# COVID-19 and Alcohol Policies

INTRODUCTION. The COVID-19 pandemic has had immediate and lasting negative impacts on the physical and behavioral health of communities across the nation and world. These impacts are worsened by economic insecurity for many individuals, families, and communities. While addressing the impact of COVID-19 is critically important to the health of our nation and the wellbeing of individuals and families, effective COVID-19 responses are hampered by a lack of resources and best practices for providing prevention, treatment, and recovery services, while maintaining social distancing.

One such public health concern involves increased alcohol availability –
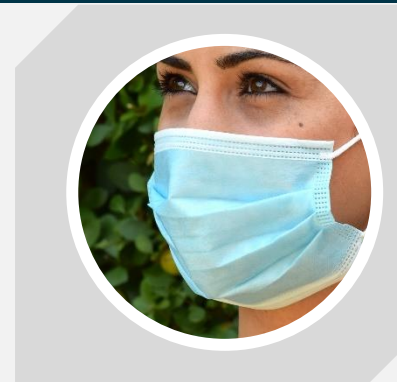
Alcohol Availability Policy Considerations

- States are commonly making alcohol available online and via takeout and delivery.
- Rationale for these changes in alcohol availability are well-intended, since life has changed so radically.
- An unintended consequence, however, is that rates of heavy and binge drinking among youth and adults have increased dramatically.
- Reasons for this increase are complex and related to stay-at-home and social distancing mandates resulting in isolation, unemployment, depression, financial concerns, abuse and domestic violence.
- Compelling body of evidence shows increased access results in increased use.
- COVID-19 is new, but prevention strategies that target population-level problems are not.
- Using a mix of policy, enforcement and media, combined with appeals to change individual behaviors, has proven successful in non-COVID-19 times, such as reducing tobacco use and drinking and driving.
- Policies are needed that take these critical public health concerns into account.
- States and communities should strongly consider reversing policies that have allowed increased access.
- Policies should be monitored closely so that they do not continue after businesses are reopened.

Alcohol Misuse Treatment Considerations

- Drinking is increasing at the same time that access to in-person treatment is drastically curtailed.
- Mutual help groups such as AA are struggling with social distancing and not meeting in-person.
- Telehealth fills important holes in the system but faces resource limitations and lack of access for many.
- Insurance coverage for telehealth is inconsistent across insurers and often fails to cover preventive services.
- Technical and organizational innovations are needed to address challenges presented by COVID-19 to the delivery of treatment services and recovery supports.

Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) and COVID

PIRE is deeply concerned about the profound impact Covid-19 is having on our states and communities. We stand ready to assist with your data collection, epidemiological analyses, needs assessments, strategic planning, training, and program evaluation needs.

Please contact us at: **covid19@pire.org**; **www.pire.org**