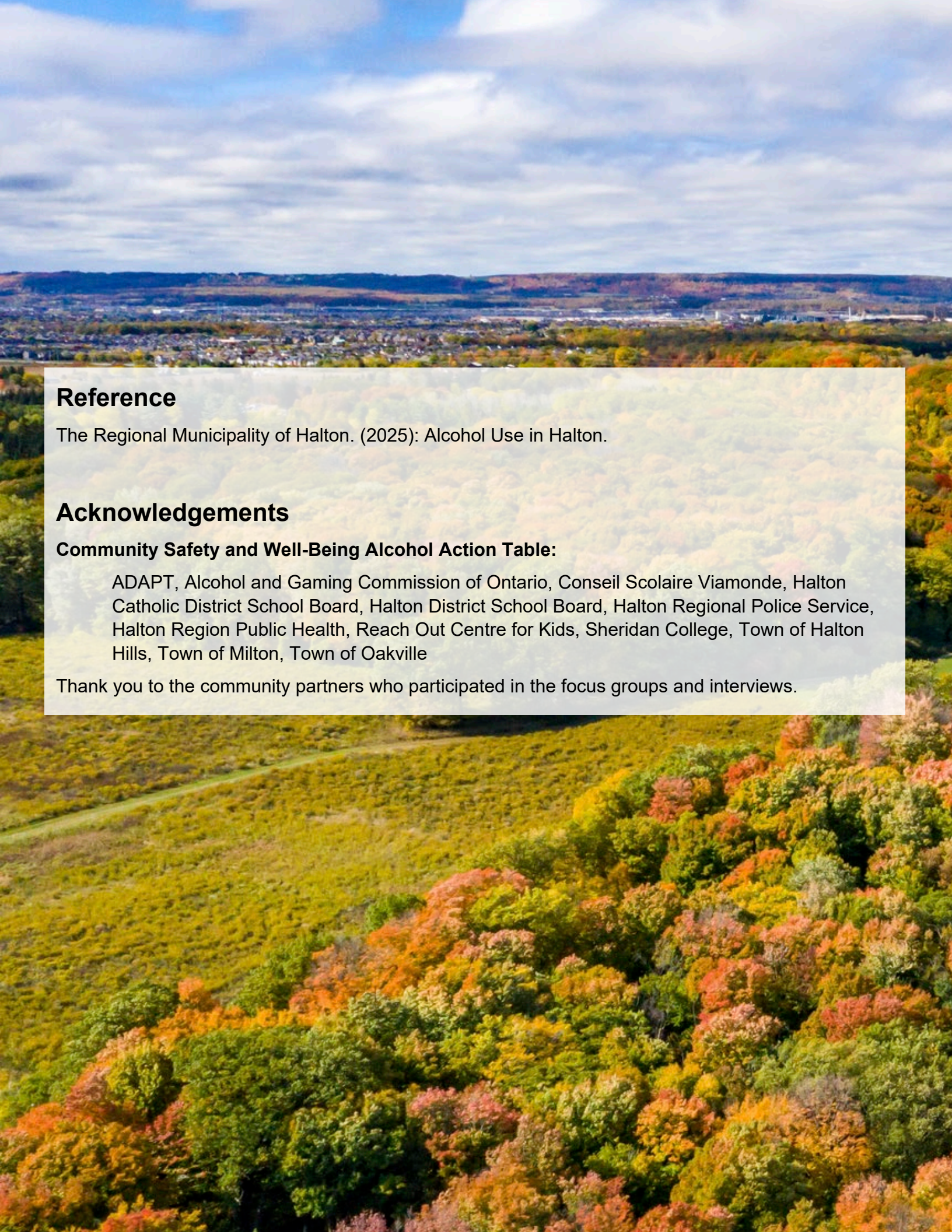




2025

Alcohol Use in Halton



Reference

The Regional Municipality of Halton. (2025): Alcohol Use in Halton.

Acknowledgements

Community Safety and Well-Being Alcohol Action Table:

ADAPT, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, Conseil Scolaire Viamonde, Halton Catholic District School Board, Halton District School Board, Halton Regional Police Service, Halton Region Public Health, Reach Out Centre for Kids, Sheridan College, Town of Halton Hills, Town of Milton, Town of Oakville

Thank you to the community partners who participated in the focus groups and interviews.

Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	6
How does alcohol use affect health?	7
Alcohol is a leading cause of death.....	7
Alcohol causes cancer	7
Alcohol causes short- and long-term physical health effects.....	8
Alcohol increases risky behaviour and violence	9
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is caused by alcohol	10
Alcohol can have an intergenerational effect	10
Alcohol has direct healthcare costs and indirect costs to society	12
Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health	13
What are the impacts of alcohol use in Halton?	14
Alcohol use contributes to both emergency department visits and hospitalizations	17
Males are more likely than females to go to the hospital for alcohol use	19
Youth and young adult visits to the ED for conditions entirely caused by alcohol have declined in recent years	21
Hospitalizations for conditions entirely caused by alcohol use are higher in older populations	22
Alcohol is the most used drug among youth in Ontario	23
Young adults are the most likely age group to binge drink.....	24
Alcohol is associated with harmful impacts on community safety	25
Alcohol impacts road safety	25
Alcohol is related to violence, abuse, and sexual assault	25
Alcohol can lead to intoxication involving police or paramedics	26
Halton residents access treatment for Alcohol Use Disorder	27
Evidence-based strategies to address alcohol use in Halton Region	28
Next Steps	36
Conclusion	37
Resources	38
Data notes & limitations	48

Executive summary

Alcohol is a widely consumed substance in Canada, with Canadians aged 15 and older drinking 52 per cent more alcohol per person than the global average. [1] This places Canada among the top-consuming developed countries in the world. [1] In 2019-20, 31 per cent of Halton adults aged 19 and over reported consuming more than three standard alcoholic drinks per week. Despite its widespread use, alcohol can cause health and social harms for individuals, families and communities. This report looks at the health and social impacts of alcohol in Halton and Ontario, combining multiple data sources including qualitative evidence gathered through focus groups with local community partners.

This report was created using:

1. published literature and guidance documents;
2. local, provincial, and federal quantitative data;
3. local qualitative data collected through key informant interviews and focus groups with a wide range of community partners in Halton; and
4. evidence-based strategies to address alcohol-related issues in Ontario.

The combination of data sources provides a comprehensive snapshot of the current situation in Halton. The inclusion of qualitative data from community partners with specialized knowledge and diverse experiences with alcohol enriches the findings, offering nuanced insights and a deeper understanding of the local context.

Addressing alcohol use is a priority in the **2023-2026 Halton Region Strategic Business Plan** and the **Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan**. An Alcohol Action Table was developed with community organizations as part of the CSWB Plan to reduce alcohol use and related harms in Halton. The CSWB Alcohol Action Table will use this report to guide their efforts to support the community.

Alcohol use negatively affects health

- Any amount of alcohol use can have negative effects.
- Alcohol is a leading preventable cause of death and contributes to health issues including cancers, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, and injuries.
- Alcohol can impact decision making and mental health.
- Alcohol causes the largest societal cost of any legal or illegal substances in Canada.
- Community partners have seen that drinking patterns can be passed down in families, influencing children's alcohol use later in life and leading to negative outcomes.
- Reducing alcohol use can decrease the health risks and social harms for individuals and the community.

Alcohol use negatively impacts residents in Halton

- Halton residents have similar alcohol use patterns to the rest of Ontario.
- Community partners said that alcohol use is normalized and accepted in Halton.

- Alcohol use can lead to emergency department visits and hospitalizations, with risks increasing with age and being higher among males.
- Young adults aged 18 to 24 have the highest rates of binge drinking.
- Alcohol is linked to safety issues like impaired driving, violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault and public intoxication.
- Treatment for alcohol use disorder is available in Halton, but community partners said that it can be hard to access due to long wait times, stigma, cost and other factors.

Access to alcohol continues to increase and can further impact health

- Alcohol accessibility in Ontario has increased in recent years, including increased retail hours and outlets.
- Community partners said that increased accessibility and visibility of alcohol may be leading to more use and greater societal acceptance in Halton.
- Limiting access to alcohol can help reduce alcohol use and related negative health outcomes.



Introduction

This report provides an in-depth look at alcohol use and its impacts to inform policy and program development in Halton. Commissioned by the [Halton Community Safety and Well-Being \(CSWB\) Alcohol Action Table](#), the findings aim to guide their ongoing efforts in addressing alcohol-related issues.

The report provides the best available evidence to answer three questions:

1. How does alcohol use affect health?
2. What are the impacts of alcohol use in Halton?
3. What evidence-based strategies can be used to address alcohol use in Halton?

To answer these questions, the report includes four types of evidence:

1. **research** from published literature and guidance documents;
2. **quantitative data** from local, provincial, and federal sources including Public Health Ontario and Statistics Canada;
3. **qualitative data** collected through five focus groups and nine key informant interviews in December 2023 and January 2024. These discussions involved members of the CSWB Alcohol Action Table and other community partners with experience in alcohol-related issues and/or working with individuals affected by Alcohol Use Disorder. Anonymized quotations from these sessions are integrated throughout the report to provide context and depth to the quantitative findings;
4. **evidence-based strategies**, including relevant policies, enforcement practices, and health promotion initiatives such as education and community engagement, aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm in Ontario.



By blending qualitative insights with quantitative data, the report offers a comprehensive view of alcohol use in Halton, shedding light on both the broader trends and the lived experiences of those directly engaged with the issue. The report intends to highlight real-world impacts of alcohol in the community, revealing both challenges and opportunities for action.

How does alcohol use affect health?

Alcohol is a leading cause of death

Alcohol is a leading preventable cause of death, disability and social problems, including certain cancers, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, unintentional injuries and violence. [2] [3]. Around the world, alcohol use causes three million deaths every year, making up 5.3 per cent of all deaths. [4]

In Canada, deaths caused by alcohol use have increased in recent years. **From 2019 to 2020 there was an 18 per cent increase in deaths, the largest year-over-year change in alcohol-induced deaths seen in the last 20 years.** [5] This steep increase may reflect changes in drinking behaviours and changes in access to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. [6] This rise in alcohol-induced death was not the same across all ages. Those younger than 65 years old had a 27 per cent increase in alcohol induced deaths, while those 65 and older only had a 4 per cent increase. [5]

In Halton, in an average year, among residents aged 15 and older, alcohol contributes to 125 deaths due to cancer, cardiovascular disease, communicable disease, digestive, endocrine or neuropsychiatric conditions, intentional or unintentional injury, and motor vehicle collisions.

Alcohol causes cancer

Alcohol is proven to cause cancer and is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. [7] In 2020, alcohol was linked to 7,000 new cases of cancer in Canada, including 24 per cent of breast cancer cases and 20 per cent of colon cancer cases. [8] In an average year in Halton, alcohol causes:

- 12 per cent of cancer deaths;
- 13 per cent of cancer hospitalizations; and
- 13 per cent of cancer Emergency Department (ED) visits. [9]

There is an increased risk for some cancers in people who drink alcohol and smoke tobacco compared to people who only smoke or drink. [3]



Alcohol causes short- and long-term physical health effects

Alcohol can cause harm to the health of those who drink it, and sometimes to others around them. [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#) summarizes extensive evidence that alcohol use can cause many negative health effects, including cancer, heart disease, liver disease and violence. [2] During interviews and focus groups conducted by Halton Region Public Health, community partners said they have seen many short and long-term alcohol-related health effects in their clients. The interviews and focus groups conducted in December 2023 and January 2024 included members of the CSWB Alcohol Action Table and other community members such as healthcare providers, community service providers, and staff at mental health organizations and alcohol treatment services. Community partners reported short-term harms including falls and car accidents. Long-term harms include chronic diseases like liver disease, pancreatic disease, cancers, cognitive impairments, and psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression.

