

Stricter alcohol policies related to lower risk of cancer

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In a new study, researchers at Boston Medical Center and Boston University have uncovered a new association between more restrictive alcohol policies and lower rates of cancer mortality.

Alcohol consumption has long been related to a number of health conditions, but has recently been identified as an emerging risk factor for developing at least seven different types of cancer. Previous studies have estimated approximately 20,000 cancer deaths are attributable to alcohol in the United States annually. However, no previous studies have looked into whether stronger (i.e. more restrictive) alcohol policies are associated with rates of alcohol-attributable cancers.

The researchers examined the relationship between more restrictive alcohol policies and the number of alcohol-related cancer deaths per state from 2006 to 2010. They assigned each state an Alcohol Policy Scale score based on presence and implementation of twenty-nine different alcohol regulations, including restrictions on the number of locations allowed to sell alcohol, state tax laws, and others. Policy Scale Scores were then related to rates of alcohol-attributable cancers by state using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Alcohol-Related Disease Impact application for cancers of the esophagus, mouth and throat, liver, prostate (among men) and breast (among women).

The study found that for all cancers combined, more restrictive policies were associated with a reduced risk of cancer mortality. A 10 percent increase in the strength of alcohol policies (calculated based on their Policy Scale Scores) was associated with an 8.5 percent relative decrease in cancer deaths. The findings, which were similar among men and women, underscore the potential impact that public health policies can have on preventing cancers at the [population level](#).

"When thinking about cancer risk and cancer prevention, the focus tends to be on individual-level risk factors rather than environmental determinants of cancer, like public policies that affect the consumption of [alcohol](#) or tobacco," said Timothy Naimi, MD, MPH, a physician and researcher at both Boston Medical Center and Boston University School

of Public Health who served as the paper's corresponding author.
"Implementing effective policies to reduce [alcohol consumption](#) is a promising means of [cancer](#) prevention that merits further investigation."

These findings are published in the journal *Chemico-Biological Interactions*.

More information: Maha Alattas et al. Alcohol policies and alcohol-attributable cancer mortality in U.S. States, *Chemico-Biological Interactions* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.cbi.2019.108885](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbi.2019.108885)

Provided by Boston Medical Center

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