

Alcohol Outlet Density

Alcohol Outlet Density in New Mexico

Alcohol abuse and dependence pose significant risks to public health and safety for adults and youth in New Mexico. Since 1997, New Mexico has had the highest death rate due to alcohol in the United States: 1 in 6 deaths among working age adults (ages 20 to 64) is attributed to alcohol in our state.¹ In addition, underage drinking is a serious concern: 22% of high school students report drinking alcohol before the age of 13, the fourth highest rate in the nation.²

Why the Concern for Increased Alcohol Outlet Density?

Research conducted over the past two decades has shown clear linkages between high alcohol outlet density and these public health harms.³

- Violence, Including Homicide, Suicide, Domestic Violence and Child Abuse
- DWI
- Sexual Assault
- Property Damage and Vandalism
- Underage Drinking and High Risk Drinking By Adults



What About the Economic Impact of More Alcohol Outlets?

When communities turn to alcohol sales outlets as a means of economic development, the cost of associated alcohol-related harms is usually ignored. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that the economic cost of alcohol in New Mexico is \$1.9 billion.⁴ This translates to a per capita cost of \$960, the third highest in the nation. Given the list of related harms, it is likely that adding alcohol outlets in areas that already have significant density will create an economic burden, not a benefit, to these communities.

Why the Concern for Expanding the Number of Alcohol Outlets?

New Mexico’s current quota regulation limits the number of liquor licenses to 1 per every 2,000 people.⁵ As of 2014, 18 Local Option Districts (LOD) with a population greater than 10,000 in the state exceed the quota by more than 20%. **Española, the City of Santa Fe, and Gallup exceed the quota by more than 200%.**⁶ Four LODs with a population between 8,000 – 10,000 also exceed the quota by more than 20%.⁷

Experience and research show there are many unintended consequences of increasing alcohol sales outlets as an economic development strategy. For example, the Nob Hill district of Albuquerque allowed alcohol outlets to exceed the quota to increase development. This area is dealing with many consequences from a business mix that is disproportionately filled with alcohol outlets including injuries and crime. The New Mexico Department of Transportation cites Central Avenue as one of the deadliest corridors for bicyclist and pedestrian alcohol related fatalities.⁸

Recommendations for Controlling Alcohol Access Through Density Regulations:

Density

Maintain quota on alcohol outlets permitted for given population: 1 full license for every 2,000 people. Limit types of licenses to reduce overall availability and regulate distance between licenses to avoid clusters.

Days and Hours of Service

Maintain appropriate restrictions on alcohol sales to support public safety and health.