Unintentional injuries and car accidents related to alcohol can lead to longer-lasting consequence such as physical and cognitive impairments (e.g. traumatic brain injury). The risk of violence associated with alcohol use can also have long-term effects on both the individuals involved and their communities. [2]

Negative health effects of alcohol impact people of all ages. Drinking alcohol can harm the developing brain of teenagers. [10] Heavy drinking affects normal brain development and can weaken connections between brain areas responsible for emotional and cognitive functions. [10]



A community partner shared a story about...

A young adult who lost their job and is dealing with cognitive impairment due to excessive drinking. They now depend on their parents for daily living needs, including a home to live in.

Alcohol impacts mental health and well-being

Poor mental health can both contribute to and result from heavy alcohol use. [11] Alcohol can affect mental health in different ways, from short-term effects like **feeling drunk** to long-term conditions such as alcohol-related **dementia**. [12] Drinking alcohol is also linked to a higher risk of experiencing **suicidal ideation**. [12]

Community partners shared that some individuals use alcohol to **self-medicate** emotional pain, anxiety, or distressing thoughts and feelings. This reinforces drinking behaviours as people begin to associate alcohol with relief, leading to continued use, higher tolerance and continuing the cycle of alcohol use and poor mental health.

Using alcohol and **cannabis** at the same time is common in Canada, especially among youth. This combination can result in more harmful effects than using either substance alone, impacting physical health, social interactions and behavior. [13] [14]

A community partner shared...

Some individuals don't realize that alcohol affects stress hormones and worsens mental health issues even after drinking has stopped.

Alcohol increases risky behaviour and violence

Drinking alcohol can lower inhibitions and lead to negative outcomes. [1] It can cause individuals to engage in **risky behaviours**, misinterpret social cues and act inconsistently with their normal behaviour. [15] This can lead to an increase in violent behaviour. Research has established a clear and strong association between alcohol and violence and aggressive behaviour. [2] Men are more likely than women to take risks when experiencing alcohol intoxication, and therefore are more likely to be involved with impaired driving collisions and to be treated in hospital for alcohol-related medical emergencies. Alcohol is more strongly associated with violence perpetration for men than it is for women. [2]

Alcohol use, especially large amounts of alcohol, can make someone more likely to **harm an intimate partner**. Alcohol use can also make existing violence in relationships more severe. [16]

A community partner shared...

Alcohol can escalate arguments and conflicts between family members and lead to intimate partner violence.



Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is caused by alcohol

Drinking during pregnancy can cause **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)**, a lifelong condition that can affect the brain and body of people who were exposed to alcohol before birth. [17]

The best evidence for the prevalence of FASD in the general Canadian population is four per cent. [17] This number may be an underestimation due to underreporting and underdiagnosis. [18]

Alcohol can have an intergenerational effect

High risk drinking patterns are often passed down through families due to a complicated interaction between alcohol use, genetics and the social/family environment. [19] Research consistently shows that children who experience adverse childhood events (ACE), including those involving binge drinking or alcoholism of a parent or grandparent, can predict alcohol dependence. [20] **Family drinking patterns affect children's future alcohol use.** Children of parents who drink heavily tend to drink earlier, drink more as they get older, and experience more negative life events in adulthood. [19]

Community partners in Halton see the impacts alcohol can have on children in families where the parents drink heavily. Some parents function well despite drinking heavily, leading their children to view this behaviour as normal. In other families, children growing up in these environments experience trauma or abuse and may develop low self-esteem or poor mental health. Community partners noted that these people may use alcohol to cope and may not be able to function with their alcohol use as well as their parents.

A community partner shared...

Some adults currently struggling with mental health issues and drinking problems experienced trauma or abuse as children.

A community partner shared...

Parents' drinking behaviours can impact their children's well-being. Children in these families may struggle with anxiety, depression, eating disorders and/or problems at school.



Alcohol has direct healthcare costs and indirect costs to society



In Canada, alcohol use causes the largest societal cost (i.e., healthcare, lost productivity, criminal justice and other direct costs) of any legal or illegal substance, accounting for 40 per cent of the overall societal cost from substances in 2020, or \$19.7 billion. [21]

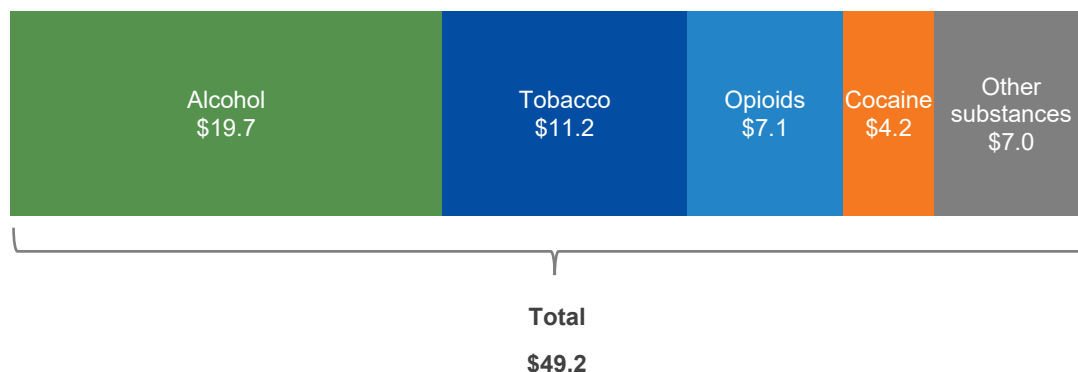


Figure: Total costs, in billions, of substance use in Canada in 2020

Data Source: Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Scientific Working Group. (2023). Canadian substance use costs and harms 2007–2020. (Prepared by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.) Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

In Ontario, alcohol use costs an estimated \$1.6 billion direct healthcare costs (e.g. costs of medical care, pharmaceuticals) and \$2.9 billion in indirect costs (e.g. lost productivity due to disability and premature death), totaling \$4.5 billion. [22]

Based on Halton's population in 2021, it is estimated that each year alcohol use results in:



\$66,226,707 in **direct healthcare costs** such as medical care and pharmaceuticals.



\$112,167,756 in **indirect costs** such as those associated with lost productivity in the workforce.

Data sources: Estimates for Halton were based on the methods provided in a 2019 report by Public Health Ontario and Cancer Care Ontario, which estimates that alcohol use in Canada costs \$111 per person each year in direct healthcare costs and \$188 per person each year in indirect costs. Population estimate: 2021 Census, Statistics Canada.

Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health

In 2023, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#) (the Guidance). The Guidance is based on the most up-to-date alcohol research and replaces the 2011 Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines.

The Guidance helps people make informed decisions about alcohol use and their health. It outlines a continuum of risk ranging from:













- **low** for those who drink between **two** standard drinks or less per week;
- **moderate** for those who drink between **three and six** standard drinks per week; and
- **increasingly high** for those who drink **seven** standard drinks or more per week.

The Guidance also recommends that if you drink more than two drinks a week, you should not exceed two drinks on any day.

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, there is no known safe amount of alcohol use. When breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest.

Overall, the Guidance presents strong evidence that drinking less alcohol equals less risk of harm from alcohol and recommends that people consider reducing their alcohol use.

Continuum of Risk [2]

0 drinks per week Not drinking has benefits, such as better health, and better sleep.	No risk	0 
1 to 2 standard drinks per week You will likely avoid alcohol-related consequences for yourself and others.	Low risk	1  2  
3 to 6 standard drinks per week Your risk of developing several different types of cancer, including breast and colon cancer, increases.	Moderate risk	3    4     5      6      
7 or more standard drinks per week Your risk of heart disease or stroke increases. Each additional standard drink Radically increases the risk of these alcohol-related consequences.	Increasingly high risk	7       8        +         ++

What are the impacts of alcohol use in Halton?

Alcohol use is accepted and included in many social events.

Drinking alcohol is a common and accepted part of Canadian society and the harms it causes may be overlooked. It plays a prominent role in many social events as shown by the 3,625 Special Occasion Permits issued in Halton between January 2020 and January 2024.

Special Occasion Permits are required for alcohol sales outside of licensed establishments and are overseen by the [Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario](#). This includes public and private events.

Data source: Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, 2024



A community partner shared...

Drinking alcohol is accepted and perceived as 'normal' in the Halton community.

A community partner shared...

The presence of alcohol in various settings, from households to public spaces, fosters an environment where individuals may consider their level of alcohol consumption 'normal' or non-problematic even when it falls into the moderate or high-risk categories in Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health.

A community partner shared...

Halton residents don't see alcohol as a drug that can cause health problems; they see it as a way to be social.

In 2019-2020, nearly half (49%) of Halton residents aged 19+ reported drinking alcohol in the past week, which was similar to Ontario. Halton residents drank above amounts considered low risk:



Nearly one-third (31 per cent) of Halton residents aged 19+ drank three or more drinks in the past week, increasing their risk for negative health outcomes.

These numbers are down from 42% in 2015-16. This was similar to Ontario rate of 30%. This means about a third of Halton's population is at moderate or high levels of risk according to the Guidance.



16 per cent of Halton residents reported that they drank heavily in the past year.

Heavy drinking is defined as having 5+ drinks for men or 4+ drinks for women on at least one occasion in the past year. Halton's rate was similar to Ontario's, where 17 per cent reported heavy drinking. Halton residents aged 19-24 were most likely to report heavy drinking in the past year, while those living in low-income households were less likely.

Data source: Canadian Community Health Survey, 2015-16, 2019-20. Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health.



Alcohol use contributes to both emergency department visits and hospitalizations

Emergency Department (ED) visits and hospitalizations entirely caused by alcohol include visits or admissions for the treatment of conditions solely caused by drinking alcohol, such as alcohol intoxication, alcohol withdrawal, or alcohol-induced cirrhosis of the liver. These incidents represent the “tip of the iceberg” of alcohol harms, as they don’t include ED visits and hospitalizations for conditions partially or sometimes caused by alcohol such as cancer, motor vehicle traffic injuries, and heart disease.



In 2021, more than 1,700 ED visits made by Halton residents were for conditions entirely caused by alcohol

Halton and Ontario ED visit rates have decreased in recent years, and Halton rates are lower than Ontario's. In 2021 there were 1,761 ED visits (or 286 per 100,000 people) among Halton residents compared to 80,138 ED visits (or 543 per 100,000 people) in Ontario. Between 2018 and 2021, rates in Halton decreased from 384 to 286 visits per 100,000 people, while rates in Ontario decreased from 604 to 543 visits per 100,000 people. It is possible that the pandemic had an impact on the number of ED visits, and data will continue to be monitored.



In 2021, there were nearly 950 hospitalizations among Halton residents for conditions entirely caused by alcohol

In 2021, there were 946 hospitalizations (or 150 per 100,000 people) among Halton residents compared to 32,430 hospitalizations (or 211 per 100,000 people) in Ontario. Between 2018 and 2021, rates in Halton and Ontario have remained stable.

Data source: Public Health Ontario Snapshots, extracted June 2023



Apart from the immediate effects mentioned above, alcohol is linked to various other health conditions, diseases, and injuries. In an average year among residents aged 15 and older in Halton, alcohol contributes to the following number of ED visits, hospitalizations, and deaths due to cancer, cardiovascular disease, communicable disease, digestive, endocrine, or neuropsychiatric conditions, intentional or unintentional injury, and motor vehicle collisions:





Figure: Annual alcohol-related emergency department visits, hospitalizations and deaths in Halton

Data source: Ontario Health and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), 2023 [23]

Over three years, the number of hospitalizations and deaths due to alcohol use in Halton are similar to those caused by COVID-19 in the first three years of the pandemic. While alcohol and COVID-19 are not the same type of health issue, this comparison highlights the significant and ongoing impact of alcohol on public health in the Halton community.

Figure: Alcohol and COVID-19 related hospitalizations and deaths

		
	ALCOHOL	COVID-19
HOSPITALIZATIONS	2,184	1,781
DEATHS	375	419

Data notes: Alcohol hospitalization and death data are based on an analysis of health conditions attributable to alcohol among Halton residents aged 15 and older conducted by Public Health Ontario; data is from 2015-2019 and therefore do not reflect changes in drinking behaviours or access to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths includes data from March 1, 2020 through February 28, 2023 among Halton residents of all ages. A COVID-19 death is defined as a death resulting from a clinically compatible illness in a confirmed COVID-19 case, unless there is a clear alternative cause of death that cannot be related to COVID-19 (e.g., trauma).

