be enacted by state legislation in Iowa.

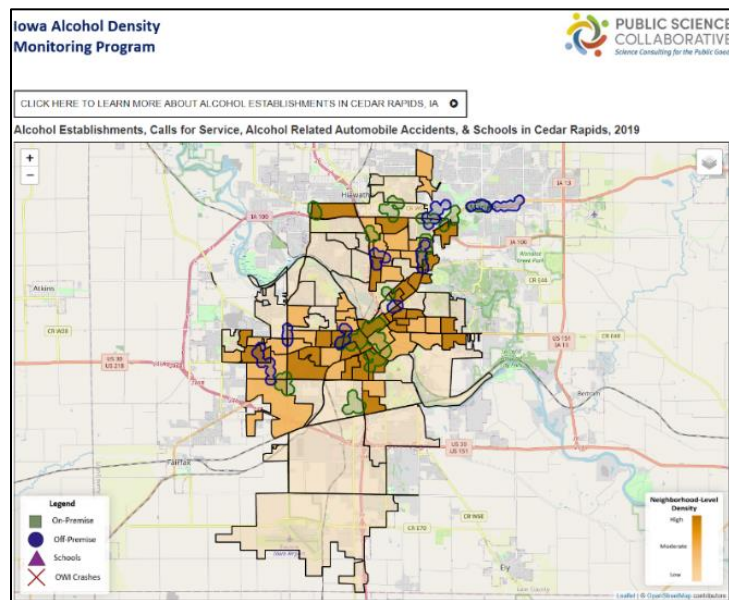


Iowa Alcohol Outlet Monitoring Dashboard

PSC built an interactive website that contains a large amount of local information concerning alcohol sales, violations, clustering of establishments (AODs), and community resources that can help communities to be a welcoming place without compromising health and safety. These web-based resources include interactive dashboards that show the locations of [every alcohol-selling establishment in the state](#), differentiated by on-premise or off-premise classification (see picture to the left), the locations of sales violations, alcohol outlet clusters that threaten community health and safety, and also the locations of schools and alcohol-related automobile crashes. Users can drill down to the local level and explore the alcohol risk environment in any community in Iowa. We hope these statewide tools will help enable communities to develop thoughtful, culturally appropriate policies that reduce underage drinking, alcohol-related crimes such as homicide, domestic assault, driving while intoxicated, and damage to property, and the incidence of cancer and other alcohol-related chronic diseases.



PSC also created customized dashboards for four Iowa communities, including Burlington, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, and Marshalltown. These community alcohol dashboards map the locations of alcohol outlets, schools, DUI car crashes, and outlet densities in each community. They also include data layers that identify neighborhoods with a high number of reactive service calls (e.g., 911) that are known to be influenced by excessive alcohol consumption. In the image to the left is a screenshot of the [Cedar Rapids Dashboard](#), showing on-premise and off-premise alcohol outlet clusters layered over a map showing neighborhoods with low, medium, and high numbers of service calls



related to families (e.g., domestic disturbance, assault, elder abuse, runaway child). Blending local data such as these with alcohol data can help communities identify problem establishments, neighborhoods in need of resources, monitor the impacts of local policy interventions, and otherwise inform local decision-making. We encourage communities to leverage their local data to guide local interventions aimed at preventing or mitigating the harms of excessive alcohol consumption.

The Iowa Alcohol Monitoring website also contains links to reports, articles, and research studies about community-oriented alcohol policy. We encourage you to [explore these resources](#) to learn more about alcohol policy in and around your community.