

April 15, 2026

To: Mayors and Councils within the County of Simcoe, District of Muskoka, City of Barrie and City of Orillia

Re: Alcohol Harms and Availability in Simcoe Muskoka

On behalf of the Board of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU), I am pleased to share a new resource with you to support your efforts in reducing alcohol-related harms in your communities. SMDHU's [Alcohol Data Brief](#) (enclosed) outlines the health impacts and financial costs associated with alcohol use in Simcoe Muskoka. It is intended to help your municipality consider the health and social impacts of increased alcohol access and availability, when reviewing your existing municipal alcohol policy and related bylaws.

Evidence-informed alcohol policies are an effective and cost-efficient way to reduce alcohol-related harms. As municipalities have authority over local policies and bylaws, understanding the local alcohol environment will help support decisions that promote public safety, community health, and responsible use of resources. By taking a proactive approach, municipalities can help prevent alcohol-related harm while fostering safer, healthier, and more vibrant communities.

SMDHU is committed to supporting municipal partners in this work. Staff are available to provide data, evidence, health policy guidance, and opportunities for collaboration to assist in the development or enhancement of your Municipal Alcohol Policies and/or bylaws.

We appreciate your ongoing commitment to community health and safety, and look forward to working together to address this important issue. Your municipality is welcome to contact SMDHU's Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Lisa Simon, at MOH@smdhu.org or the Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction team at SUPHR@smdhu.org. They are available to support your review of local alcohol policies and to

□ Barrie: 15 Sperling Dr. P: 705-721-7520 F: 705-721-1495	□ Barrie Clinic: 403-80 Bradford St. P: 705-721-7520 F: 705-721-7848	□ Collingwood 280 Pretty River Pkwy. P: 705-445-0804 F: 705-445-6498	□ Cookstown 2-25 King St. South P: 705-458-1103 F: 705-458-0105	□ Gravenhurst 2-5 Pineridge Gate P: 705-684-9090 F: 705-684-9887	□ Huntsville 34 Chaffey St. P: 705-789-8813 F: 705-789-7245	□ Midland A-925 Hugel Ave. P: 705-526-9324 F: 705-526-1513	□ Orillia 120-169 Front St. S. P: 705-325-9565 F: 705-325-2091
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provide input if you are considering changes to alcohol access in municipal spaces, such as parks, or at municipally designated community and cultural events.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Ann-Marie Kungl
Chair, Board of Health
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

AMK/MB/mn

Enc. (1)

cc: Hon. Andrea Khanjin, MPP Barrie-Innisfil
Hon. Doug Downey, MPP Barrie-Springwater-Oro Medonte
Hon. Jill Dunlop, MPP Simcoe-North
Hon. Graydon Smith, MPP Parry Sound-Muskoka
Hon. Caroline Mulroney, MPP York-Simcoe
Chief Joanne Sandy and Council, Beausoleil First Nation
Chief Rhonda Williams-Lovett and Council, Moose Deer Point First Nation
Chief Ted Williams and Council, Rama First Nation
Chief Philip Frans and Council, Wahta First Nation
Chief Administrative Officers
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit Board of Health

Alcohol Availability and Harms in Simcoe Muskoka

APRIL 2026

Key Findings

- Alcohol use is responsible for approximately **7,665 emergency department visits, 840 hospitalizations and 275 deaths annually in Simcoe Muskoka.**¹
- Alcohol harms affect all neighbourhoods but **have a greater impact on people living in neighbourhoods with the greatest economic and social disadvantage.**²
- In 2025, Simcoe Muskoka had **480 retail alcohol outlets.**³ This equals a density of 8.4 retailers for every 10,000 residents aged 15 years and older, four times higher than the recommended best-practice density.⁴

About this Work

This data brief provides municipal partners with updated local information on alcohol-related harms and alcohol availability within Simcoe Muskoka. Its purpose is to help inform and support municipal decision-making related to local alcohol policies.

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) has a long-standing partnership with local municipalities, providing health data and health policy expertise to support the development and maintenance of effective municipal alcohol policies.

