

Policy Planning and Choice: Guide to Feasible Interventions

Adapted from:

Stimson, G., Grant, M., Choquet, M., & Garrison, P. (Eds.).
(2007). *Drinking in Context: Patterns, Interventions, and
Partnerships*. New York: Routledge

Policy Guides provide an overview of the key principles underlying ICAP's approach to developing and implementing alcohol policies based on drinking patterns, targeted interventions, and the building of partnerships. The Guides can be used where in-depth information and detailed policy tools are not needed. However, we recommend that the Policy Guides be used in conjunction with ICAP's other, more comprehensive, Policy Tools, including the ICAP Blue Book.

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Policy Planning and Choice: Guide to Feasible Interventions

The implementation of alcohol policies relies on the ability to maximize benefits while minimizing harm. Immediate needs and concerns must be addressed quickly and efficiently, while at the same time leaving room for an overarching policy framework within which specific actions can be put into practice.

Policy options can be divided broadly into two approaches: *population-level* policy measures, implemented through governmental action and legislation that address the general population; and *targeted interventions*, an array of measures aimed at specific populations, behaviors, and contexts in which risk related to drinking is increased and that involve a spectrum of stakeholders. The latter group of interventions recognizes the diversity of drinking patterns across populations and cultures, as well as the importance of garnering the resources and expertise of a range of (often non-traditional) partners.

Using the Guide

This *Guide to Feasible Interventions* examines a range of different measures aimed at reducing the potential harm associated with drinking. It provides an overview both of population-level approaches and targeted interventions, weighing their relative strengths and weaknesses in various areas. A more detailed discussion can be found in *Drinking in Context: Patterns, Interventions, and Partnerships* (Stimson, Grant, Choquet, & Garrison, 2007).

The selection and design of interventions requires a clear specification of objectives, strategies for achieving them, and targets (populations, behaviors, or contexts). It also requires assessment of available resources—human, technical, or financial. Finally, which interventions may be most appropriate for a given situation and for achieving a specific objective also depends on an assessment of its likely outcomes, both those intended and unintended. Table 1 lists the criteria that can be applied to individual interventions to assist with the assessment of their feasibility.

Table 2 applies these criteria to a range of different interventions. It is intended to be used as a guide by those seeking to design, monitor, and implement alcohol policy measures, focusing on what is most suitable and practical within particular contexts. It can be used as an aid in comparing and weighing various approaches against each other, to be updated and modified as best fits the particular circumstances in question. It is suggested that Table 2 be used as a complement to the *ICAP Blue Book: Practical Guides for Alcohol Policy and Prevention Approaches*.

What we have attempted to demonstrate is that the criterion for selecting a particular intervention is not just whether there is available scientific evidence for effectiveness. Other criteria include what is feasible, what can be realistically accomplished, and what can be implemented with the resources available. The key criteria for the selection of some measures over others are that they do not require procedural or structural changes, or intensive allocation of resources.

Table 1: Intervention Planning and Choice

Objectives	What the intervention should accomplish
Target(s)	The population, behavior, or context that is the object of the intervention; this should also include an indication of the required coverage of the intervention.
Outcomes	Changes expected as the result of the intervention. Positive outcomes are generally sought, but there may also be unintended outcomes, both positive and negative.
Shortcomings	Limitations of the intervention.
Obstacles to overcome	Societal, community, and other factors that may inhibit the introduction of the intervention, impede its implementation, or hinder its success.
Procedural requirements	The actions needed—and at which level—in order to introduce and implement the intervention.
Resources for implementation	Required human, technical, and organizational resources.

For ease of reference, measures are grouped by intervention type, though policy-makers should be encouraged to think logically in terms of objectives and the strategies for achieving the objectives. Depending on the particular circumstances, these measures may be implemented alone or as a mix of approaches. For example, the reduction of alcohol-impaired driving might involve various strategies and measures, applied alone or, more probably, in combination.

Most of the interventions listed in Table 2 clearly require cooperation among a wide range of potential partners. Quite simply, interventions cannot be introduced in opposition to major organizations or groupings in the population. Many need active cooperation, support, and endorsement in order to be implemented and to work successfully. Reducing alcohol-related harms is “everybody’s business”—including consumers, producers, retailers, educators, law enforcers, and governments.