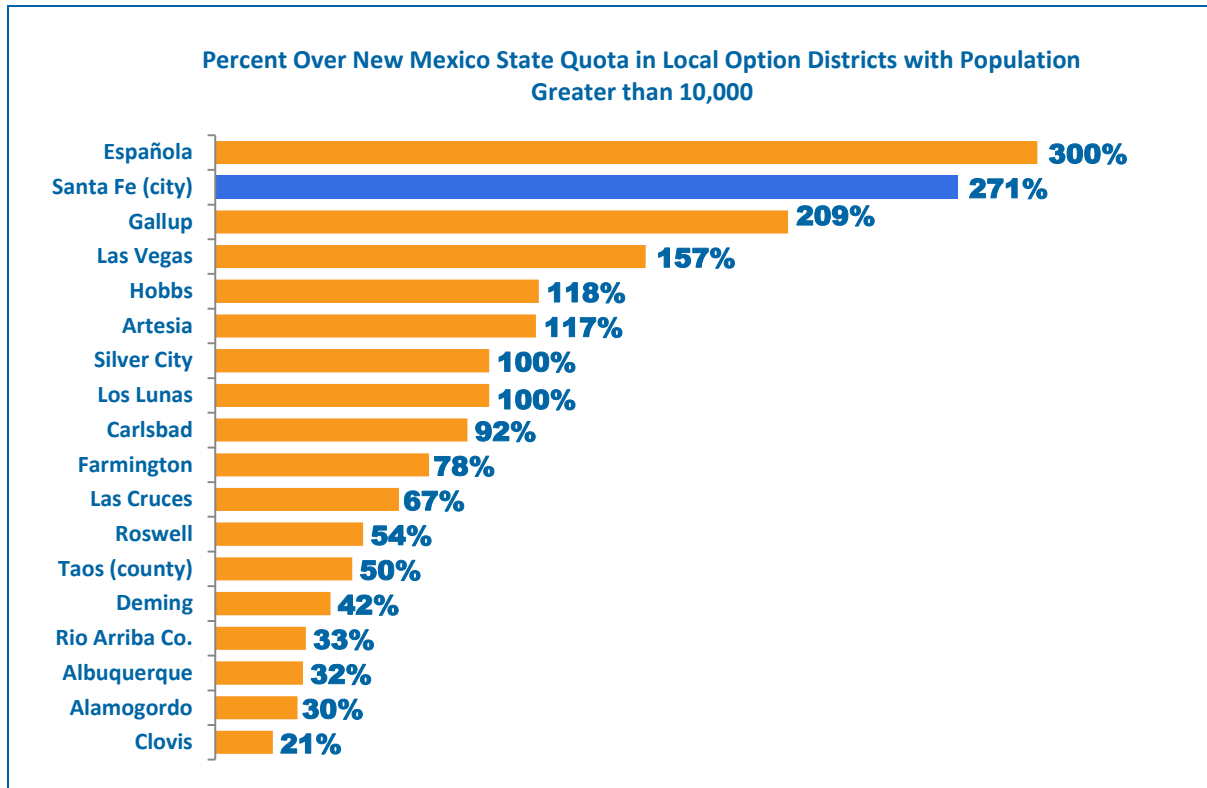
Distance from Schools, Churches

Ensure alcohol sales outlets are located away from places where children congregate.

Local Control

Increase local control over restricting alcohol licenses, especially in areas with high density and significant concerns about related harms.

Santa Fe and Other Areas of High Alcohol Outlet Density in New Mexico



Current New Mexico Laws related to Alcohol Outlet Density

Current statutes in the Liquor Control Act (LCA) contain some of the best practices recommended to control alcohol establishments based on national recommendations.⁹ These statutes include:

- Limiting outlets to no more than 1 license for every 2,000 population, excluding Restaurant Licenses (beer and wine only)
- Limiting hours of operation
- Restricting outlets within 300 feet of schools, churches and military installations
- Banning sales to minors and sales to intoxicated persons with significant penalties for violations

A recently formed Task Force recommended several changes to the LCA that would undermine these practices. Several Task Force recommendations would expand number and types of licenses, reduce penalties, and lengthen hours. These changes would likely lead to serious public health and safety consequences. In addition, these recommendations may exacerbate economic problems instead of solving them.

How Can We Better Control Alcohol Outlet Density?

- Maintain or strengthen current quota on alcohol outlet density
- Expand requirement to seek a local waiver for outlets wanting to locate near a school or church from 300 to 500 feet
- Strengthen local control to decide whether to approve a new or transferring license based on health and safety impacts
- Use local zoning to apply effective restrictions on alcohol outlet density in sensitive areas

References

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3. <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/RecommendationsReducingExcessiveAlcoholConsumptionAlcohol-RelatedHarmsLimitingAlcoholOutletDensity.pdf>
4. Sacks JJ, Roerber J, Bouchery EE, Gonzales K, Chaloupka FJ, Brewer RD. State costs of excessive alcohol consumption, 2006. *Am J Prev Med.* 2013;45(4):474-85.
5. Canopy License (CAN), Dispenser License (DIS), Rural Dispenser (RDI), Inter-Local Dispenser License (ILD), Lottery License (LOT), Retailer License (RET), Rural Retailer (RRE)
6. New Mexico Alcohol and Gaming Division records of current alcohol licenses and population, 2014
7. Grants (200%), Ruidoso (400%), Town of Bernalillo (225%), and Socorro City (80%).
8. New Mexico Department of Transportation, 2014
9. <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/outletdensity.html>