

# Ontario's proposed plan to broaden alcohol sales will harm people, say public health officials

April 8 2024

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The Ontario government's plans to broaden alcohol sales to privately operated stores in the province could lead to higher consumption rates and related harms, [write](#) commentary authors in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

"These changes will result in a 289% increase in the number of alcohol stores in Ontario (n = 2,935 in March 2023, per the [Liquor Control Board of Ontario](#)), will likely reduce the price of alcohol, and will represent the biggest shift in decades with respect to how alcohol is sold in Canada," write Drs. Norman Giesbrecht, Center for Addiction and Mental Health and University of Toronto, and Daniel Myran, Bruyère Research Institute and The Ottawa Hospital, Ottawa, Ontario.

Extensive evidence indicates that these changes will increase alcohol use and associated harms, such as deaths, hospital visits and admissions, violence, and chronic disease. For example, an analysis of the first two years of [alcohol sales](#) in Ontario grocery stores found alcohol-related emergency department visits increased by more than 6% in areas with alcohol in [grocery stores](#) compared to those without.

The authors call for additional policies to help reduce the risk of negative effects of this policy change.

"We propose instituting policies at the provincial and federal level—including strengthening minimum pricing on alcohol, mandating warning labels on all alcoholic beverages, and increasing access to screening and treatment for alcohol use disorders—to partially mitigate potential harms and costs from these changes."

Although it is difficult to quantify the harms that may occur, the "public health imperative" posed by these changes warrants action and perhaps a

rethink by the Ontario government.

**More information:** Norman Giesbrecht et al, Harms and costs of proposed changes in how alcohol is sold in Ontario, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2024). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.240069](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.240069)

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

Citation: Ontario's proposed plan to broaden alcohol sales will harm people, say public health officials (2024, April 8) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-04-ontario-broaden-alcohol-sales-people.html>

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