Data sources: Alcohol data (Ontario Health and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), 2023); COVID-19 data (Case and Contact Management (CCM) Solution, extracted November 2023). Alcohol three-year estimate is based on 2015-2019 data of health conditions attributable to alcohol for Halton residents aged 15 and older. [23]

Males are more likely than females to go to the hospital for alcohol use

Males* are more likely than females to visit the ED for conditions entirely caused by alcohol use. In 2021, there were 356 ED visits per 100,000 males in Halton for conditions entirely caused by alcohol, compared to 212 visits per 100,000 females. Rates in Ontario are also higher among males than females. This may be because men drink more alcohol than women and are more likely to drink in excess, leading to more injuries, violence and deaths. [2]

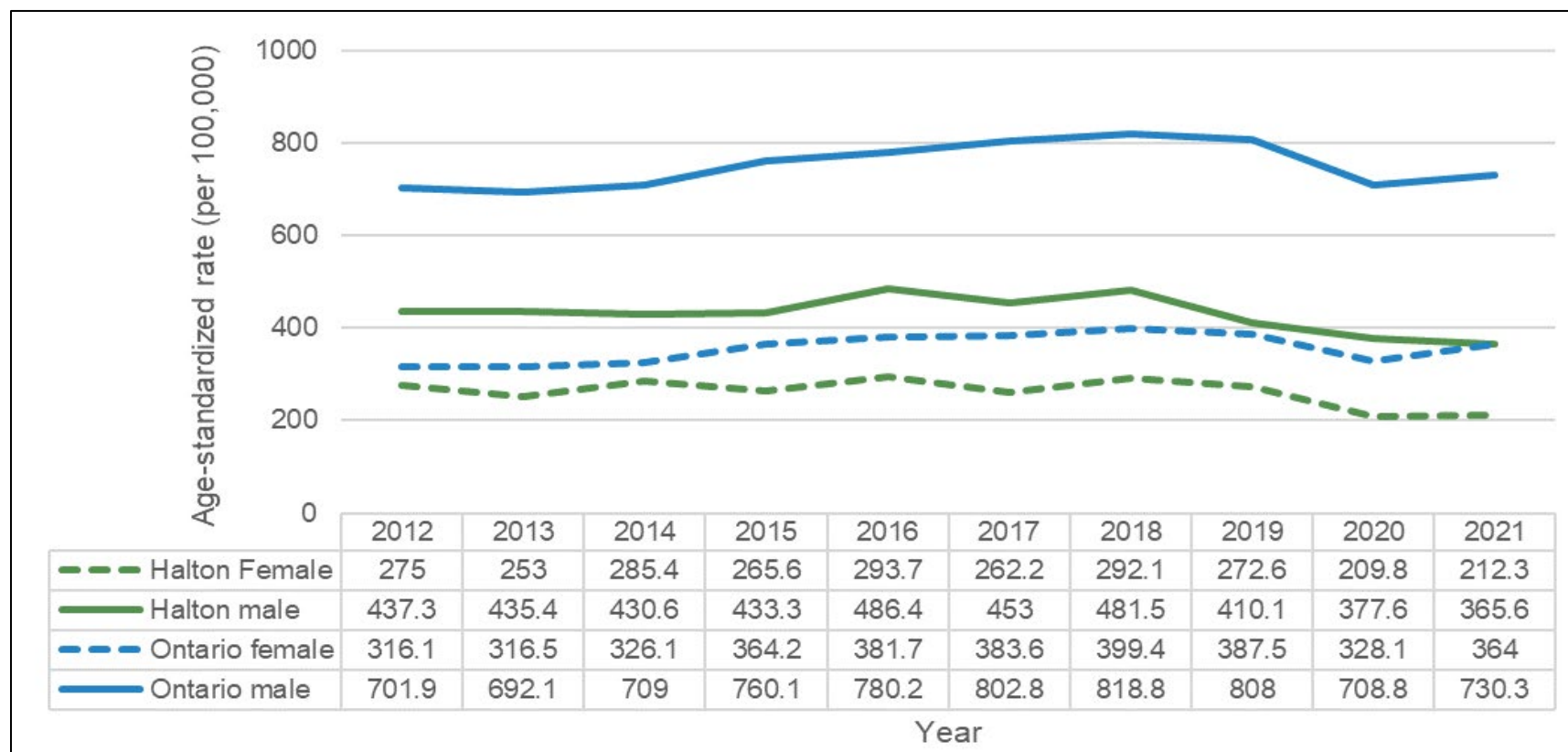


Figure: Age-standardized rate of emergency department visits for conditions entirely caused by alcohol, Halton Region and Ontario, by sex, 2012-2021.

Data source: Public Health Ontario Snapshots, extracted June 2023

*Throughout this report, when presenting sex-related risks, the terms female and male are used. When presenting gender-related risks, the terms women and men are used. When a section or topic involves the entanglement of sex and gender, the terms women and men are used.

Males are hospitalized more than females for conditions entirely caused by alcohol use. In 2021, there were 208 hospitalizations per 100,000 males in Halton for conditions entirely caused by alcohol, compared to 96 hospitalizations per 100,000 females. Rates in Ontario are also higher among males than females.

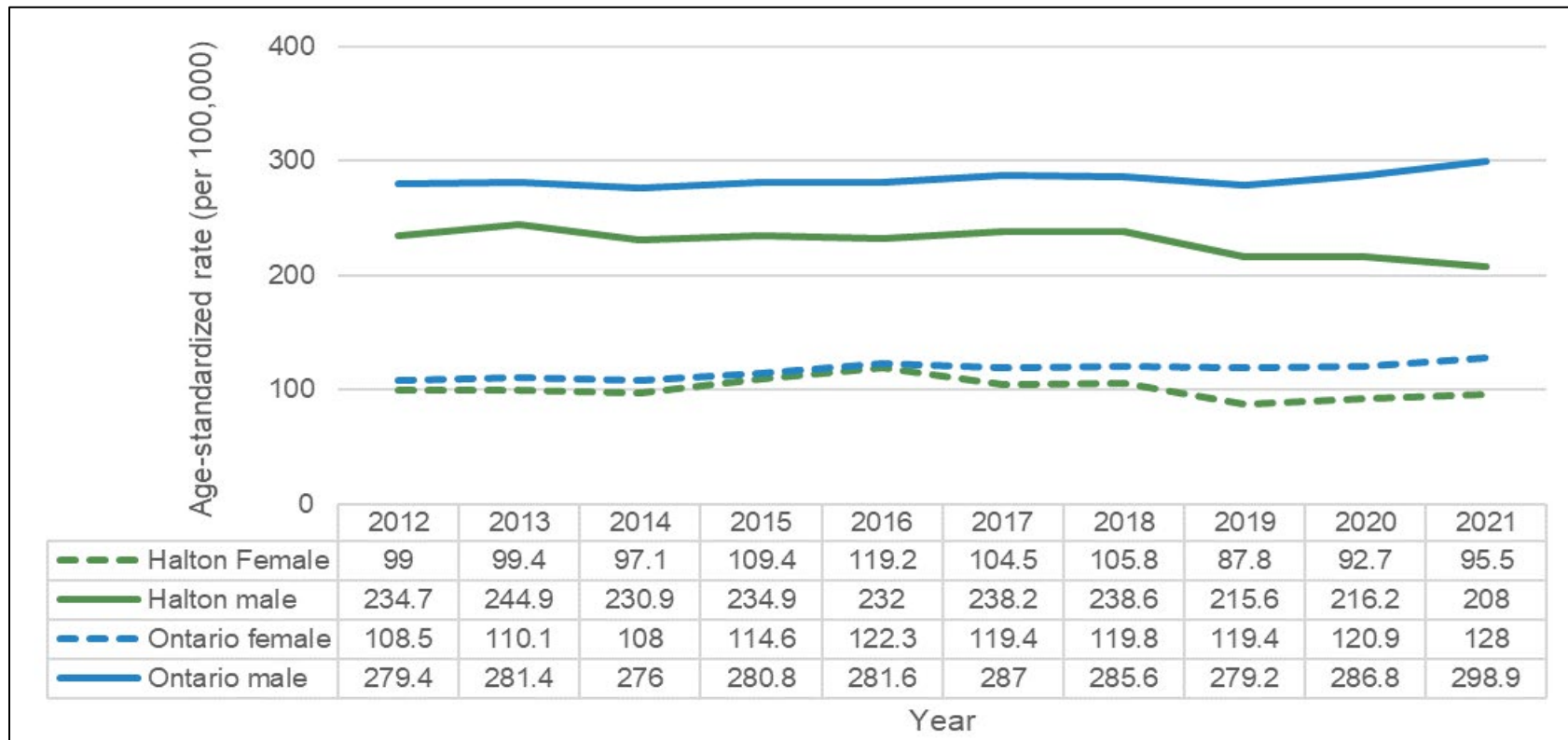


Figure: Age-standardized rate of hospitalizations for conditions entirely caused by alcohol, Halton Region and Ontario, by sex, 2012-2021.

Data source: Public Health Ontario Snapshots, extracted June 2023

Youth and young adult visits to the ED for conditions entirely caused by alcohol have declined in recent years

Before 2020, ED visits for conditions entirely caused by alcohol were highest among residents aged 15-24. However, significant decreases occurred between 2019 (579 per 100,000) and 2021 (352 per 100,000) in this age group. ED visits in 25 to 64-year-olds have also gone down in recent years, but not as sharply. In 2021, Halton residents between the ages of 15 and 64 had similar ED visits to each other. Rates are lowest in those aged 0-14 and 65+. Decreases seen between 2019 and 2021 may be related to changes in health care use and limited social occasions with alcohol present during the COVID-19 pandemic.

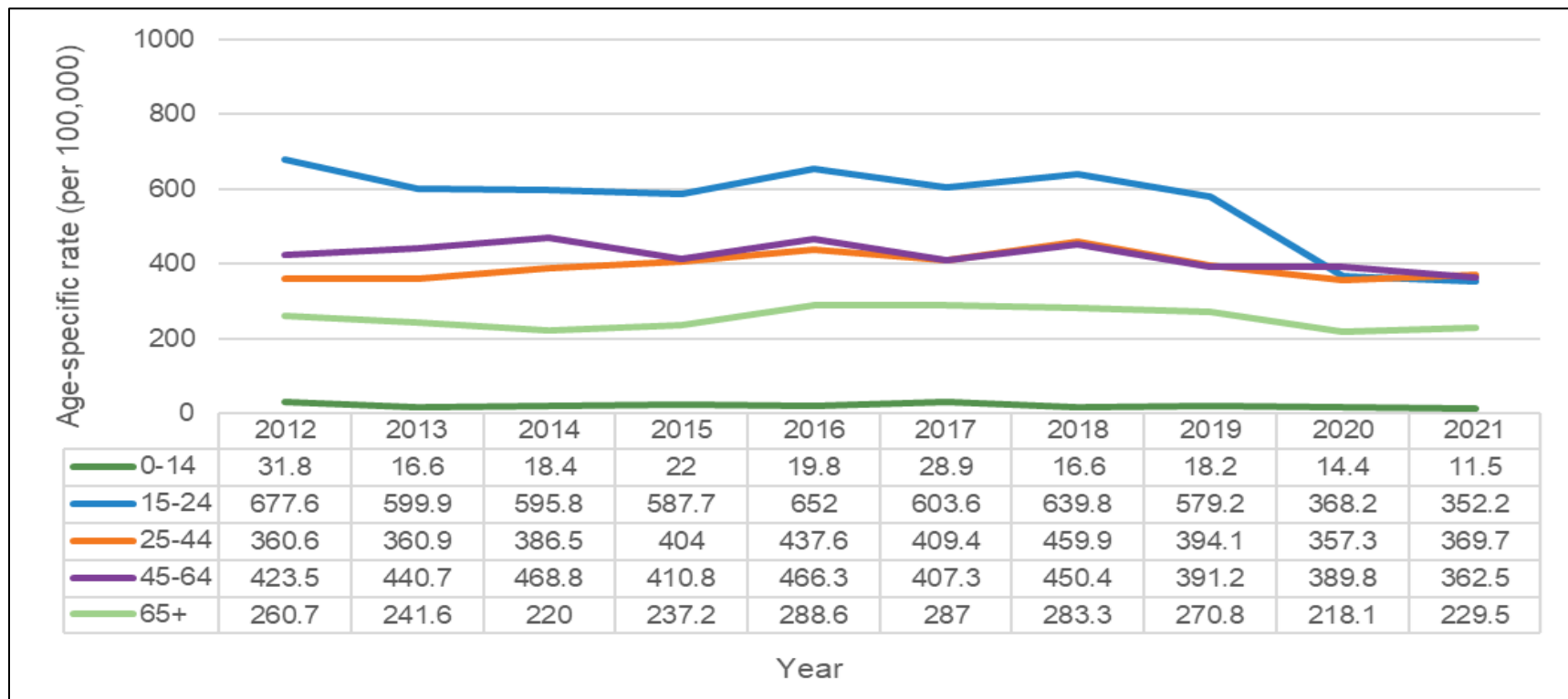


Figure: Age-specific rate of emergency department visits entirely caused by alcohol, Halton Region, by age group, 2012-2021