Not every available measure is listed here, and the outcomes (intended or otherwise) and mode of implementation may well differ from country to country. As well as being an *aide-mémoire* to common interventions, Table 2 serves as a useful reminder to policy-makers of some of the things that need to be considered when selecting, designing, and implementing interventions.

Suggested resources:

Stimson, G. V., Grant, M., Choquet, M., & Garrison, P. (Eds.) (2007). *Drinking in Context: Patterns, Interventions, and Partnerships*. New York: Routledge.

International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP). (2005). *ICAP Blue Book. Practical Guides for Alcohol Policy and Prevention Approaches*. Available: <http://www.icap.org>.

Table 2: Feasible Interventions for Minimizing Harm

Among the many interventions that may be applied at the national or local levels and that target the population, groups, contexts, and behaviors associated with increased risk for harm, some may be implemented quickly and efficiently. These measures (highlighted) may often be implemented without major procedural or structural changes (such as changes in legislation) and many do not require intensive allocation of resources. The omission of other measures from selection does not imply that they are ineffective in minimizing harm around drinking, simply that their implementation may be more difficult. In fact, measures such as the setting of legal age limits for the consumption and purchase of beverage alcohol, random breath testing, or alcohol education are valuable tools with proven impact.

<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Target(s)</i>	<i>Intended Outcomes</i>	<i>Unintended Outcomes</i>	<i>Shortcomings</i>	<i>Obstacles to Overcome</i>	<i>Procedural Requirements</i>	<i>Resources for Implementation</i>
Total ban on sales	Elimination of alcohol from market	Whole population	Zero or minimal consumption Reduced abuse Reduced physical harm (chronic and acute) Reduced social cost	Rise in illicit production and trade; black market Rise in organized crime Increased availability of lower-quality beverages Reduced pleasure and benefits	Elimination of commercial sector Inconsistency with policies in neighboring countries Restricted consumer freedoms Reduced pleasure and benefits	Cultural resistance to/acceptability of government control Consumer demand for alcohol Illicit trade Loss of revenue from taxation and pricing	Legislation for prohibition Institution of penalties for breaches	Government at national level Government at local level, where jurisdictions have autonomy Enforcement by police and customs Religious leaders and institutions
Taxation and pricing	Raise price, reduce overall consumption	Whole population	Reduced alcohol abuse and heavy drinking Reduced social cost Reduced physical harm (chronic and acute)	Reduced pleasure Reduced benefits Increased black market Increased cross-border trade Increased illicit production Increased consumption of low-quality beverages Social inequality of access/affordability	Loss of revenue Individual responsibility not encouraged Inconsistency with policies in neighboring countries	Cultural resistance Requires education for acceptance	Legislation Standards for taxation rates	Government at national level Government at local level, where jurisdictions have autonomy Adequate and efficient enforcement Collection of revenue Private sector needed for implementation Commercial market/products

Intervention	Objectives	Target(s)	Intended Outcomes	Unintended Outcomes	Shortcomings	Obstacles to Overcome	Procedural Requirements	Resources for Implementation
Government monopoly of retail sales	Regulated access to alcohol	Whole population	Limited private sector involvement Increased government revenue Reduced alcohol abuse Reduced social problems	Limited free market and trade Impact on economy around production, distribution, and sale Restricted private sector Rise in illicit production and trade; black market Rise in organized crime Shifts trade to neighboring jurisdictions Impact on social outcomes (e.g., drinking and driving across borders)	Inconsistency with policies in neighboring countries Restricted consumer freedoms Limited choice	Cultural resistance to/acceptability of government control Harmonization of regional alcohol policies Traditionally unresponsive to consumer demand	Legislation	Government at national level Government at local level, where jurisdictions have autonomy Infrastructure for retail Enforcement through police force Customs and border control agencies for law enforcement and monitoring of cross-border trade and black market
Restricted hours and days of sale	Limited access to alcohol	Whole population	Reduced consumption Reduced alcohol abuse Reduced social problems	Inconsistency with policies in neighboring countries Restricted consumer freedoms	Increased availability of lower-quality beverages Limited free market and trade Impact on economy around production, distribution, and sale Loss of revenue Shifts trade to neighboring countries or jurisdictions	Cultural resistance to/acceptability of government control Harmonization of regional alcohol policies Unresponsive to consumer demand	Legislation Institution of penalties for breaches of regulation	Government at national level Government at local level, where jurisdictions have autonomy Enforcement through police force Customs and border control agencies for law enforcement and monitoring of cross-border trade and black market
Restrictions on advertising and promotions	Reduce consumption by reducing enticement to purchase	Whole population May also target particular groups (e.g., sports audiences, young people)	Reduced harmful drinking, especially among young people	Restriction of commercial freedoms Disregard of beneficial aspects of alcohol consumption Limited brand information Restriction on funds to TV/radio programming, sports, and arts from alcohol advertising and/or sponsorships	Does not take other influences into account (e.g., family and peer influences)	Consumer demand for alcohol Advertising practices in neighboring jurisdictions, the Internet, and the media	Legislated regulatory or self-regulatory framework	Government at national level Enforcement mechanism

