

# **Population-wide interventions for reducing alcohol consumption:**

what does the per capita  
consumption indicator say?

**Snapshot series on alcohol control policies and practice**

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## **Brief at- a-glance**

## **The problem**

Population-wide interventions are the most cost-effective approach to tackle the root causes of and reduce overall alcohol consumption and harm. Many global commitments and surveillance systems use this population-wide approach to track progress in implementing alcohol control policies. Per capita alcohol consumption is used as an indicator for that purpose. Despite its many advantages, countries rarely publish or use it as an indicator to monitor policies that tackle alcohol consumption.

## **The evidence**

Per capita alcohol consumption is a summary measure of alcohol consumption for a population measured in litres of pure alcohol consumed by an average adult per year. It presents many advantages as an indicator for monitoring policies, including being readily available, extremely reliable, comparable across settings and closely associated with alcohol-related harm.

## **The know-how**

Challenges related to the use of national and international sources for estimating the per capita alcohol consumption indicator as well as its use to monitor policy effectiveness are illustrated by the experiences from Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and Brazil.

## **The next steps**

The next steps for policy- and decision-makers include setting out training opportunities to better understand the indicator and advocating for its implementation. The next steps for civil society, community-based organizations, researchers and research institutions include considering ways to improve measurement and estimation of unrecorded alcohol production and consumption to strengthen the accuracy of per capita alcohol consumption indicator as well as to regularly monitor the characteristics of the per capita alcohol consumption indicator to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

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This work has been made possible thanks to the financial contribution of the Government of Norway.

## Related resources

[Webinar recording](#) | [Event description](#) | [Programme](#)

Population-wide interventions for reducing alcohol consumption: what does the per capita consumption indicator say.

(Snapshot series on alcohol control policies and practice. Brief 5, 16 November 2021)

ISBN 978-92-4-004442-5 (electronic version)

ISBN 978-92-4-004443-2 (print version)

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**Suggested citation.** Population-wide interventions for reducing alcohol consumption: what does the per capita consumption indicator say. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. (Snapshot series on alcohol control policies and practice. Brief 5, 16 November 2021.) Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

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Layout and design: Lars Moller, Erica Barbazza

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## About the series




This Snapshot is part of a series of briefs tackling critical issues related to the determinants driving the acceptability, availability and affordability of alcohol consumption and how it affects people and their communities. The series aims to facilitate evidence and experience-informed conversations on key topics relevant to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the noncommunicable diseases targets in the context of the WHO Global Strategy for reducing the harmful use of alcohol and its global action plan. Each brief is the result of a global, multistakeholder conversation convened by the Less Alcohol Unit, part of the WHO Department of Health Promotion. The topics of the series emerged in response to blind spots in the current policy conversations. The approach and length of the Snapshots do not fully describe the complexities of each topic nor do the illustrative country experiences. The series is a conversation-starter rather than normative guidance. Relevant WHO resources are provided to explore the subject in more depth.

The series is intended for a wide audience, including professionals working in public health and local and national alcohol policy focal points, policy-makers, government officials, researchers, civil society groups, consumer associations, the mass media and people new to alcohol research or practice.

### **What is a health promotion approach to reducing alcohol consumption?**

Drinking has multidimensional connotations. Robust and growing evidence demonstrates that cultural, social and religious norms influence alcohol consumption – acceptability, ease of purchase (availability) and price (affordability). Addressing this multidimensional causality chain requires a portfolio of health promotion interventions to moderate the determinants driving alcohol consumption and, in turn, enable populations to increase control over and improve their health to realize their full potential.

## Determinants driving the consumption of alcohol

	Acceptability	Availability	Affordability
			
Public health objectives	Protect consumers	Promote healthier settings	Build resilient societies
	Raising awareness, e.g. labelling	Mediating licensing, e.g. outlet density and location, online sales	Increasing prices, excise taxes and moderating other fiscal measures, reducing and ending financial incentives and subsidies
Health promotion interventions	Banning or comprehensively restricting alcohol marketing, advertising, sponsorships and promotion	Promoting healthy settings and pro-health environment, e.g. schools, stadiums	Tackling unrecorded alcohol
	Addressing commercial determinants and conflict of interests		

## How are the briefs developed?

The briefs result from a quick scanning of the recent evidence on the topic, insights from leading experts, consultation with selected countries and discussions that took place during webinars convened to create a platform to match evidence, practice and policies. Each webinar, attended by more than 100 participants, took place over 1.5 hours in English, Russian and Spanish. Between 8 and 10 speakers were invited to participate in each webinar, engaging global experts, officials from governments, academia, civil society and other United Nations agencies. Participants also engaged in the webinar by posting questions, sharing experiences and resources. The snapshot has been reviewed by the respective speakers – the contributors to each brief – to confirm the completeness and accuracy of the synthesis prepared.

## Interested in other topics?

Visit the *Less Alcohol webpage* for other briefs in this series and forthcoming webinars. During 2021, topics including alcohol consumption



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