Data source: Public Health Ontario Snapshots, extracted June 2023

Hospitalizations for conditions entirely caused by alcohol use are higher in older populations

Hospitalizations for conditions entirely caused by alcohol generally increase with age in Halton. This may be because older individuals are more sensitive to the effects of alcohol and process alcohol more slowly, making them more vulnerable to negative health impacts. [24] Additionally, harms such as falling, delirium, severe drug interaction, frailty, cognitive deterioration and death are linked to alcohol use in older adults. [25]

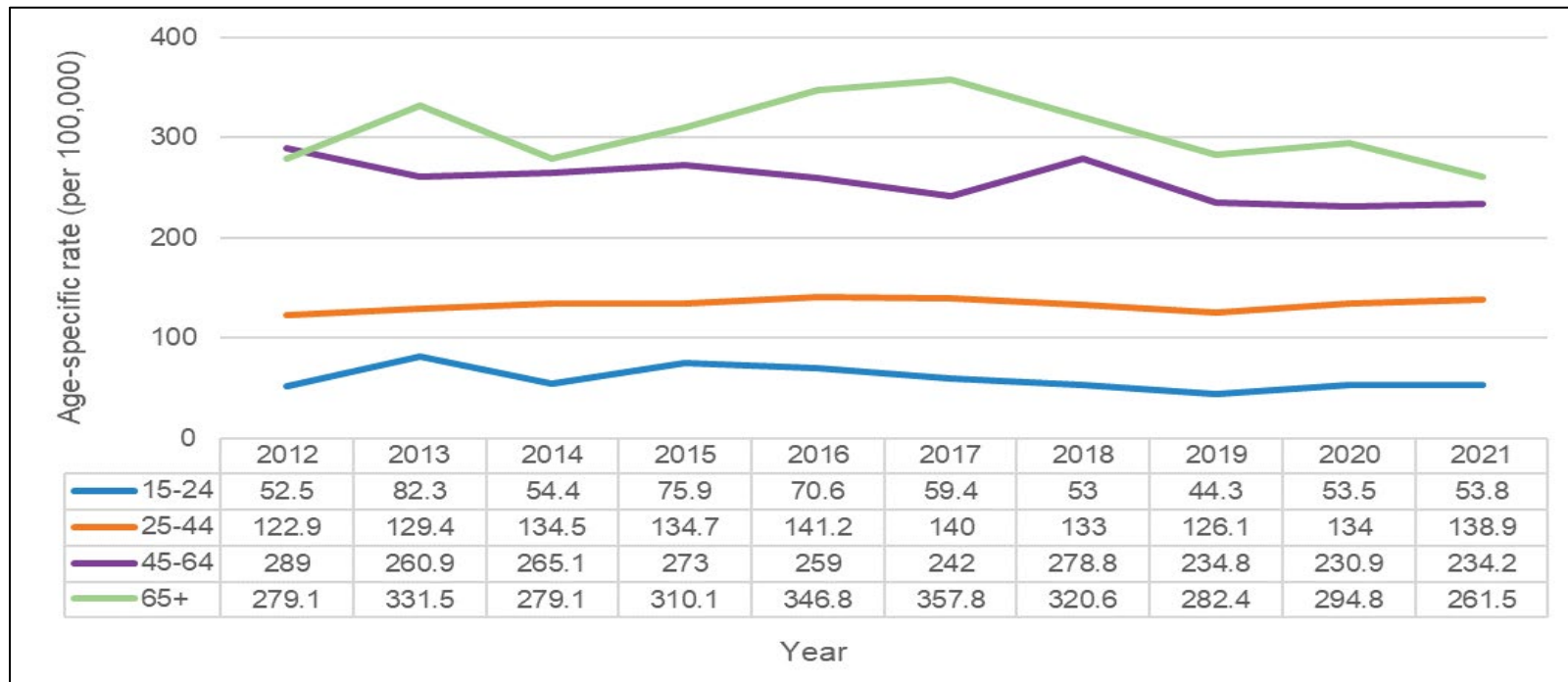


Figure: Age-specific rate of hospitalizations for conditions entirely caused by alcohol, Halton Region, by age group, 2012-2021

Data source: Public Health Ontario Snapshots, extracted June 2023

Alcohol is the most used drug among youth in Ontario

Recommendations in the Guidance about risks of weekly alcohol use and alcohol use per occasion do not apply to youth under the legal drinking age. **It is recommended for youth to abstain or delay drinking as long as possible.** [2] Youth who start drinking before age 15 are significantly more likely to develop an alcohol use disorder and face alcohol related harms later in life. [1]

In Halton, over one-quarter of youth aged 12-17 reported ever having tried alcohol, while 5 per cent reported being regular drinkers.

In 2019, 28 per cent of Halton youth said they had ever tried alcohol (more than a few sips), while 5 per cent* said they were regular drinkers (drank twice or more per month in the past year). Additionally, 17 per cent were occasional drinkers (drank once a month or less in the past year). The majority of youth in Halton (72 per cent) said they had never tried alcohol. These percentages were similar to those in Ontario.

Data source: Canadian Health Survey of Children and Youth. Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health. Data notes: Estimates marked with an asterisk (*) should be interpreted with caution due to high variability.

In Ontario in 2023, 36 per cent of youth in grades 7-12 reported drinking alcohol in the past year. This is steadily declining from 66 per cent in 1999. However, **alcohol remains the most commonly used drug among Ontario youth**, surpassing the use of nonmedical* prescription opioid pain relievers (22 per cent of youth used in the past year), any form of tobacco (20 per cent), and cannabis (18 per cent). Youth in grade 12 were more likely to drink alcohol and females were significantly more likely to report drinking alcohol. [25]

Community partners observed that drinking is common among high school and university students. They noted that this behavior is driven by the belief that alcohol is a part of socializing and that students feel pressured to drink to fit in, which creates a drinking culture.

*without a doctor's prescription



A community partner shared...

Some high school students arrive at school events, such as prom and dances, already intoxicated.

A community partner shared...

That the acceptance of alcohol use in the Halton community has led youth to view drinking as a rite of passage and normalized their drinking behaviours.

Young adults are the most likely age group to binge drink

Alcohol is the most common psychoactive substance used by youth and young adults and is a leading behavioural risk factor for death and social problems. [2] Additionally, many young people binge drink, which can lead to injuries, aggression, violence, dating violence and poor grades. [2] In Ontario in 2023, 10 percent of students in grades 7–12 reported binge drinking at least once in the past month. [25]

Binge drinking happens when someone drinks a lot in a short period of time, specifically drinking five or more drinks for men or four or more drinks for women. Binge drinking can lead to injuries, violence, dating violence and a negative impact on school performance.

In Halton in 2019-20, residents aged 18 to 24 (32 per cent*) were the most likely age group to report drinking heavily (binge drinking) in the last year.

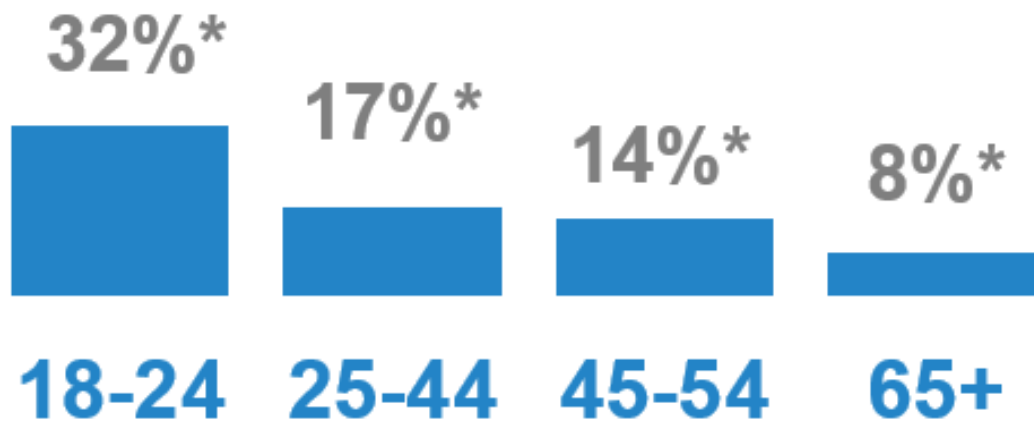


Figure: Percentage of Halton residents aged 18 and over who reported engaging in binge drinking in the past year, by age, Halton Region, 2019-20

Data source: Canadian Community Health Survey, 2019-20. Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health. Data notes: Estimates marked with an asterisk (*) should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size. Only the difference between those aged 18 to 24 and those aged 65+ was statistically significant. Rates among residents aged 12-17 were not reportable. Binge drinking or Drinking heavily is defined as having five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women on one occasion, at least once a month.

Alcohol is associated with harmful impacts on community safety

Alcohol impacts road safety

Between 2022 and 2023, the Halton Regional Police Service reported an average of:

- 1,039 **impaired driving incidents** involving alcohol each year.
 - Most offenders were 25-44 years old (56 per cent), followed by 45-64 year olds (25 per cent).
 - More males than females were involved in these incidents.
- 99 **motor vehicle collisions** involving alcohol each year.

Recent surveys have shown 6 per cent* of Halton residents aged 16+ said in the past year they had been a **passenger in a motor vehicle driven by someone who was under the influence of alcohol** (who had two or more drinks in two hours prior to driving). This was similar to Ontario rates.

Data source: Canadian Community Health Survey, 2019-20. Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health.

Data notes: Estimates marked with an asterisk (*) for Halton should be interpreted with caution due to high variability.

Community partners noted that over time there has been a decrease in drinking and driving in Halton, particularly among youth. They've also seen reductions in youth drinking and driving, likely due to early education efforts. Partners also said that some older adults still consider drinking and driving acceptable.

Alcohol is related to violence, abuse, and sexual assault

Between 2022 and 2023 the Halton Regional Police Service reported an average of:

- 415 incidents of **violence and intimate partner violence** where alcohol was a contributing factor.
- 17 incidents of **sexual assault** each year that were attributed to alcohol and were reported to the Halton Regional Police Service. 85 per cent of the victims of sexual assault reported were female.

One community partner highlighted that sexual violence and assault on post-secondary campuses often involves alcohol use (among those who harm and are harmed), since alcohol impairs judgement and the ability to make informed decisions. They also noted that students lack awareness about how alcohol impacts an individual's ability to consent to engage in sexual activity.

Alcohol can lead to intoxication involving police or paramedics

Between 2019 and 2023, the Halton Regional Police Service reported an average of:

- 194 charges for **public intoxication** issued each year.

