

Ontario to allow beer, wine sales at convenience stores by 2026

By Brian Lockhart

Many people in Ontario will be saying ? it's about time.?

The Ontario government has announced that beginning no later than January 1, 2026, consumers will be able to buy beer, wine, cider, coolers, seltzers, and other low-alcohol ready-to-drink beverages at all participating convenience, grocery and big box stores across the province.

This new open marketplace will allow up to 8,500 locations where these products can be purchased.

This will be the largest expansion of consumer choice and convenience since the end of prohibition ? almost 100 years ago.

Spirits like vodka, gin, and whisky will continue to be sold at the LCBO only.

?We made a promise to the people of Ontario to deliver more choice and convenience,? said Ontario Premier Doug Ford. ?Today, we're delivering on that promise. There's no reason why Ontario consumers shouldn't enjoy the same convenient shopping experience as Canadians in every other province when buying some wine for their holiday party or a case of beer or seltzers on their way to the cottage.?

As a first step in the transition to a new retail marketplace, the government has informed Brewers Retail Inc. (The Beer Store) that the Master Framework Agreement, signed and extended for 10 years by the previous government in 2015, limited the number of retail stores that could be authorized to sell alcohol, will not be renewed after it expires on December 31, 2025.

The Beer Store and LCBO will continue their retail operations in Ontario's new marketplace.

?The people of Ontario will soon have more choice and convenience on where they can buy alcohol,? said Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance. ?As we move towards implementing this expansion, our government will be taking a responsible, measured approach so we can ensure our transition to a new marketplace is smooth, safe, and stable.

The government's balanced approach will include competitive pricing to promote competition and a better deal for consumers.

The province is removing restrictions and exclusivities on pack sizes.

The new program will help support local beverage producers with extended, dedicated shelf space requirements to give small producers a chance to compete.

The LCBO will continue to be the exclusive wholesaler for all retail locations, bars, and restaurants selling alcohol and will offer consumers an extensive array of choices, including domestic and imported products.