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Responsible drinking messages	Reduce consumption by alerting consumers to health hazards of immoderate consumption	Whole population Particular groups (e.g., pregnant women and young people)	Reduce abusive drinking patterns and harm Encourage responsible drinking		Longer-term approach: awareness building and information Implementation best when combined with other measures (e.g., education)	Perception of industry motivation in messages Prevailing drinking culture	Legislated regulatory or self-regulatory framework	Producers of beverage alcohol Advertisers and the media
Targeted Measures: Groups at Risk								
Minimum legal purchase/ drinking age	Elimination of drinking under legal age	Young people under the legal purchase and drinking age	Prevention of health and social problems among those below legal age Adherence to law	Impact on social outcomes, such as drinking and driving across borders Drives underage drinking underground Criminalization of underage drinking	Legal purchase and drinking ages vary across countries Inconsistency between age of majority and legal age of purchase Incongruity with reality of drinking among young people Does not teach responsible drinking patterns Inconsistency of legal age across neighboring jurisdictions	Drinking culture among young people Permissiveness of drinking under legal age Lack of viable alternatives to drinking for many young people Ignorance about drinking patterns and relationship to outcomes Ignorance about legal age in many countries Lack of enforcement	Legislation Enforcement and implementation of punitive measures for breaches of regulation	Government at national level Government at local level, where jurisdictions have autonomy Educators, medical professionals, social workers, and others to pass information Training, education, and awareness building (e.g., through public campaigns) Compliance among retailers and servers Effective enforcement measures Community support Parents, guardians, and other adult role models

Intervention	Objectives	Target(s)	Intended Outcomes	Unintended Outcomes	Shortcomings	Obstacles to Overcome	Procedural Requirements	Resources for Implementation
School-based education	Educate young people about alcohol and its effects Reduced drinking under legal drinking age Reduced problems among young people	Young people	Abstinence under minimum mandated age Responsible and moderate drinking (as legally permissible) Raised awareness Harm reduction	Raised interest in alcohol Interest in alternative psychoactive substances	Evaluation suggests that behavior changes are not immediate Longer-term approach: awareness building and providing information Implementation best when combined with other measures	Influence of parents and peers Didactic approach may not resonate with young people Active participation of young people needed Does not reach marginalized groups due to attrition from schools (e.g., in many developing countries)	Education policy	Education system and school boards for integration into school curricula Teachers, parents, and students Training of teachers and educators NGOs, beverage alcohol industry (e.g., social aspects organizations [SAOs]), and others to develop and sponsor programs Community leaders Funding for development of materials, training, and implementation
Life skills	Reduction of heavy or harmful drinking patterns	Young people	Behavior change and awareness building around responsible drinking Integration of responsible drinking with healthy lifestyles and decision-making Addressing hard-to-reach populations		Does not focus exclusively on drinking awareness building and information Longer-term approach: Behavior changes may not be immediate	Attrition from schools, especially in developing countries Requires involvement of parents and others Requires commitment from teachers to learn/teach the program	Education or health policy	Can be integrated into existing programs and education measures Community, educators, and religious leaders Range of programs for young people Funding for development of materials, training, and implementation NGOs, beverage alcohol industry (e.g., SAOs), and others to develop and sponsor programs