In 2022, Halton Regional Paramedic Services responded to 1,096 **calls involving alcohol intoxication**. Between 2014 and 2019, the number of calls involving alcohol intoxication nearly doubled before decreasing slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic years. This data will continue to be monitored to assess trends over time.

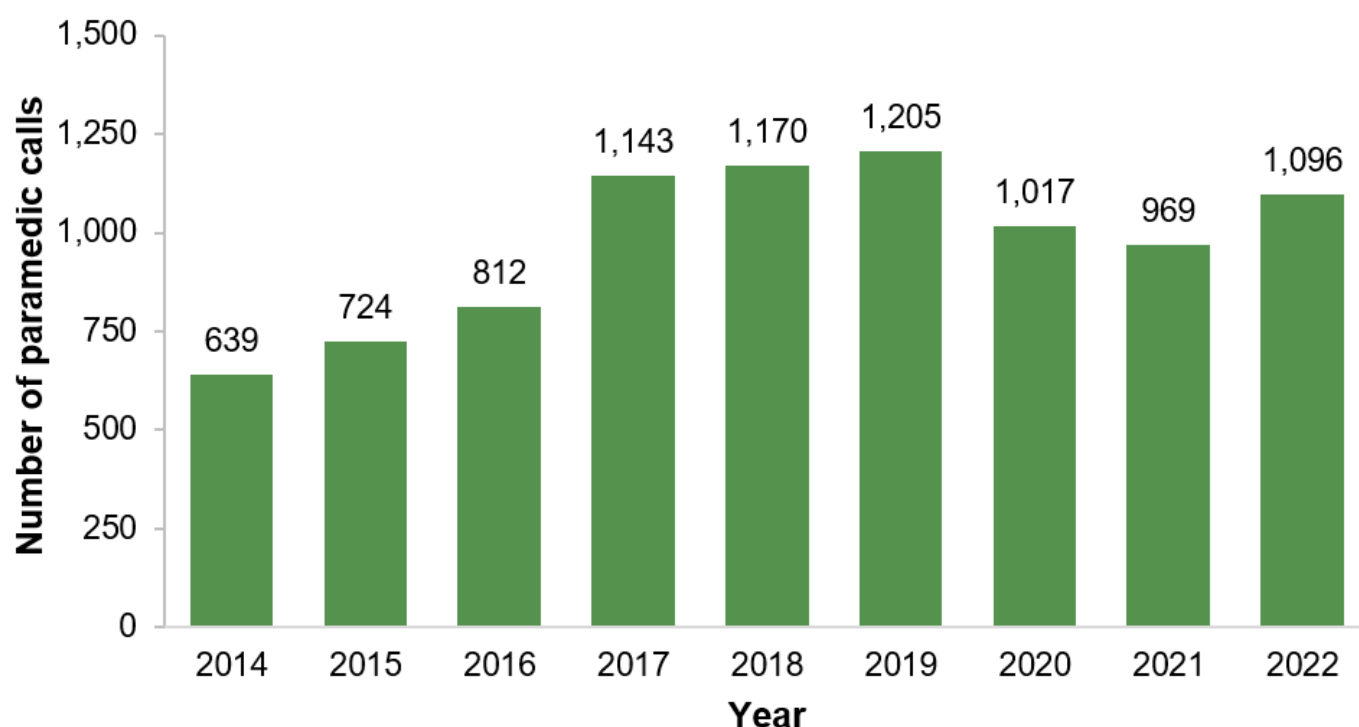


Figure: Number of calls involving alcohol intoxication responded to by Halton Region Paramedic Services, Halton Region, 2014-2021

Data source: electronic Patient Care Report (ePCR), Halton Paramedic Services, extracted 2023

Data notes: Estimates marked with an asterisk (*) should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size. Also, these numbers may be under reported as not all respondents may be comfortable sharing this information.

Halton residents access treatment for Alcohol Use Disorder

Between 2014 and 2022, **an average of 1,535 Halton residents per year** received treatment for Alcohol Use Disorder at a publicly funded community program in Ontario. Approximately 120 unique agencies were accessed by Halton residents for Alcohol Use Disorder during this period. These numbers represent only those who sought treatment.

Community partners shared that individuals in Halton often face challenges when trying to access care, including a lack of withdrawal management programs in Halton, long wait times for treatment and inadequate follow-up care. Some people may also be unaware of the available resources and services, how to access them and may struggle to self-manage alcohol withdrawal.

Data source: Drug and Alcohol Treatment Information System, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Received August 2023.

Data notes: Includes Halton residents who have accessed publicly funded treatment services (withdrawal management, non-residential or residential) anywhere in Ontario for the presenting issue of alcohol addiction. Does not include programs that are 100% privately funded.



A community partner shared...

Clients with Alcohol Use Disorder live in both high- and low-income neighbourhoods in Halton.

A community partner shared...

When people think of Alcohol Use Disorder, they often associate it with stereotypes such as being homeless, unemployed, or unable to care for one's family. Alcohol Use Disorder does not discriminate and can impact any resident in Halton.

Evidence-based strategies to address alcohol use in Halton Region

Alcohol use is influenced by more than just individual choices; policy and social environments play an important role. Effective policies are crucial to mitigate alcohol-related health and safety issues and to encourage a culture of moderation. [26] [27] [28] [29]

Alcohol-related issues cannot be tackled by the healthcare system alone. Addressing substance use, including alcohol use, requires a collaborative approach. This includes partnerships and action between communities, all levels of government, health and social services, organizations at all levels, the public health sector, the healthcare system, and Ontario residents. [30]

In Ontario, both provincial and municipal governments have the authority to shape alcohol-related policies and implement evidence-based strategies. While recent provincial policy changes, such as the expansion of retail outlets and the relaxation of alcohol regulations, pose challenges, they also create opportunities for municipalities and their community partners to implement policies and interventions that align with evidence-based recommendations to protect public health and safety.

There are several evidence-based approaches to reduce alcohol-use and alcohol-related harms that can be actioned by community organizations represented at the CSWB Alcohol Action Table, such as Local Municipalities and other community organizations. The following strategies are informed by recommendations from key public health authorities and research-based organizations, including:

- Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation– CAPE 3.0 Results from Ontario
- World Health Organization (WHO) – SAFER initiative: A world free from alcohol-related harm
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) – Alcohol Policy Framework

Reducing alcohol availability

Limiting the availability of alcohol, such as reducing the number of places that sell it or restricting the hours during which it can be sold, has proven effective in reducing alcohol consumption and related harms. This approach helps control access, particularly for vulnerable and high-risk groups. Evidence suggests that limiting the availability of alcohol can reduce binge drinking, injuries, and alcohol-related social issues. [27] [31] [32] [29]

In Ontario, policies that increase alcohol availability, such as greater alcohol retail access, may be connected to more ED visits entirely caused by alcohol. [33] For example, a 2016 study in Peel found areas with a higher density of on-premise licensed establishments had a seven times higher risk of ambulance calls for injury, particularly for trauma. [31]

Recent provincial policy changes in Ontario

2015	2019	2020	2024
Expansion of alcohol sales to include grocery stores and non-traditional venues such as farmers' markets [34]	Expansion of alcohol retail hours [35]	Expansion of alcohol delivery by allowing third-party delivery [36]	Expansion of alcohol sales to grocery stores, convenience stores, and big-box [37]

As of September 2024, Halton has 1,291 alcohol outlets, including grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, and other retail outlets.

What can be done by Local Municipalities and community organizations in Halton?

- Strengthen local Municipal Alcohol Policies (MAPs) to limit hours when alcohol can be served at events on municipal property.
- Maintain prohibition of alcohol in municipal parks.
- Explore the density and location of alcohol outlets through zoning and other bylaws.
- Advocate for greater municipal control over the placement of alcohol outlets to better protect residents from potential harms, as per CAMH recommendation.
- Advocate for a Provincial Alcohol Strategy that includes plans to limit hours of sale for alcohol and limiting where alcohol can be sold, including minimum distance requirements for alcohol outlets from sensitive areas, such as schools, healthcare facilities and community centres



A community partner shared...

that alcohol is increasingly accessible, available, and visible in the Halton community. With the expansion of alcohol availability to grocery stores, convenience stores and big-box stores in Ontario, partners are concerned that these changes will further exacerbate alcohol-related harms.

A community partner shared...

The same people often return for support. Even after getting help, it's hard to avoid alcohol in communities where alcohol is easily accessible.

Strengthening alcohol pricing and taxation rules

Increasing the price of alcohol is one of the most effective ways to reduce alcohol use and its related harms. [38] [39] [40] Higher consumer prices can be achieved through raised minimum unit pricing and taxation. Basing minimum unit pricing on ethanol content encourages consumers to buy lower alcohol content beverages. [41] [29] Policies that raise alcohol prices delay the start of alcohol use, slow young people's progression towards heavier drinking, and reduce binge drinking. [40]

In 2015, British Columbia raised the minimum alcohol prices by 10 per cent, resulting in a 19 per cent decline in alcohol-related traffic violations and 9 per cent reduction in crimes against persons. [39] An international study also found that on average, a 1 per cent rise in overall alcohol prices was associated with a 0.5 per cent decrease in alcohol use. [38]

In Ontario, the minimum price for alcohol remains lower than what is recommended by public health experts. [38] In recent years, the province has canceled scheduled increases in beer taxes and LCBO mark-ups, including a planned increase for 2024. [42] The federal government has also adjusted taxes on alcohol to lower consumer costs, including capping the annual alcohol excise duty inflation adjustment at two per cent instead of the scheduled 4.7 per cent, and giving a GST/HST break to eligible alcohol products. [43] [44]

What can be done by Local Municipalities and community organizations in Halton?

- Implement higher than provincially required minimum unit prices for alcohol sold at municipal events, as part of their Municipal Alcohol Policies (tied to inflation and based on ethanol content).
- Advocate to Province to increase minimum unit price and to tie alcohol price to ethanol content, as per CAPE 3.0 and CAMH recommendation.
- Advocate to provincial and federal governments to move forward with scheduled tax increases



Regulating alcohol in public spaces and events

Unregulated alcohol consumption in public spaces contributes to the normalization of drinking behaviors and increases safety concerns. [45] Since 2019, municipalities have had the authority to decide where alcohol can be consumed in public areas, such as parks. Tailgating events, outdoor events in connection with and in proximity to live professional, semi-professional or post-secondary sporting events, are also under municipal decision to allow. [35]

A community partner shared...

They have seen evidence of drinking on municipally owned properties (e.g., facilities and parks), and are concerned that this behaviour could lead to violence or other public safety issues in the community.



All municipalities in Halton currently have bylaws that restrict public alcohol consumption in parks, unless a Special Occasion Permit (SOP) is obtained. Each municipality also has a Municipal Alcohol Policy which governs alcohol use on municipally owned or managed properties like parks, arenas and community centres, or during events run by a municipality where an SOP has been granted.

What can be done by Local Municipalities and community organizations in Halton?

- Maintain prohibition in all municipal parks within Halton Region
- Strengthen Municipal Alcohol Policies using Halton Region Public Health's [Municipal Alcohol Policy and Procedure Reference Document](#)
- Promote health by providing alcohol-free spaces and provide incentives for holding alcohol-free events (e.g. lower booking fees, priority dates)



Regulating alcohol advertising, sponsorship and promotion

Alcohol advertising has a powerful influence on drinking behaviours. Exposure to alcohol advertising lowers the age people start drinking and increases the likelihood of heavy drinking. [46] [47] Restricting alcohol advertising, sponsorship and promotion, particularly in public spaces, is an impactful and cost-effective measure to reduce alcohol consumption. [32] [29] [28] While alcohol advertising is regulated through federal and provincial policies, there are many opportunities to strengthen existing policies and implement a strong policy at the municipal level to limit alcohol's presence in certain environments. For example, the City of Saskatoon implemented a policy to restrict alcohol advertisements on public transit and the Town of Caledon bans alcohol permits for events for youth, including minor sport events, limiting exposure of alcohol to youth. [47] Municipalities can strengthen existing policies to limit alcohol advertising at public events, especially those targeted at underage audiences, and restrict alcohol promotion on municipally owned lands and facilities, including transit.

