

Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Alberta: A Policy Review

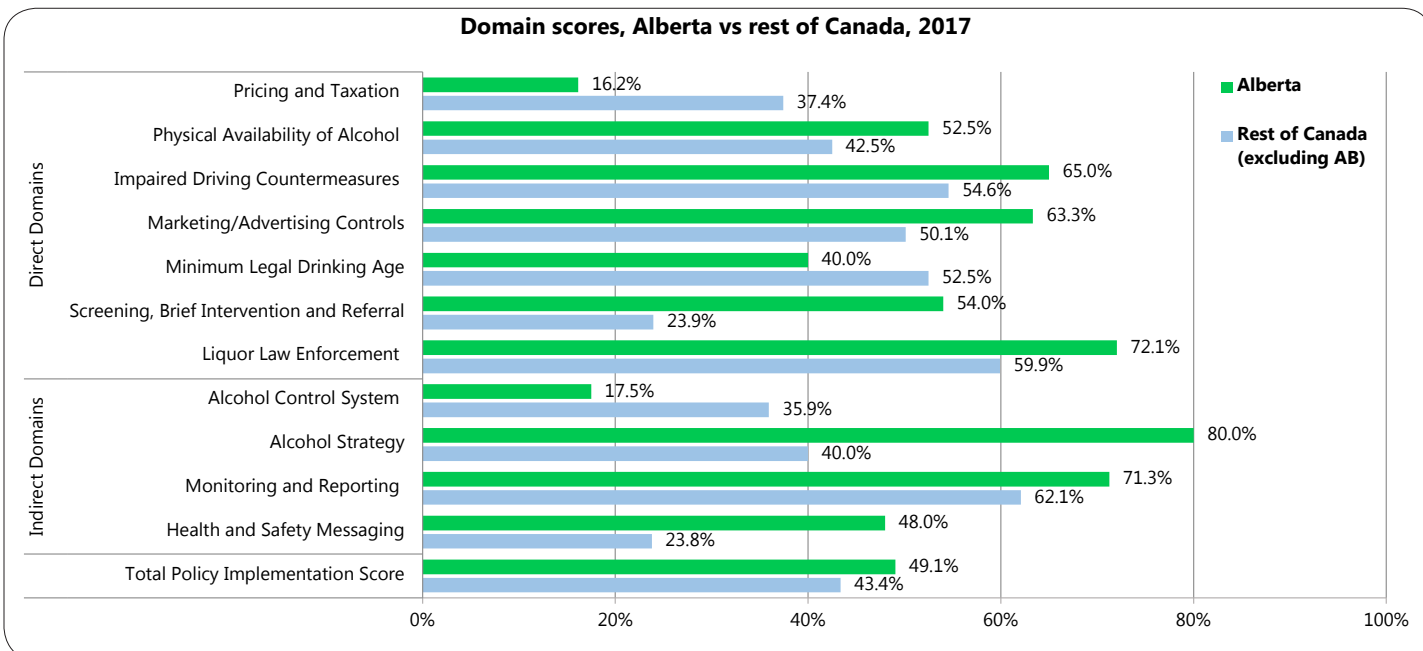
Alberta

Population (2016)	4,067,175
Per capita alcohol consumption age 15+*	9.7L pure ethanol**
Overall alcohol harm costs (2014)	\$2,396M
Net revenue from alcohol (2014)***	\$1,111M
Type of alcohol retail system	Wholesale: government monopoly; Retail: private system

The Provincial and Territorial Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation (CAPE) project is a rigorous assessment of whether evidence-based alcohol policies were implemented within each province and territory in 2017. A comprehensive alcohol policy framework was developed, containing gold standard best practices across 11 different policy domains. The first seven domains have evidence of effectiveness as means of *directly* reducing population level consumption of alcohol and/or related harms. The last four domains are composed of evidence-based strategies that more *indirectly* facilitate implementation of the first seven domains. See Stockwell et al, 2019^a for the full methodology and findings.