Local alcohol availability, consumption, and related harms directly affect municipal services, including policing, paramedic services, bylaw enforcement, fire services, parks and recreation, and liability on municipal properties. Municipalities also often bear the financial and operational impacts of alcohol-related injuries, disturbances, and property damage. Understanding the local alcohol environment helps municipalities make informed decisions that protect public safety, health, and municipal budgets.

Background

Alcohol is the most used substance in Ontario and places the greatest burden on healthcare and other social systems in comparison to all other substances including commercial tobacco and opioids.⁴ Alcohol-related harm represents significant public health burden, as a large proportion of the population consumes alcohol at levels exceeding amounts beyond minimal risk, thereby increasing the risk of chronic disease, injury, and premature mortality.⁵ Alcohol-related harms are not evenly experienced across the population, with some demographic and socioeconomic groups experiencing higher levels.⁶

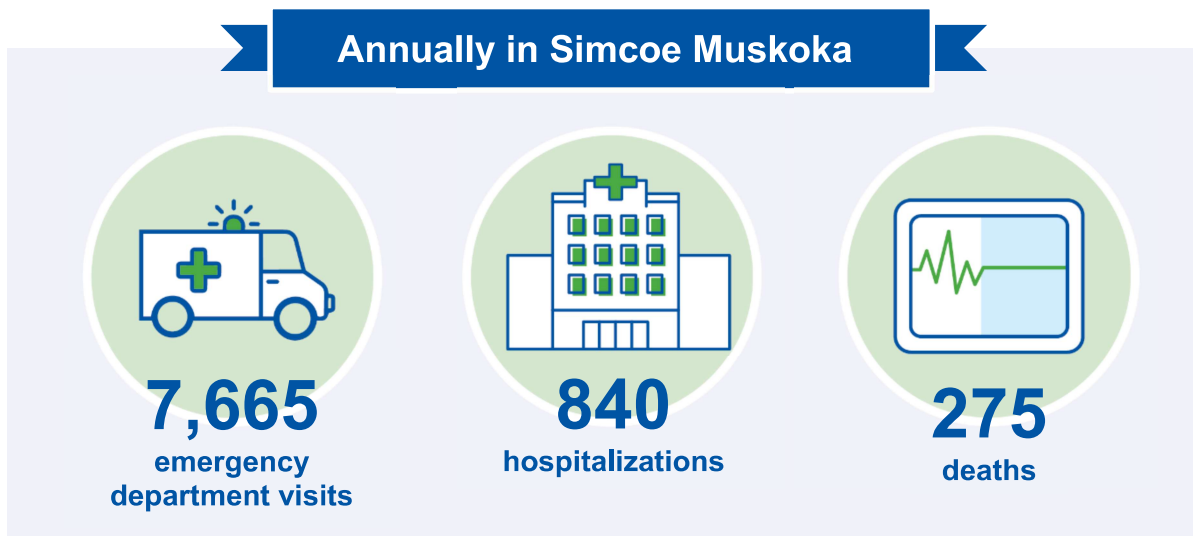
In recent years, alcohol regulations in Ontario have been gradually relaxed, expanding retail access considerably and allowing municipalities to permit personal alcohol consumption in public spaces, such as parks, creating an environment more conducive to alcohol consumption, demand, and associated harms.

Evidence consistently shows that when alcohol becomes more available, consumption increases and so do alcohol-related harms.⁶ When alcohol is consumed in public spaces, it contributes to the normalization of drinking.^{6,7} Greater visibility increases the chance that children and youth will use alcohol.⁵ Alcohol use during the teenage years can interfere with important brain development, including areas responsible for memory, decision-making, and impulse control. Delaying the start of drinking is the best way to protect healthy brain development, with the greatest risks seen in youth under 15.^{5,6}



Alcohol use also has significant economic impacts at both provincial and municipal levels. In Ontario, alcohol generated \$5.2 billion in net revenue in 2020, yet the overall economic cost, including health care, lost productivity, criminal justice, and other direct costs, reached \$7.1 billion, resulting in a \$1.9 billion deficit.^{8,9} At the municipal level, alcohol use can contribute to increased costs and liability risks on municipal properties, along with pressure on insurance coverage. There is potential for these impacts to grow if municipal alcohol policies become less restrictive.^{8,9}

What we know...



