

ALCOHOL AVAILABILITY: SUMMARYⁱ

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Reasonable regulations concerning alcohol availability are a necessary component of any balanced alcohol policy. Excessive regulations run the risk of generating unintended and often negative consequences, such as driving consumers toward the informal (unregulated) market. Proper policy enforcement should be backed by education of the general public about drinking patterns and outcomes, the implementation of adequate prevention, and the involvement of the broader community.

This paper considers two specific issues relating to alcohol availability: legal age limits and the prevalence of noncommercial beverages.

Legal Age Limits

Teaching young people about responsible drinking patterns, strengthening the positive role of parents, family and peers, and enforcing local rules must accompany any laws in order to be effective. In this regard, the industry has and will continue to play its role through awareness programs, responsible hospitality initiatives, partnerships with community stakeholders, and working with governments to reinforce purchase and drinking age limits. However, this is not the sole province of producers, who are not directly involved in the sale and service of alcohol; therefore, all industry stakeholders—including in particular the retailers—must be active.

Noncommercial Alcohol

The amount of noncommercial alcohol consumed globally is considerable, particularly in developing regions. It is important for governments to gain effective control over informal alcohol production and distribution, not least because these beverages are not overseen by government quality controls, laws, or self-regulation. These beverages can be toxic, served in an unsafe manner, and accessible to minors.

A number of interventions can help reduce the harmful impact of noncommercial alcohol if undertaken by governments, NGOs, and industry members working individually and in partnership:

- Develop and pilot an international methodology to gauge noncommercial alcohol production, consumption, and outcomes so that the interaction between policies and drinking can be better observed and evaluated, and cross-country comparisons can be made.
- Enforce laws against the production and sale of noncommercial alcohol.

ⁱ This is a summary of the paper submitted to the WHO public hearing on ways of reducing harmful use of alcohol. The paper and this summary were submitted by Adrian Botha on behalf of the companies sponsoring ICAP: Asahi Breweries, Bacardi-Martini, Beam Global Spirits & Wine, Brown-Forman Corporation, Diageo, Heineken, InBev, Molson Coors, Pernod Ricard, SABMiller, and Scottish & Newcastle. A referenced version of the paper submitted to WHO is available on the ICAP website at www.icap.org.

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- Provide consumer education and information about noncommercial alcohol, raising awareness about potential risks and drinking patterns.
- Undertake broad public campaigns to raise awareness about existing laws, enforcement, and possible punitive measures.
- Where appropriate, institute competitions and awards for quality as incentives to legal home-producers to raise and maintain the standards of their beverages.
- Set and enforce standards for commercial alcohol production, distribution, retail, and consumption, particularly in developing countries.
- Encourage commercial producers (e.g., through tax incentives) to provide affordable alternatives to illicit alcohol.
- Offer training, incentives, and funding to assist noncommercial producers to establish alternative income-generating businesses.

Addressing noncommercial alcohol is in the best interest of governments, law enforcement, and the industry. As a result, there is ample room for cooperation and initiatives based on partnership and directed at a common goal.