What can be done by Local Municipalities and community organizations in Halton?

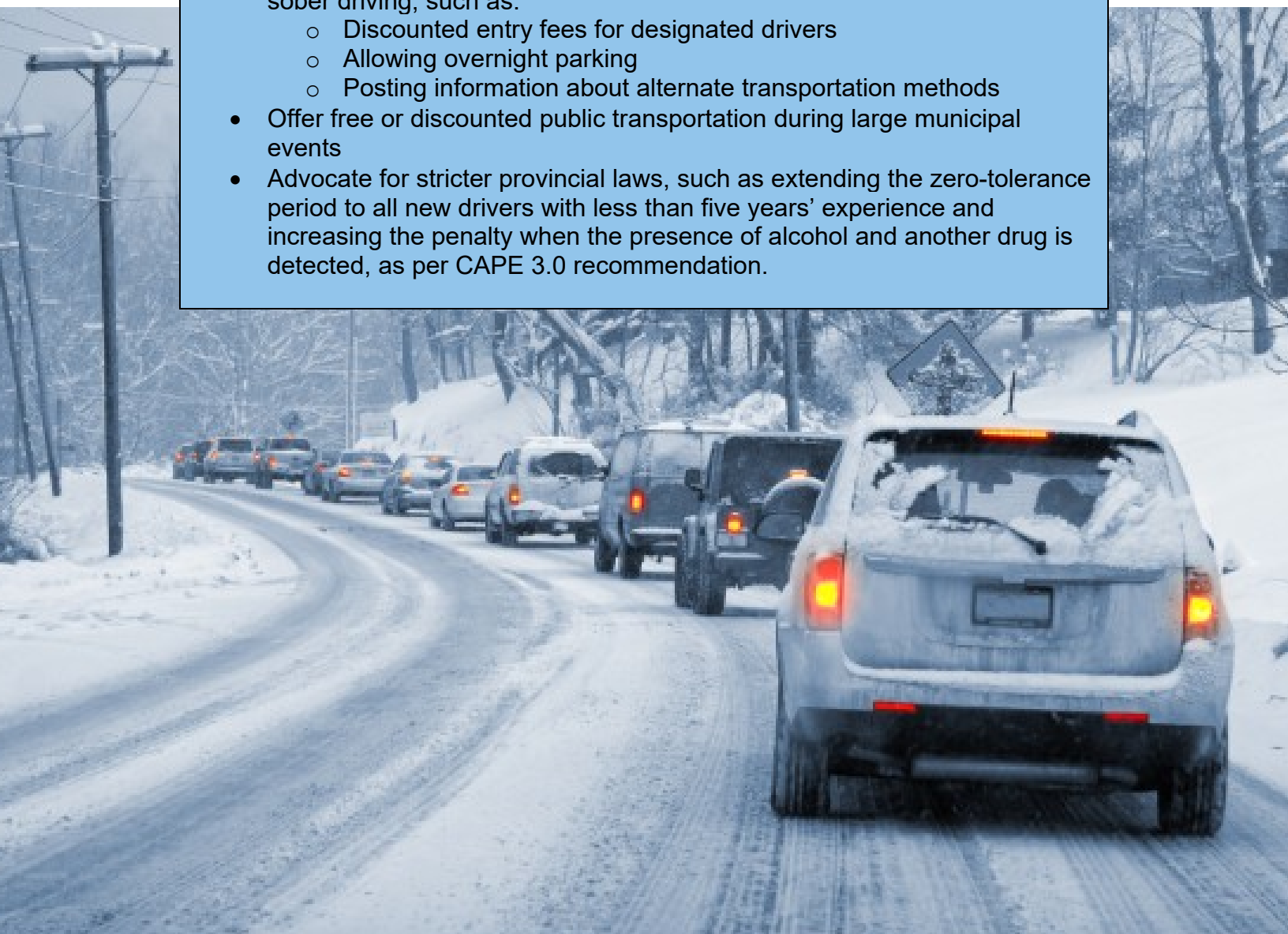
- Restrict or prohibit alcohol imagery, marketing and sponsorship locally (e.g. on public transit, in arenas or at outdoor special events)
- Do not allow alcohol companies to sponsor events on municipal property or any local teams or arenas
- Strengthen Municipal Alcohol Policies so alcohol cannot be served, or promoted at events that are youth focused

Effectively enforcing drinking and driving laws

Operating a motor vehicle while impaired by alcohol is an offence in Ontario and is a significant community safety issue. Policies that make alcohol less accessible and less affordable can help prevent alcohol-impaired driving. Other evidence-based strategies include publicized sobriety check-points and a strong penalty for those driving while impaired. [48] [28] [27] Halton Regional Police Services is committed to reducing impaired driving through special projects, awareness campaigns, education and enforcement. For example, the Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) program includes spot checks for impaired drivers and is conducted region-wide year-round, with heightened surveillance for holidays. Additionally, the Province has stiffened penalties for impaired drivers, including longer license suspensions for those caught driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs [49].

What can be done by Local Municipalities and community organizations in Halton?

- Advocate to the Province to modify liquor licence laws to ensure convenience stores at gas stations cannot sell alcohol
- Include guidelines in Municipal Alcohol Policies to ensure events support sober driving, such as:
 - Discounted entry fees for designated drivers
 - Allowing overnight parking
 - Posting information about alternate transportation methods
- Offer free or discounted public transportation during large municipal events
- Advocate for stricter provincial laws, such as extending the zero-tolerance period to all new drivers with less than five years' experience and increasing the penalty when the presence of alcohol and another drug is detected, as per CAPE 3.0 recommendation.



Educating and raising awareness about alcohol-related harms and harm reduction strategies

A community partner shared...

The general public's perception about alcohol can be influenced by social media and entertainment. There is a need for continued education in schools. The government should provide more information to parents about the risks of early alcohol exposure.

Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health aims to provide information to the public about alcohol-related harms, to help them make informed decisions about their alcohol use. The guidance is based on the principle of autonomy in harm reduction and the fundamental idea behind it that people living in Canada have a right to know that all alcohol use comes with risk. [2] The Public Awareness of Alcohol-related Harms Survey (2023) reported that most people in Canada were not aware that low consumption levels of alcohol could cause cancer. Moreover, there is no clear understanding of what a standard drink is. [50]

Evidence shows that increased awareness of the risks associated with alcohol is linked to decreased alcohol drinking occasions, decreased number of purchasing occasions and greater public support for other alcohol control measures which reduce alcohol-related harms. [30] [26] [51] Alcohol Warning Labels increase consumer awareness by placing warnings of alcohol-related harms directly on alcohol-containers, similar to tobacco warning labels. When the Yukon piloted Alcohol Warning Labels in 2017 alcohol sales decreased and reported knowledge and awareness of the health risks associated with alcohol-consumption increased. [51]

What can be done by Local Municipalities and community organizations in Halton?

- Share public health messaging with community partners; share trusted sources of information with the public
- Use advertising spaces in public areas, such as hockey arenas, to provide education on alcohol-related harms
- Enhance education about alcohol-related harms in secondary school curriculum
- Engage with youth to create alcohol prevention strategies
- Advocate to federal government to support Alcohol Warning Label laws

Integrating screening, brief intervention and referral to treatment (SBIR) into health services

Health care providers play an important role in helping people to reduce or stop their drinking to limit health risks. SBIR is an early intervention strategy that has shown to effectively reduce alcohol harms. It helps health care providers identify individuals consuming alcohol at risky amounts through universal screening. SBIR can be delivered during routine visits in primary care and other healthcare settings with all patients. Brief intervention is a non-confrontational conversation with a patient that aims to motivate them to make behavioural changes. [52]

What can be done by Local Municipalities and community organizations in Halton?

- Provide health care providers with supports to help them have regular conversations about alcohol consumption with their patients
- Reduce barriers to treatment by improving access and communication between treatment options, healthcare providers and addiction services, such as ADAPT.

Next Steps

Halton Region Public Health will continue to monitor alcohol-related issues in Halton through an ongoing Alcohol Monitoring Framework. This framework will collect data from various sources, including paramedic data, allowing for ongoing tracking of alcohol consumption and related harms. Regularly reviewing this data helps identify trends and areas where action may be needed to address alcohol-related harms.

The Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Alcohol Action Table, consisting of community leaders from health, education, municipal government and policy development sectors, will work collaboratively to implement evidence-based actions that respond to the needs identified in this report. Their efforts will focus on developing comprehensive strategies aimed at reducing alcohol-related harms, improving community awareness, and fostering a coordinated response to this ongoing public health challenge.

As of January 2025, Halton Region has developed a Municipal Alcohol Policy Reference Document for municipalities to use for public and private events, held a Continuing Medical Education event to educate physicians on Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health, advocated to the Federal Government for the creation of alcohol warning labels and led projects with various community and government organizations. Halton Region will continue to provide action to reduce the alcohol-related harms highlighted in this report. We invite all individuals, organizations and businesses in Halton to evaluate their ability to contribute to the implementation of evidence-based strategies to reduce alcohol consumption.

Conclusion

Alcohol use leads to a wide range of health and social harms, such as an increased risk of cancer, chronic diseases, and violence. It also incurs the largest societal cost of any legal or illegal substances in Canada. Our local data shows that many Halton residents drink alcohol at levels that are associated with an increased risk of harms to themselves and others. Research suggests that any reduction in alcohol use can decrease the health risks and social harms for individuals and the community.

Considering the Canadian Guidance on Alcohol and Health and the data presented in this report, there is a clear need to reduce alcohol use among Halton residents. To address this, Halton Region continues to monitor population level data and has launched several initiatives in collaboration with the CSWB Alcohol Action Table. These initiatives include strategies to build healthy public policy, create supportive environments, promote awareness and education, and strengthen community action.

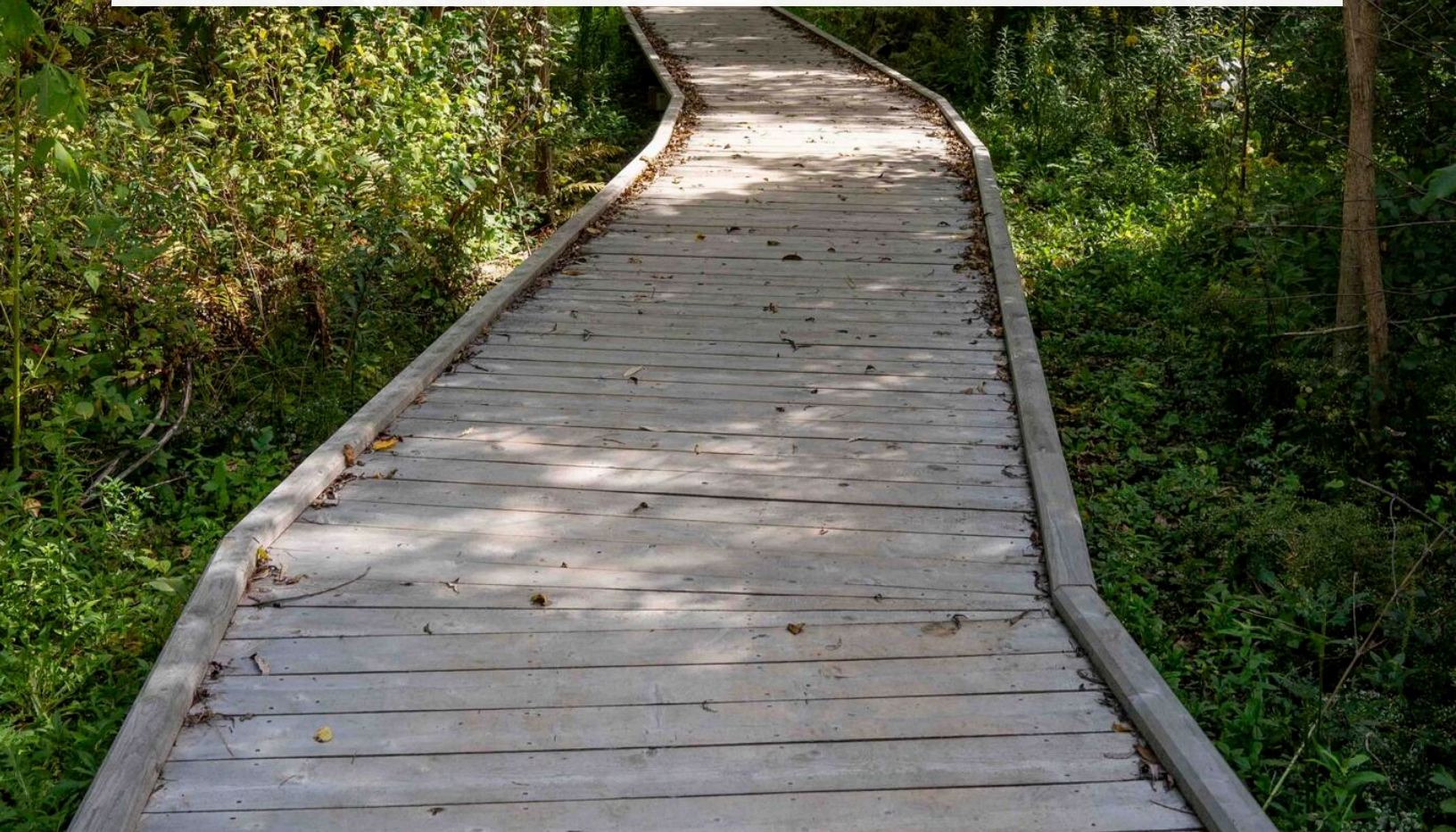
Together, these efforts will ensure that actions taken are based on the most current data and meet the needs of Halton residents.



