



Research Article

Innovation and diversity in public health team engagement in local alcohol premises licensing: qualitative interview findings from the ExLEnS study

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Plain language summary

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When alcohol is more easily available, people tend to drink more, which leads to higher levels of alcohol-related harms such as liver disease and cancer. Public health teams in England and Scotland have a role in the system that decides whether places are allowed to sell alcohol. This system, known as alcohol licensing, decides whether shops, bars and other venues are allowed to sell alcohol. We wanted to show the different ways these teams try to make a difference across England and Scotland to help public health teams learn from each other. We looked at what public health teams did through 69 interviews with public health professionals with licensing experience. We found major differences in what they do. The amount of time teams had to work on licensing varied greatly across the areas included in this study, with some areas having a dedicated person spending all their time working on licensing. In some areas, the teams would work with the person applying for the licence before the application was sent on for a formal decision. This helped them put in an application that was more likely to be successful and helped the team influence the licensing process. Some areas gathered their own information, which helped them make decisions whether to object to licensing applications or helped them show that a licence would not be suitable for a certain area. This involved visiting shops and supermarkets to find out what they were selling. One area was able to have a major role in developing local licensing policy. This was very unusual and was a very effective way of having an influence on the kind of places that were allowed to sell alcohol. The examples included in this paper of the different ways public health teams tried to affect the number and types of places that sell alcohol should be of use for teams who want to be more involved in alcohol licensing.