People in Simcoe Muskoka experience substantial harms related to alcohol use

- Every year in Simcoe Muskoka, alcohol use is responsible for approximately 7,665 emergency department (ED) visits, 840 hospitalizations, and 275 deaths.¹
 - One-in-twenty deaths in Simcoe Muskoka is caused by alcohol use.
 - Men experience more alcohol-related harm than women.
 - In Simcoe Muskoka, about half of all deaths caused by alcohol are from cancer or heart disease.
 - Alcohol also plays a major role in injuries. It is responsible for about one in five deaths from intentional injuries and about one in seven deaths from accidental injuries.

Alcohol-related harms are higher in Simcoe Muskoka and have greater impact on those living in lower resourced areas

- The rates of deaths, hospitalizations, and ED visits due to alcohol use in Simcoe Muskoka are significantly higher than provincial averages.¹
- The rates of deaths, hospitalizations, and ED visits caused by alcohol use are about twice as high among people living in Simcoe Muskoka neighbourhoods with the greatest economic and social disadvantage compared with those in the least disadvantaged areas.^{1,2}
- Neighbourhoods with the greatest disadvantage are those where many residents cannot meet their basic needs.²
- Approximately 100 deaths, 250 hospitalizations, and 2,000 ED visits related to alcohol use could be avoided each year if all residents in Simcoe Muskoka experienced the same rates of alcohol-related harms as those living in areas with the least disadvantage.^{1,2}



Alcohol availability and use in Simcoe Muskoka

- As of December 3, 2025, there were 480 retailers in Simcoe Muskoka that were allowed to sell alcoholic beverages. More than three-quarters of these retailers are grocery and convenience stores.³ This equals a density of 8.4 retailers for every 10,000 residents aged 15 years and older, four times higher than the recommended best-practice density.⁴
- More than 80% of Simcoe Muskoka adults drank alcohol in the past year, which was significantly higher than the provincial average of 75%.¹⁰ In addition, one-in-three adults drank more than two drinks per week, which is above the recommended amount to likely avoid alcohol-related consequences.^{5,10}

What's Next

The most effective and cost-efficient ways for reducing alcohol-related harms are policies that provide limits on alcohol availability and exposure.^{6,7} As part of this, local alcohol policies that maintain limits can influence community-wide drinking patterns and reduce related harms, while also protecting municipalities from increasing alcohol-related costs and liability risk. It is recognized that municipalities must balance public health considerations with tourism, economic development, recreation programming, enforcement capacity, and community expectations. Municipalities therefore play an important role in determining local strategies that are the best fit for their communities based on a range of considerations, including local alcohol-related harms.

Municipal actions that reduce alcohol-related harms include:

- maintaining alcohol-free parks, beaches, trails, recreation spaces, and community events⁶
- applying risk-based permitting for alcohol sale at events^{4,7}
- ensuring clear municipal alcohol bylaws and policies^{4,7,9}
- setting limits on when and where alcohol is allowed at municipal events^{4,7}
- supporting enforcement in public spaces^{4,7,9}

Reducing alcohol-related harms can also help limit pressures on policing, paramedic services, bylaw enforcement, parks operations, and municipal risk management. Although alcohol revenue flows mainly to the province, many of the resulting costs are experienced locally.^{6,8,9}

Assessing and monitoring the impacts of municipal actions that are intended to reduce alcohol-related harms is important. In particular, using an equity lens helps to ensure that actions do not unintentionally increase the harms experienced in lower-resourced neighbourhoods, which are already disproportionately high.

Health unit staff continue to support local municipalities in implementing evidence-based practices. This includes helping inform their decision-making on alcohol-free municipal spaces such as parks, providing guidance on municipal alcohol bylaws and policy updates, supplying local data on alcohol-related harms, and participating in community consultations on the local alcohol environment.

Municipal staff are encouraged to contact the Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction team at SUPHR@smdhu.org for support when reviewing alcohol policies or considering changes to alcohol access in parks or other municipal spaces.

Additional information can be found on SMDHU's HealthSTATS [website](#).



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