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Early identification and brief intervention	Early prevention of harm in those at risk	Nondependent problem drinkers	Modify harmful drinking patterns Reduce risk for social and physical harm	Patients lie to medical practitioners		Reluctance to undergo screening Ensuring follow-up Social stigma of drinking problems	Integration into health care system Referral for treatment, where appropriate	Any health care setting (e.g., pharmacy, emergency room, clinic, or doctor's office) Availability of screening instruments Training of practitioners in screening Treatment resources available Technology resources for internet-based tools
Targeted Measures: Contexts								
Server training	Reduced incidence of intoxication Reduced violence and public disorder Reduced potential for harm and injury Reduced liability for outlet owners and operators	Licensed premises and other public venues	Reduced harm Reduced violence Reduced public disorder Reduced alcohol-impaired driving Reduced intoxication Reduced liability for outlet owners and operators	Decreased sales Shifts heavy drinking to home or other venues	Ignores undrruptive heavy drinkers Implementation best when combined with other measures (e.g., education and campaigns)	General support needed Cost for hospitality and retail sector operators	Possible linkage to licensing requirements Insurance and liability Self-enforcement needed	Retail and service sector outlet owners, managers, and staff Producers of beverage alcohol Incentives or penalties needed Training of staff Broad coverage of outlets and trade support Police presence National or regional government Community support
Restrictions on density of serving and retail outlets	Reduced access to alcohol	Entertainment and retail districts	Reduced incidents of violence and public disorder Reduced heavy drinking	Shifts heavy drinking to home or other venues Reduced revenue generation for businesses and communities	Reduced competition, selection, and choice	Consumer demand Resistance from retailers Political interests	Licensing and zoning laws	Community support Enforcement Changes in infrastructure (e.g., transportation)

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Local accords and community action	Reduced social harm	Communities/ areas where harm indicators are high	Prevention of violence, crime, and disorder Efficient use of available resources Involvement of all segments of community; general support	May neglect low-profile issues	Focus on immediate community concerns, not long-range goals May be motivated by political expediency	Lack of communication between sectors of community	Enforcement needed Repercussions for breach of accord	Community support and involvement Involved police, media, local government, retailers and servers, insurance providers, community and religious leaders, educators, and others Mechanism for communication Leadership
Breath testing in high-injury-risk workplaces	Reduced risk for harm	Workplace	Reduced accidents and injury to self and others Increased awareness/deterrence		Needs to be supplemented by employee support programs	Cultural resistance	Legislation or voluntary codes and self-regulation by employers and professional groups	Employer support Resources for testing needed Implementation of penalties Employee training
Targeted Measures: Behaviors								
Social norms marketing	Reduction of heavy drinking	Extreme drinking (especially among young people)	Instilling realistic expectancies and attitudes toward drinking Reduction of health and social harm	Responsible drinking among young people Realistic expectancies and attitudes around drinking	Longer-term approach: awareness building and provision of information Behavior changes may not be immediate	Misperceptions of peer drinking behavior may be hard to overcome Drinking culture among young people (e.g., on college/university campuses)	Education or health policy	Educators, school boards, and university governance bodies Integration into school curriculum Funding for development of materials, training, and implementation
Random breath testing sobriety checkpoints	Reduced drinking and driving	Driving under the influence of alcohol	Reduced irresponsible drinking Increased awareness Sober driving, driving below legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limits Reduced accidents, injuries, and mortality from road traffic crashes Encourage designated drivers or alternative transportation	Limited access to outlets relying on driving patrons Impact on rural economy Discriminatory targeting of enforcement (e.g., ethnic groups)	Infringement of personal freedoms Inconvenience to sober drivers Diversion of resources Implementation best when combined with other measures (e.g., education and awareness campaigns)	Broad-based support Cultural/ societal views on individual freedoms Corruption around enforcement Access to alternative transportation helpful	Legislation	Government at national or local level Police enforcement Training of police; equipment and resources for implementation Campaigns to raise awareness Beverage alcohol industry: retailers and servers Community support



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