Resources

If you or someone you know would like support for their alcohol use, there are many local resources and organizations available:

- [One-Link](#): a single point of access for referrals to 10 Addiction and Mental Health Service Providers. Call 1-844-216-7411 (toll free) or (905) 338-4123.
- [Halton ADAPT](#): specialized programs to meet the needs of under-served populations and to fill gaps in service by working in an integrated way with service partners in the community. Call (905) 639-6537 ext. 0.
- [ConnexOntario](#): a 24-hour help line providing access to Addiction, Mental Health, and Problem Gambling Services.
- [COAST – Crisis Outreach and Support Team Halton](#): immediate outreach and support for residents aged 16 and over who are experiencing a mental health crisis. Call 1-877-825-9011 (24 hours).
- [ROCK - Reach Out Centre for Kids](#): the child and youth mental health lead agency for Halton. Call 905-878-9785 (24 hours).
- [Halton & Mississauga Rapid Access Addiction Medicine Clinic](#): an outpatient addiction medicine clinic that provides expert assessment, brief counseling, and medication-assisted treatment for a variety of substance use disorders, including alcohol.
- [CMHA Halton](#): access programs for people who use alcohol and their families, including peer mentorships, groups, workshops and webinars.



Works Cited

- [1] Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse, "Canadian Guideline for the Clinical Management of High-Risk Drinking and Alcohol Use Disorder," 2023.
- [2] Paradis, C., Butt, P., Shield, K., Poole, N., Wells, S., Naimi, T., Sherk, A., & the Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines Scientific Expert Panels, "Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report," Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, Ottawa, Ont, 2023.
- [3] World Health Organization, "No level of alcohol consumption is safe for our health," 4 January 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/04-01-2023-no-level-of-alcohol-consumption-is-safe-for-our-health#:~:text=The%20World%20Health%20Organization%20has,that%20does%20not%20affect%20health..>
- [4] World Health Organization, "Alcohol," 2022.
- [5] Statistics Canada, "Provisional death counts and excess mortality, January 2020 to October 2022," 12 January 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230112/dq230112c-eng.htm>.
- [6] The Lancet Gastroenterology & Hepatology, "Digging deeper into alcohol-related deaths," February 2022. [Online].
- [7] International Agency for Research on Cancer, "List of classifications," 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://monographs.iarc.who.int/list-of-classifications/>.
- [8] Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, "New WHO study links moderate alcohol use with higher cancer risk," 13 July 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/new-who-study-links-moderate-alcohol-use--with-higher-cancer-risk>.
- [9] Ontario Health and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), "Burden of Health Conditions Attributable to Smoking and Alcohol by Public Health Unit in Ontario," King's Printer for Ontario, Toronto, 2023.
- [1] National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, "Alcohol and the Adolescent Brain," 2024.
- [0] [Online]. Available: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/alcohol-and-adolescent-brain>.
- [1] Mental Health Foundation, "Alcohol and mental health," 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/alcohol-and-mental-health>.
- [1] World Health Organization, "Global status report on alcohol and health," 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241565639>.
- [2] <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241565639>.
- [1] Government of Canada, "A Framework for the Legalization and Regulation of Cannabis in Canada," Health Canada, Ottawa, 2016.
- [3] Canada," Health Canada, Ottawa, 2016.

- [1 Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), "Evidence brief: risk factors for simultaneous use of alcohol and cannabis.," Queen's Printer for Ontario, Toronto, ON, 2018.
- [1 Giesbrecht, N. & Bosma, L. M., "Preventing Alcohol-Related Problems: Evidence and Community-Based Initiatives," American Journal of Public Health, Washington, D.C., 2017.
- [1 Bernards, S., Graham, K., Tanner, B., Chavarria, J., Dhinsa, T., Crépault, J.F., & Wells, S.,
[6] "Update of Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines: Overview of reviews of the association between alcohol use and aggression and violence," Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, Ottawa, Ont, 2022.
- [1 Canada FASD Research Network, "What is FASD?," [Online]. Available: <https://canfasd.ca/what-is-fasd/>. [Accessed 25 01 2025].
- [1 Palmetter S, Probert A, & Lagacé C., "FASD prevalence among children and youth: results from the
[8] 2019 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth," *Health Promot Chronic Dis Prev Can*, vol. 41, no. 9, pp. 272-6, 2021.
- [1 Public Health Agency of Canada, "The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public
[9] Health in Canada 2015: Alcohol Consumption in Canada," 2016.
- [2 Pilowsky, D. J., Keyes, K. M. & Hasin, D. S., "Adverse Childhood Events and Lifetime Alcohol
[0] Dependence," *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 99, no. 2, pp. 258-263, 2009.
- [2 Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Scientific Working Group, "Canadian substance use
[1] costs and harms 2007–2020," Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, Ottawa, Ont, 2023.
- [2 CCO and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), "The
[2] burden of chronic diseases in Ontario: key estimates to support efforts in prevention," Queen's Printer for Ontario, Toronto, 2019.
- [2 Ontario Health and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario),
[3] "Burden of Health Conditions Attributable to Smoking and Alcohol by Public Health Unit in Ontario," February 2023. [Online]. Available: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/B/2023/burden-health-smoking-alcohol-appendix-a-etimates.pdf?rev=5d7b233ef2d546e89a6688a4322603e4&sc_lang=en&hash=05C974A08333AE879DFCD20AE4C9A836.
- [2 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, "Alcohol Use in Older Adults," 2008. [Online]. Available:
[4] <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/guides-and-publications/alcohol-use-in-older-adults#:~:text=As%20you%20age%2C%20you%20become,the%20negative%20effects%20of%20alcohol..>
- [2 Boak, A., & Hamilton, H. A., "Drug use among Ontario students, 1977–2023: Findings from the
[5] Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS)," Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, ON, 2023.

- [2] Alberta Health Services, "Alcohol Policy for Community Safety, Vibrancy, Health and Well-Being a
6] Practical Guide for Alberta Municipalities," 12 2022. [Online]. Available:
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-alcohol-policy-for-community-safety.pdf>.
- [2] Naimi, T., Stockwell, T., Giesbrecht, N., Wettlaufer, A., Vallance, K., Farrell-Low, A., Farkouh, E.,
7] Ma, J., Priore, B., Vishnevsky, N., Price, T., Asbridge, M., Gagnon, M., Hynes, G., Shelley, J.,
Sherk, A., Shield, K., Solomon, R., Thomas, G. & Thomps, "Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation
3.0: Results from Ontario," Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, Victoria, BC, 2023.
- [2] World Health Organization, "SAFER initiative," 2018. [Online]. Available:
8] <https://www.who.int/initiatives/SAFER>. [Accessed 2025].
- [2] The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, "Alcohol Policy Framework," 2019. [Online]. Available:
9] <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---public-policy-submissions/camh-alcoholpolicyframework-2019-pdf.pdf>. [Accessed 2025].
- [3] Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, "Balancing Act:
0] An all-of-society approach to substance use," March 2024. [Online]. Available:
<https://www.ontario.ca/files/2024-04/moh-cmoh-annual-report-2023-en-2024-04-02.pdf>.
- [3] Ray, J. G., Turner, L., Gozdyra, P., Matheson, F. I., Robert, B., Bartsch, E., & Park, A. L., "On-
1] Premise Alcohol Establishments and Ambulance Calls for Trauma, Assault, and Intoxication,"
Medicine, vol. 95, no. 19, p. e3669, 2016.
- [3] World Health Organization, "SAFER: Enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol
2] advertising, sponsorship, and promotion," 2024. [Online]. Available:
<https://www.who.int/initiatives/SAFER/alcohol-advertising>. [Accessed 6 August 2024].
- [3] Myran, D. T., Chen, J. T., Giesbrecht, N., & Rees, V. W., "The association between alcohol access
3] and alcohol-attributable emergency department visits in Ontario, Canada," *Addiction*, vol. 114, no.
7, pp. 1183-1191, 2019.
- [3] Government of Ontario, "Ontario Announces First 58 Grocery Store Locations to Sell Beer," 15 12
4] 2015. [Online]. Available: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/35326/ontario-announces-first-58-grocery-store-locations-to-sell-beer>.
- [3] Government of Ontario, "Backgrounder Improving Choice and Convenience for Alcohol
5] Consumers," 11 04 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://budget.ontario.ca/2019/bg-alcohol.html>.
[Accessed 25 01 2025].
- [3] Government of Ontario, "Ontario Permanently Allowing Alcohol with Food Takeout and Delivery,"
6] 09 12 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/59542/ontario-permanently-allowing-alcohol-with-food-takeout-and-delivery>.
- [3] Government of Ontario, "All Ontario Grocery and Big-Box Stores Now Able to Sell Alcoholic
7] Beverages," 31 10 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005247/all-ontario-grocery-and-big-box-stores-now-able-to-sell-alcoholic-beverages>.