The scores presented in this summary reflect the degree to which Alberta has implemented these gold standard best practices captured in the alcohol policy framework. **Overall, Alberta scored 49% in 2017, which is 6% above the 43% average for the rest of Canada (excluding Alberta.)**

Domain scores, Alberta vs rest of Canada, 2017






Promising practices in Alberta

- There are some promising pricing restrictions in place in Alberta such as **restrictions on price-based advertising** (e.g. prohibitions against advertising free liquor, multi-drink specials, or all-you-can-drink specials). Discounted gift cards for on-premise liquor purchase are not allowed and coupons are only permitted if the price per drink does not fall below the minimum.
- To support safer drinking contexts, Alberta **restricts the number of alcoholic beverages** sold or served to a patron after 1am to two drinks and permits **re-corking of unfinished wine** for take-away at on-premise establishments such as bars and restaurants.
- Alberta has strong **interlock regulations** for *Criminal Code* impaired driving offenders, which requires completion of the interlock program prior to relicensing and a minimum 3-year interlock order for second offenses.
- The government liquor commission's social media platforms take a balanced approach to disseminating **health and safety messaging** and promotional messaging; The AGLC funds programs such as *Best Bar None* and resources such as *DrinkSense* which are dedicated to social responsibility and health and safety messaging.

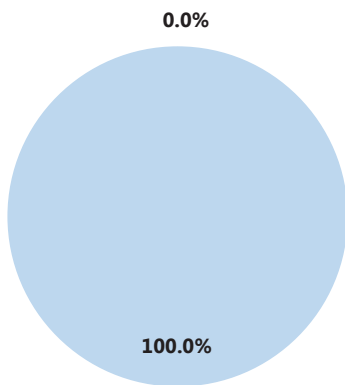
*Adjusted to account for unrecorded alcohol consumption. **Equivalent to 568 standard drinks (1 standard drink contains 17.05mL of pure alcohol and is equivalent to 341mL of 5% beer; 142mL of 12% wine; or 43mL of 40% spirits). *** Net income of liquor authorities, total taxes, and other revenue. See CAPE report for full list of data sources.^a

Strengthening alcohol policies in Alberta

Policy Domain		Score	Selected recommendations
DIRECT DOMAINS	 Pricing and Taxation	16% F	Ensure minimum prices are set at a rate per standard drink (e.g. 17.05mL pure alcohol) of at least \$1.75* per standard drink for off-premise retail stores and \$3.50* per standard drink for on-premise establishments , after taxes with no exceptions (*2019 price). For example, on-premise minimum prices should apply to all types of liquor licensees including for special events. Update all alcohol prices annually to reflect Alberta-specific inflation rates to ensure alcohol does not become less expensive relative to other goods over time. On-premise minimum prices have not been updated since implementation in 20008 and so have reduced potential as a harm reduction intervention.
	 Physical Availability	53% D-	Introduce legislated restrictions on outlet density in Alberta, particularly for on-premise establishments such as restaurants and bars. Limit the availability of alcohol by reducing trading hours ; do not allow early morning alcohol sales (i.e. before 11:00am) or late-night sales (i.e. after 8pm for off-premise retail stores and 1am for on-premise establishments) without exceptions such as during major events or sporting tournaments.
	 Impaired Driving Counter-measures	65% C-	Strengthen the graduated licensing program (GLP) for new drivers in Alberta by implementing a minimum GLP start age of 16 and ensuring there is zero tolerance for cannabis and illicit substances for GLP drivers for a minimum of 3 years after program completion. Penalties should be increased or modified for all drivers when the presence of a drug is detected in addition to alcohol and administrative license suspensions (ALS) should be recorded on driver's abstracts for at least 3 years and require a license reinstatement fee.
	 Marketing and Advertising Controls	63% C	Ensure alcohol advertising content restrictions cover placement and quantity of ads , and extend to media beyond radio and television such as digital, print and signage. Implement an independent complaint system with penalties that vary by severity of the violation. Require mandatory pre-screening for all alcohol ads by an independent authority to confirm compliance with content restrictions prior to publication.
	 Minimum Legal Drinking Age	40% F	Increase the minimum legal drinking age in Alberta to at least 19 to be in line with other provinces and territories; give consideration to graduated drinking policies that grant phased-in legal access to alcohol by limiting the amount and type of alcohol that can be purchased in specific settings between the ages of 19 and 21.
	 Screening, Brief Intervention/Referral	54% D-	Collaborate with health care professionals to develop screening, brief intervention and referral (SBIR) practice guidelines and tools to be implemented in a health care setting and online or consider adopting the SBIR resource developed by the College of Family Physicians. Implementation of SBIR tools should be tracked in order to inform future SBIR activities.
	 Liquor Law Enforcement	72% B-	Implement a risk-based licensing and enforcement (RBLE) program for off-premise retail stores and special occasion permits to inform licensing conditions and enforcement schedules based on outlet and licence holder characteristics as well as incident data; ensure RBLE criteria for on-premise establishments include outlet characteristics. Employ at least 1 liquor inspector per 300 outlets to ensure there are sufficient numbers to conduct frequent compliance checks and follow-up checks for violations; ensure liquor law violations are tracked and publicly reported .
INDIRECT DOMAINS	 Alcohol Control System	18% F	Consider reinstating government-owned and government-run off-premise retail stores in Alberta and ensure they report to a ministry with a mandate to protect health and/or safety . Phase out sales beyond on- and off-premise outlets such as online sales and liquor delivery services. Ensure there are legislated earmarked funds to support prevention initiatives and health messaging .
	 Alcohol Strategy	80% A-	Ensure Alberta's existing alcohol-specific strategy is updated , government endorsed and includes a range of evidence-based public health policies and is revised independently from the alcohol industry . Allocate dedicated funding to the strategy , have an identified leader with a public health and/or safety focus to facilitate implementation, and systems in place to monitor implementation and effectiveness. The strategy should be kept current with updates at least every five years .
	 Monitoring and Reporting	71% B-	Ensure that the alcohol consumption and harm indicators that are tracked (e.g. alcohol consumption, alcohol-related morbidity, mortality and crime) are made publicly available at least annually through a centralized system in order to support effective monitoring of trends in consumption and harms. Have an identified leader with a health and safety focus responsible for monitoring alcohol harm; make specific funding and/or staff resources available to support these monitoring initiatives.
	 Health and Safety Messaging	48% F	Implement legislated enhanced alcohol labels as a manufacturer requirement with health and safety messages, standard drink information, and national low-risk drinking guidelines; labels should have prominent rotating messages that are accompanied by pictorial images. Ensure that legislated health and safety messages displayed in all on-premise establishments and off-premise retail stores include a variety of health-focused messages .
Total Policy Implementation Score		49% F	A comprehensive list of gold standard best practice alcohol policies is available in Appendix C of the full CAPE report².

