

The Extra Mile

Advocating for evidence-based policies and practices to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms



Going the Distance: Alcohol Taxes Save Lives

Excise tax increases reduce excessive consumption and its harms

Community members from across Nebraska gathered to recognize the extraordinary leadership of individuals and organizations working to prevent alcohol-related harms at Project Extra Mile's recognition dinner on November 19.



Advocates recognized that evening are working to implement evidence-based policies and practices, which have also been identified as ['best buys'](#) by the World Health Organization, including:

- Increasing alcohol excise taxes;
- Restricting access to the physical availability of retail alcohol beverages and;
- Implementing comprehensive advertising, promotion and sponsorship

bans.

Those in attendance heard keynote speaker Vincent DeMarco share his approach for effective public health advocacy. DeMarco is a longtime public health advocate who played a crucial role in achieving one of those best buys in Maryland with that state's alcohol tax increase in 2011. According to DeMarco, grassroots campaigns are a proven path to transform public will into political power.

["How Marylanders beat the alcohol lobby"](#) details five key elements that influenced a political win around alcohol taxes. A more recent [opinion piece](#) in the Washington Post underscored the progress made following alcohol and tobacco tax increases in Maryland. A study by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and summarized in a [report](#) by the Abell Foundation outlines the following health benefits in the five years following the tax increase:

- Binge drinking among Maryland adults dropped by 17 percent; the reduction seen in Maryland between 2011 and 2016 was higher than the 6 percent national reduction.
- Between 2011 and 2015, there was a 26 percent reduction in the percentage of Maryland high school students who consumed alcohol in the preceding 30 days, a 28 percent reduction in binge drinking, and a 31 percent reduction in students riding in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.
- There was a decrease in alcohol-positive drivers and in sexually transmitted infections.

Throughout his presentation, DeMarco repeatedly stressed a key message: "Alcohol taxes save lives." A [study](#) published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* reinforced excise tax increases as a "best buy" approach to reducing alcohol consumption. "Tax increases may not sound the most attractive of policy options but are the single most cost-effective way of diminishing demand and reining back consumption," said lead researcher Dan Chisholm, Ph.D., of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland.

By increasing alcohol taxes, states have an opportunity to decrease excessive drinking and the numerous health-related harms. For example, the Nebraska Department of Transportation - Highway Safety Office reports 721 lives were lost in alcohol-related traffic crashes over the last ten years. An estimated 40% of those fatalities are someone other than the drinking driver. Alcohol-impaired traffic fatalities are only a fraction of the 703 estimated annual alcohol-attributable deaths in Nebraska. Alcohol contributes to a variety of health complications such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, and at least seven types of cancer.



Miles to Go: Excise Taxes Bypassed as Funding Source

Current alcohol tax revenues cover only a fraction of excessive drinking costs

At the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA) in November, the APHA Governing Council adopted a new public health policy statement to address alcohol-related harms. The [policy](#) calls for increasing federal excise taxes on alcohol, as well as implementing several other evidence-based measures.

Unfortunately, the federal government and most states continue to bypass excise taxes on alcohol as they look for new sources of funding. Between 2010 and 2017, twenty-one states increased their tobacco or cigarette taxes, according to the [Tax Policy Center at the Urban Institute & Brookings Institution](#). Connecticut, Delaware, Louisiana, and Rhode Island were the only states to increase their alcohol excise tax rates on beer, wine, or distilled spirits during this period. Washington state created a tax on alcoholic beverages when the state privatized alcohol sales and phased out state-owned liquor stores.

Alcohol producers are enjoying the lowest alcohol excise tax rates due to the 2017 federal tax cut. It was the first time the rates had been cut at the federal level since 1936 following a push led by craft brewers. The national rate on beer was reduced by \$3.50 per barrel for the first 60,000 barrels produced for small breweries (under two million barrels produced in a year). According to data found on the [Nebraska Craft Brewers Guild](#), the total barrels produced by all craft brewers in the state in 2017 were just over 46,000 barrels making all locally produced beer eligible for the lower federal tax rate.

Additionally, a [loophole](#) in the federal Act allows large producers of distilled spirits to ship their product tax-free through smaller firms and importers, giving them the lower tax rate that was designated for small, craft businesses. A handful of United States senators introduced a bill this year that would make those cuts permanent. According to an [article](#) published earlier this month by The Hill, "the bill has broad backing in both chambers, and supporters are confident they can get it across the finish line this year."

Nebraska Grapples with Second Highest DUI Rate

Recent string of alcohol-related crashes plagues communities

Nebraska has the second-worst DUI rate for alcohol in the country, with 955 episodes per 1,000 population. Based on this data and an estimated population of 1.9 million, the state has approximately 1.83 million drunk driving episodes each year. State policies play a significant role in this problem and its solution. For example, the Project Extra Mile coalition heard from the State Game & Parks Commission that since the adoption of regulations allowing alcohol on state park lands in 2010, DUI/BUI arrests have increased by 65%.

Over the past month, media accounts have shown a surge in alcohol-related crashes involving both injuries and deaths in eastern Nebraska.

- [11/21](#): Police: Lincoln driver pulled out whiskey bottle during DUI stop
- [11/17](#): Denton man killed in crash on West Van Dorn
- [11/14](#): Two women driving the same car in downtown Lincoln suspected of DUI, police say
- [11/14](#): 19-year-old arrested for third DUI
- [11/13](#): Reportedly drunk man crashes his car after driving the wrong way on O Street
- [11/12](#): Deadly rollover accident in Jefferson County
- [11/2](#): Update: Driver identified in fatal rollover crash
- [11/1](#): LPD: Teen was drinking before crashing into garage
- [11/1](#): Prosecutors file charges against Lincoln man involved in crash at 120th and Highway 2
- [10/30](#): Police: 4 injured in DUI crash at 26th and Holdrege.

