

WEBINAR OVERVIEW

Alcohol monopolies: what does it take for alcohol monopolies to work?

18 October 2023 | 13:00–14:00 CET

Background

There is solid and compelling evidence that alcohol monopolies hold significant advantages for public health and welfare by way of limiting the availability of alcohol (1-3). An *alcohol monopoly* is a government-controlled system for all or a segment of the alcohol supply chain (i.e., import, production, distribution, sales and/or export of alcohol) (1, 4). Retail alcohol monopolies are widespread and implemented in varied ways for distilled spirits, beer and/or wine (1).

Despite their known advantages, alcohol monopolies are somewhat of a unicorn among alcohol policy interventions actively implemented. Monopoly systems are found in only a handful of contexts. This includes most prominently the Nordic area (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands), where the model of monopolies implemented serves as the backbone of their alcohol control policies for the betterment of public health. Other contexts with varied models of monopoly systems include the United States of America and Canada (2, 5). Each context has taken a tailored approach to design its monopoly systems through state-owned retailers like *Alko* in Finland (6), *Systembolaget* in Sweden (7), or jurisdiction-specific liquor corporations in Canada like the *Liquor Control Board of Ontario*. The regulation of retailers in this way enables the use of other mechanisms, such as restrictions on opening hours, bans on advertising, and the strict enforcement of age limits (3).

Alcohol retail monopolies evolve over time. There has been a tendency towards increased private ownership of retail locations, either entirely or through the gradual increase in the share of private retailers (i.e., grocery stores) for beer and/or wine sales (8, 9). There is also growing pressure to introduce other changes, such as to allow alcohol sales via the Internet. Advocates of these changes present them as seemingly minor exceptions. However, these changes ultimately risk eroding the unique advantages of an alcohol monopoly (2).

The consequences of deviating from a true monopoly system are well-studied. The evidence suggests the continued public ownership of alcohol retail systems leads to substantial improvements in population health and reduced economic costs (8, 10, 11). In contrast, deregulating the alcohol market risks considerable increases in the selling points for alcohol and, ultimately, increasing economic burdens on healthcare and criminal justice systems, among other known consequences of increasing the accessibility of alcohol. Novel modelling and scenario forecasting have also been used to quantify these effects, demonstrating increases in sales volume, alcohol use per capita, and increased hospital admissions and deaths (e.g., 2, 8, 12).

About the webinar

This webinar sets out to spotlight alcohol monopolies and the contemporary challenges they must overcome to ensure these systems remain fit for purpose. It continues the dialogue initiated earlier in the Less Alcohol Webinar Series on [restricting alcohol availability](#) and [alcohol consumption and socioeconomic inequalities](#). Leading experts on alcohol monopolies will share the best available evidence and discuss these systems in different contexts, including Canada, Finland, Sweden and other Nordic countries. We will discuss the threats monopolies face at present and ultimately reflect on the global mechanisms, including the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (13) and global action plan on alcohol (14), that can support countries in their continued implementation of alcohol monopoly systems.

What do we aim to achieve?

This webinar aims to raise awareness of the unique advantages of alcohol monopolies, highlight the latest scientific evidence, and create a platform for discussing the future of monopoly systems.

Who should participate?

The target audience includes policy-makers, government officials and civil servants, civil society, researchers, local authorities and the public.

► Register here

Joining this event requires prior registration. If you have questions regarding how to request to attend, please contact the Less Alcohol Unit for more information: lessalcohol@who.int.

The event is co-organized by the Less Alcohol Unit of the Department of Health Promotion, the Drugs and Addictive Behaviours of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Use at the World Health Organization and the European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare).

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► About the Less Alcohol Webinar Series

The Less Alcohol Webinar Series sets out to start global conversations on contemporary policy issues critical to reducing alcohol consumption. The topics explored through the series intend to draw attention to perceived blind spots in the policy sphere. For an overview of the 2023 edition of the webinar series, visit here and register for upcoming webinars below.

Alcohol and the environment: how to green alcohol control policies?	Alcohol monopolies: what does it take for alcohol monopolies to work?	Youth and alcohol: do new trends demand new solutions?	Measuring alcohol policy implementation: are existing tools and methods fit for purpose?
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