Alberta: selected findings, 2017

Alberta alcohol retail stores, 2017



■ Government retail stores ■ Private retail stores

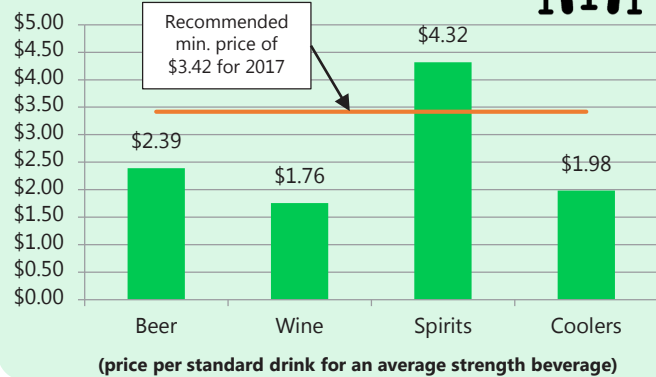
Best practice is 100% government-run alcohol retail stores

Alberta minimum prices per standard drink, 2017

Off-premise retail stores

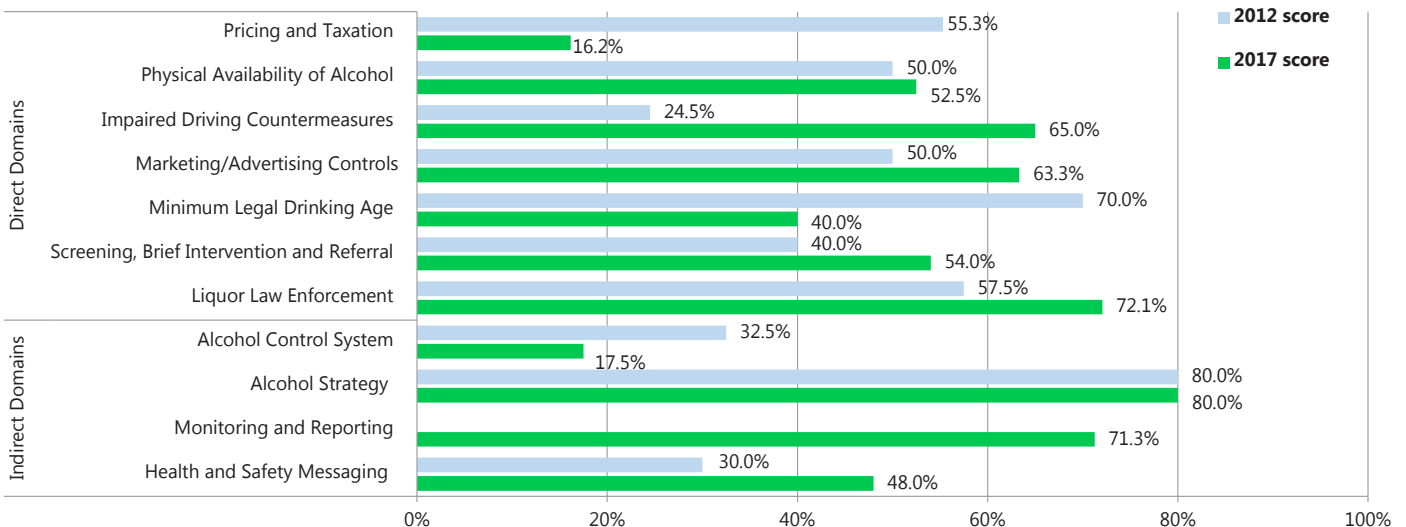


On-premise establishments (restaurants, bars, etc.)



Note: No off-premise minimum pricing. On-premise minimum beer price shown here is an average of two minimum beer prices.

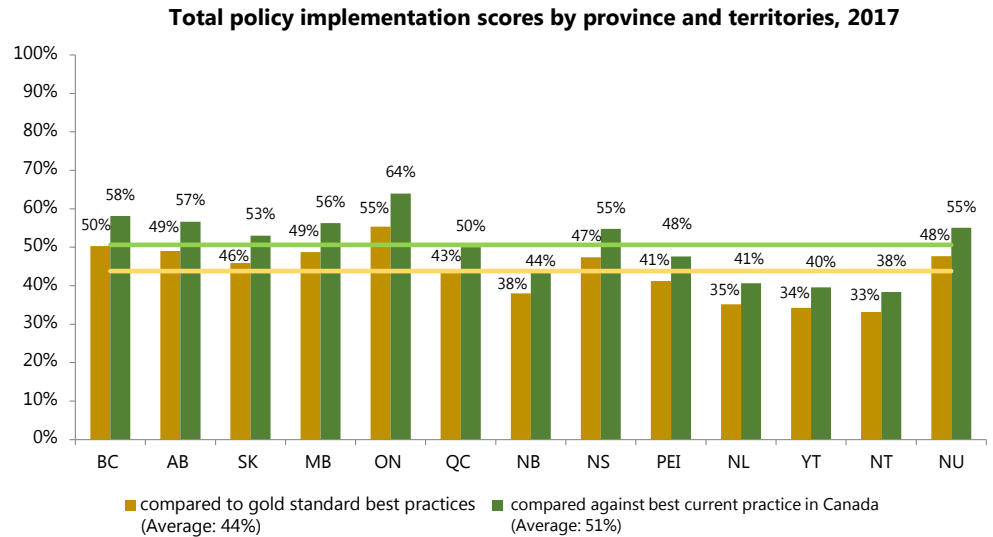
Domain scores, Alberta, 2012 vs 2017



Note: policy indicators may have changed between 2012 and 2017 thus scores reflect best practices at the time of data collection.

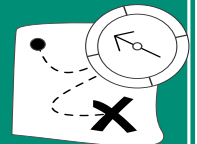
How does Alberta stack up against other provinces and territories?

Even though the provinces and territories scored poorly overall in relation to gold standard best practices, many examples of strong alcohol policy components were found across Canada. **In fact, if a province or territory chose to implement all of these best current practices that were identified they would have scored 87% (Grade A).** Based on these best current practices identified across all jurisdictions, the scores were scaled up to show how the provinces and territories measure up against best current practices in Canada (green bars).



Next steps for reducing alcohol-related harms and costs in Alberta

- In light of the substantial and increasing harm from alcohol use, the Alberta government should give greater priority to funding and implementing effective alcohol policies such as those outlined in this summary and in the full report²⁴.
- Position liquor boards within ministries directly concerned with health and safety rather than with finance and economic development.
- Consideration should be given to re-establishing at least partial government ownership of liquor retail outlets.
- Learn from other provinces' and territories' experiences with successful implementation of effective alcohol policies (see Best Practice Leaders identified on P11 of the full report²⁴).
- Government should take action in concert with NGOs and other stakeholders to implement a combination of population level policies prioritising the first seven policy areas identified in this summary.
- Inform the public about the risks of alcohol, including the comparative risks of alcohol and other substances, to create a more supportive climate for enacting effective policies. This can be achieved with initiatives such as mandatory warning labels on all alcohol containers and clear and consistent public health messaging on a range of health topics.
- Carefully document policy changes and regularly monitor and evaluate alcohol-related public health and safety outcomes to better inform future policy development.



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▣ To learn more about the Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation Project, read other jurisdictional summaries and download the full federal and jurisdictional reports, visit alcoholpolicy.cisur.ca or email cisur@uvic.ca.