Fortunately, states have a roadmap to prevent alcohol-related crashes. With support from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine organized a committee to identify strategies to prevent deaths caused by alcohol-impaired driving, which resulted in the report: [Getting to Zero Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities: A Comprehensive Approach to a Persistent Problem](#).

Past efforts to reduce alcohol-impaired driving have focused on decreasing the likelihood that someone will drive after they are already impaired by alcohol. However, broadening the focus to reduce excessive drinking by implementing these strategies is a more effective approach.

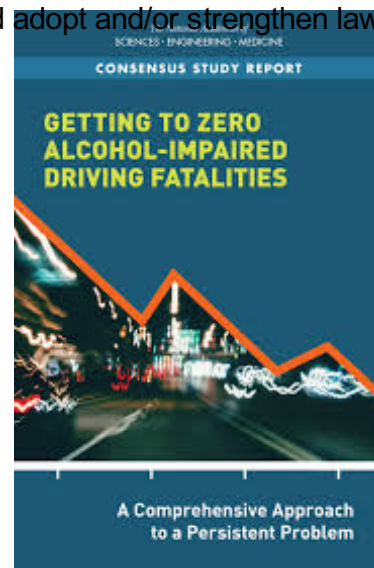
The need to pursue evidence-based strategies is evident in the wake of a recent study that looked at the impact of UberX on self-reported measures of alcohol consumption. [Researchers](#) estimated that UberX is associated with a 3.1% increase in the average number of drinks consumed per day and a 9% increase in the prevalence of heavy drinking. The effect is even greater in cities with poor public transportation options, where UberX is associated with an estimated 17.5% to 21.8% increase in binge drinking occurrences.

Simply put, we cannot prioritize one desired outcome over others. Instead, policymakers must realize that strategies that reduce excessive drinking and ALL of its harms will be most beneficial in tackling the problems that excessive alcohol consumption is causing in our communities.

Getting to Zero Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities: A Comprehensive Approach to a Persistent Problem

- Federal and state governments should increase alcohol taxes significantly.
- State and local governments should take steps to limit or reduce alcohol availability, including restrictions on the number of on- and off-premises alcohol outlets, and the days and hours of alcohol sales.

- Federal, state, and local governments should adopt and/or strengthen laws and dedicate enforcement resources to stop illegal alcohol sales (i.e., sales to already-intoxicated adults and sales to underage persons).
- Federal, state, and local governments should use their existing regulatory powers to strengthen and implement standards for permissible alcohol marketing content and placement across all media, establish consequences for violations, and promote and fund counter marketing campaigns.
- State governments should enact per se laws for alcohol-impaired driving at 0.05% blood alcohol concentration (BAC).
- States and localities should conduct frequent sobriety checkpoints in conjunction with widespread publicity to promote awareness of enforcement initiatives.



To report impaired driving, dial *55 from any cell phone. Emergencies should be reported to 911.

Ireland Restricts Alcohol Advertising Aimed at Youth

Groundbreaking policy changes will improve the health of families and children

New rules established by Ireland's [Public Health Alcohol Act](#) went into effect in November, restricting several types of alcohol advertising. Excessive alcohol use is a significant public health issue in Ireland. Over half (54%) of 18-75-year-old drinkers are classified as harmful drinkers, which equates to 1.35 million harmful drinkers in Ireland. It's estimated that 75% of all alcohol consumed in Ireland in 2013 was done while binge drinking. Alcohol contributes to one in four deaths of young men ages 15-39 in Ireland, and it is also a factor in half of all suicides, according to [Alcohol Action Ireland](#).

Exposure to alcohol advertising not only increases the likelihood that children will use alcohol but also is associated with increases in binge drinking and engaging in risky behavior. Research has found that 90% of Irish children were exposed to "traditional" advertising in the week before the study, with more than 50% of children surveyed citing seeing four or more advertisements a day. Of the children studied, 77% reported online exposure, and 61% owned alcohol-branded merchandise. More than half of Irish children (53.5%) between the ages of 13 and 15 had previously consumed alcohol, according to information about the impact of alcohol advertising on youth from [LOGT International](#).

Recent [research](#) published in 2019 has indicated that the amount of money spent advertising beer brands was positively correlated with adolescents' brand awareness, preference, use, and loyalty behavior. Beer advertising predicted both their intention to drink and actual alcohol consumption, independent of peer and parent behavior, and attitudes. Additionally, [research](#) found that adolescent recall of alcohol marketing was significantly associated with underage drinking.

Over the next three years, the following measures will be implemented as part of the new, groundbreaking Act:

- Alcohol advertising will be prohibited in public service vehicles, at public transport stations, and within 200 meters of a school or playground.
- Alcohol advertising will be prohibited in some movie theaters.

- Alcohol advertising will be prohibited on children's clothing.
- Alcohol will be confined to areas separated by a barrier in mixed retail units. Alcohol products may not be visible behind retail counters.
- Alcohol advertising will be banned in sports areas during events aimed at children.

"We know that we have a relationship with alcohol in this country that is not good, damages our health, harms our communities, and harms many families," [said Harris](#). "The measures in this bill will make a real difference to changing the culture of drinking in Ireland over a period of time."

"For the very first time in our history, we are legislating for alcohol as it affects our health, and it is right and proper that we do so."

- Health Minister Simon Harris



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