- [3 Naimi, T., Stockwell, T., Giesbrecht, N., et al., "Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation 3.0: Results
8] from Ontario," Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, Victoria, BC, 2023.
- [3 Stockwell T, Zhao J, Marzell M, Gruenewald PJ, Macdonald S, Ponicki WR, & Martin G.,
9] "Relationships Between Minimum Alcohol Pricing and Crime During the Partial Privatization of a
Canadian Government Alcohol Monopoly," *Journal of studies on alcohol and drugs*, vol. 76, no. 4,
pp. 628-634, 2015.
- [4 World Health Organization, "SAFER: Raise prices on alcohol through excise taxes and pricing
0] policies," 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/SAFER/pricing-policies>.
[Accessed 6 August 2024].
- [4 Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, "Social Reference Pricing for Alcohol FAQs," 2017.
1] [Online]. Available: <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/CCSA-Social-Reference-Pricing-Alcohol-FAQs-2017-en.pdf>. [Accessed 25 01 2024].
- [4 Government of Ontario Newsroom, "Ontario Stopping Scheduled Beer Tax Increase," 9 February
2] 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1004172/ontario-stopping-scheduled-beer-tax-increase>. [Accessed 30 July 2024].
- [4 Government of Canada, "Backgrounder: Supporting Canadian businesses with alcohol excise duty
3] relief," 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-finance/news/2024/03/backgrounder-supporting-canadian-businesses-with-alcohol-excise-duty-relief.html>. [Accessed 25 01 2025].
- [4 Government of Canada, "GST/HST break," 2024. [Online]. Available:
4] <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes/child-and-family-benefits/gst-hst-holiday-tax-break.html>.
[Accessed 25 01 2025].
- [4 National Alcohol Strategy Working Group, Reducing Alcohol-Related Harm in Canada: Toward a
5] Culture of Moderation, Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2007.
- [4 Babor, T. F., Caetano, R., Casswell, S., Edwards, G., Giesbrecht, N., Graham, K., Grube, J. W.,
6] Hill, L., Holder, H., Homel, R., Livingston, M., Österberg, E., Rehm, J., Room, R., & Rossow, I.,
Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and Public Policy (3rd edn), Oxford University Press,
2022.
- [4 Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, "Alcohol Policy and Cancer in Canada: Policy Actions," 05
7] 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://s22457.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Alcohol-Policy-Actions-EN.pdf>. [Accessed 25 10 2025].
- [4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "What Works: Strategies to Prevent Alcohol-Impaired
8] Driving," 16 05 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cdc.gov/impaired-driving/strategies/index.html>. [Accessed 25 01 2025].
- [4 Government of Ontario, "Ontario Taking Impaired Drivers Off the Road," 15 05 2024. [Online].
9] Available: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1004598/ontario-taking-impaired-drivers-off-the-road>.
[Accessed 25 10 2025].

- [5 Government of Canada, "Public Awareness of Alcohol-related Harms Survey 2023," 19 01 2024.
0] [Online]. Available: <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/alcohol-related-harms-survey/>. [Accessed 25 01 2025].
- [5 World Health Organization, "Health warning labels on alcoholic beverages: opportunities for
1] informed and healthier choices," 08 11 2021. [Online]. Available:
<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/352519/9789240044449-eng.pdf?sequence=1>.
[Accessed 25 01 2025].
- [5 Public Health Ontario, "Evidence Brief: Alcohol screening, brief intervention and referral (SBIR)
2] services in health settings," 03 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/E/2017/eb-sbir.pdf?la=en>. [Accessed 25 01 2025].
- [5 Stockwell T, Zhao J, Marzell M, Gruenewald PJ, Macdonald S, Ponicki WR, & Martin G.,
3] "Relationships Between Minimum Alcohol Pricing and Crime During the Partial Privatization of a
Canadian Government Alcohol Monopoly," *Journal of studies on alcohol and drugs*, vol. 76, no. 4,
pp. 628-634, 2015.

Glossary

Age-standardized rate

- Age-standardized rates are presented for emergency department visits and hospitalizations entirely caused by alcohol in order to make comparisons between Halton and Ontario. Age-standardized means that the rates have been adjusted to account for differences in age structure of the two populations being compared. In this report, rates were standardized to the 2011 Canadian population.

Alcohol outlet

- A location where alcohol is legally available for purchase including both on-premise and off-premise establishments.

Binge drinking

- A pattern of heavy drinking defined by the number of standard drinks consumed on a single occasion: five or more drinks for a male or four or more drinks for a female.

ED visits entirely caused by alcohol

- Includes unscheduled visits to the emergency department with a diagnosis of a condition that is considered 100% attributable to alcohol, as captured through the National Ambulatory Care Reporting System. The following ICD-10 codes are included:

Condition	ICD-10 Code
Alcohol-Induced Pseudo-Cushing's Syndrome	E24.4
Mental And Behavioural Disorders Due To Use Of Alcohol	F10
Degeneration Of Nervous System Due To Alcohol	G31.2
Alcoholic Polyneuropathy	G62.1
Alcoholic Myopathy	G72.1
Alcoholic Cardiomyopathy	I42.6
Alcoholic Gastritis	K29.2
Alcoholic Liver Disease	K70
Alcohol-Induced Acute Pancreatitis	K85.2
Alcohol-Induced Chronic Pancreatitis	K86.0
Maternal Care For (Suspected) Damage To Fetus From Alcohol	O35.4
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (Dysmorphic)	Q86.0
Finding Of Alcohol In Blood	R78.0
Toxic Effects Of Alcohol	T51
Accidental Poisoning By And Exposure To Alcohol	X45
Intentional Self-Poisoning By And Exposure To Alcohol	X65
Poisoning By And Exposure To Alcohol, Undetermined Intent	Y15

Heavy drinking

- Data on heavy drinking among young adults in Halton come from the Canadian Community Health Survey. Heavy drinking is defined as the consumption of five or more drinks for men or four or more drinks for women on at least one occasion per month in the last 12 months.

Hospitalizations entirely caused by alcohol

- Includes hospital discharges for individuals hospitalized with a condition considered to be 100% attributable to alcohol, as captured through the Discharge Abstract Database (DAD) and the Ontario Mental Health Reporting System (OMHRS). The following ICD-10 and DSM-V codes are included:

Condition	ICD-10 Code
Alcohol-Induced Pseudo-Cushing's Syndrome	E24.4
Mental And Behavioural Disorders Due To Use Of Alcohol	F10
Degeneration Of Nervous System Due To Alcohol	G31.2
Alcoholic Polyneuropathy	G62.1
Alcoholic Myopathy	G72.1
Alcoholic Cardiomyopathy	I42.6
Alcoholic Gastritis	K29.2
Alcoholic Liver Disease	K70
Alcohol-Induced Acute Pancreatitis	K85.2
Alcohol-Induced Chronic Pancreatitis	K86.0
Maternal Care For (Suspected) Damage To Fetus From Alcohol	O35.4
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (Dysmorphic)	Q86.0
Finding Of Alcohol In Blood	R78.0
Toxic Effects Of Alcohol	T51
Accidental Poisoning By And Exposure To Alcohol	X45
Intentional Self-Poisoning By And Exposure To Alcohol	X65
Poisoning By And Exposure To Alcohol, Undetermined Intent	Y15

Condition	DSM-V Code
ALCOHOL INTOXICATION DELIRIUM	291.0
Alcohol Withdrawal Delirium	
Alcohol Persisting Amnesic Disorder	291.1
ALCOHOL-INDUCED MAJOR NEUROCOGNITIVE DISORDER, NONAMNESTIC	291.2
Confabulatory Type	
Alcohol Withdrawal	291.81
Alcohol-Induced Sleep Disorder	291.82
ALCOHOL-INDUCED ANXIETY DISORDER	291.89
ALCOHOL-INDUCED BIPOLAR AND RELATED DISORDER	
ALCOHOL-INDUCED DEPRESSIVE DISORDER	
Alcohol-Induced Sexual Dysfunction	
ALCOHOL-INDUCED PSYCHOTIC DISORDER	291.9
Unspecified Alcohol-Related Disorder	
Alcohol Intoxication	303.00
Alcohol Use Disorder, Moderate/Severe	303.90

Incident (as defined by Halton Regional Police Service)

- A self-contained episode or event. One incident can include an officer being dispatched, an arrest, or a charge being laid. Synonymous with “occurrence”.

International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD)

- The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) is a medical classification list by the World Health Organization (WHO). The 10th revision is the version used for assessing emergency department visits and hospitalizations entirely caused by alcohol in this report.

Liquor Control Act (LCA)

- The Liquor Control Act, R.S.O 1990, controls the sale and pricing of alcohol in Ontario. The LCA controls the retailers who can retail beverage alcohol in the province as well as minimum price requirements.

Liquor License Act (LLA)

- The Liquor License Act, R.S.O 1990, sets out the rules for the sale and service of beverage alcohol in Ontario. The Act regulates the same of alcohol in licensed establishments as well as advertisements and promotions of alcohol. The administration and enforcement of the LLA are the responsibility of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO).

Off-premise licensed establishment

- Off-premise alcohol outlets include liquor, wine and grocery stores as well as farmers' markets and ferment-on-premise outlets (among other types of retailers) that sell alcohol for consumption elsewhere.

On-premise licensed establishment

- On-premise alcohol outlets include bars, restaurants, hotels, producers (wineries, breweries), and other locations where alcohol is consumed on-site.

Special Occasion Permit (SOP)

- The Special Occasion Permit program in Ontario allows for the sale and service of alcohol on special occasions, such as cash bars at weddings or private receptions, as well as larger scale events that are open to the public, such as charity fundraisers. A

SOP is required any time alcohol is offered for sale anywhere other than a licensed establishment (such as a bar or restaurant) or a private place (such as a private residence or office).

Standard drink

- In Canada, a standard drink is defined as:
 - 341 mL (12 oz.) beer, cider or cooler (5% alcohol)
 - 142 mL (5 oz.) wine (12% alcohol)
 - 85 mL (3 oz.) fortified wine (18% alcohol)
 - 43 mL (1.5 oz.) liquor (40% alcohol)

Data notes & limitations

Counts and rates

- Some data sources in this report are presented as counts only (e.g. number of paramedic calls, number of police incidents), while some are presented as rates (e.g. rates of emergency department visits and hospitalizations).
- For data presented as counts over time, the counts do not take into account growth in Halton's population. Therefore some increases may be due to population growth.
- Rates take into account population size. In this report, rates of ED visits and hospitalizations entirely caused by alcohol were age-standardized to the 2011 Canadian census when comparing Halton to Ontario. This ensures that any differences in rates between these two populations are not due to differences in the populations' age structures.

COVID-19 Hospitalizations and Deaths

- This report presents data regarding COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths between March 1, 2020 and February 28, 2023.
- COVID-19 hospitalizations include any new hospitalization among Halton residents involving treatment for COVID-19 and its symptoms.
- COVID-19 deaths include any fatality of a Halton resident where COVID-19 contributed to or was the underlying cause of death, as recorded on the death certificate or other official documentation.
- Data for COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths were retrieved from the Case and Contact Management (CCM) Solution, which is an operational database.
- Estimates are subject to change once data is available through the Discharge Abstract Database (DAD) and vital statistics.

DATIS

- [The Drug and Alcohol Treatment Information System](#) (DATIS) supports approximately 200 publicly-funded addiction agencies in Ontario manage and report on clinical services. Reporting is mandated by Ontario's Ministry of Health. DATIS also provides Ontario's health policy and decision makers with a wide variety of reports. It is operated by the Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

Direct and non-direct cost of alcohol in Halton

- The estimated costs of alcohol harms in Halton were derived from a systematic review of the per capita healthcare costs of alcohol presented in the [Burden of Chronic Diseases in Ontario](#) report by Cancer Care Ontario and Public Health Ontario, applied

to the population size of Halton Region. It is not based on local healthcare cost data and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

FASD prevalence estimates

- FASD studies have some limitations, such as discrepancies in reporting diagnoses, underreporting of prenatal alcohol exposure, and the fact that difficulties associated with FASD sometimes do not emerge until school years or later. Many prevalence studies involve small samples, unique settings, use different methodologies, require voluntary participation, or focus on estimating numbers using pre-existing data sources. Almost all Canadian research has been done with children. These limitations make it difficult to know the true prevalence of FASD in Canada (CanFASD, 2018).

Representativeness of Qualitative Data

- Participants were purposively selected to represent organizations with perspectives on alcohol-related issues and/or experiences working with individuals with Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). However, some selected participants could not attend interviews or focus groups due to scheduling conflicts, and there may have been gaps when considering which partners to reach out to. In addition, group dynamics in focus group discussions may have prevented less vocal members from expressing their opinion (despite facilitator efforts to encourage participation). As a result, results may not be fully representative of the intended audience.

Statistical significance

- A statistically significant difference between two estimates is a difference that is not likely due to chance alone. Difference between groups (for example Halton and Ontario) were tested for statistical significance where applicable by calculating 95% confidence intervals. If the confidence intervals did not overlap, differences were considered statistically significant.
- Statistical significance was described in the report for the following data sources: Canadian Community Health Survey, Canadian Health Survey of Children and Youth, Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalization data.

Survey data

- The perception of social approval or disapproval by respondents may affect their responses to survey questions about alcohol use.