

# The Extra Mile

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

## Dietary Guidelines Committee Recommends Reducing Alcohol Use to Achieve Better Health

**Will recommendations withstand industry lobbying?**

The 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory (DGA) Committee's review of scientific evidence and recommendations inform the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services as they adopt the final 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The guidelines' purpose is to provide further direction to health professionals and policymakers in developing programs and policies related to nutrition with the intent of "translat[ing] science into succinct, food-based guidance that can be relied upon to help Americans choose foods that provide a healthy and enjoyable diet."

During the 2015-2020 guideline development process, the Committee considered approving a weekly consumption limit which would have allowed up to 15 drinks per week and did not address the dangers of consuming them in a single sitting. Due to concerns expressed by the public health community that this would indirectly endorse binge drinking, the recommendation was later abandoned.

The DGA Committee began its deliberation in March 2019 and reviewed topics related to nutrition and health from birth into adulthood. [Several questions are being considered](#) concerning alcohol use, and the committee accepted public comments related to the new dietary guidelines.

At their meeting in June, members of the DGA Committee announced new recommendations to the current alcohol consumption guidance, which recommended that men limit consumption to no more than two drinks per day (women one drink per day). The Committee is now advising both men and women to decrease daily use to a [single serving of beer, wine, or liquor](#). The group found that consuming two drinks per day for men is associated with a



["modest but meaningful increase"](#) in death rates due to all causes.

The recommendations also offer guidance to individuals concerned about lowering their risk of cardiovascular disease and other health issues. The Committee noted that "at all levels of consumption, drinking less is generally better for health than drinking more."

The U.S. Dietary Guidelines have historically helped to advance the myth that moderate alcohol consumption is healthy, according to a recent opinion piece in [The Hill](#). The Committee made [unscientific recommendations](#) in 2010 and included remarks such as "Strong evidence from observational studies has shown that moderate alcohol consumption is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease." The next set of guidelines removed that statement but didn't include the science linking alcohol and cancer, according to [Movendi International](#). Public health advocates question if the new recommendations will withstand strong opposition from the alcohol industry.

"The new recommendations are a significant step in the right direction, but now they have a big target on their back," said Chris Wagner, executive director for Project Extra Mile. "The industry will lobby hard to get these recommendations revised or removed. It's important to have a public health and safety voice at the table so that the industry isn't the only one that policymakers hear on this issue."

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## Miles to Go: U.S. Alcohol Taxes at All-Time Low

[Taxes failed to keep up with inflation, harming public health and costing lives](#)

A study in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* found that the [value of alcohol excise taxes has decreased since 1970](#) from insufficient and infrequent tax increases. From 1933 until 1970, beer, wine, and distilled spirits tax rates increased in value. However, by 2018 alcohol taxes had declined 66%, 71%, and 70%, respectively, compared with their initial values.

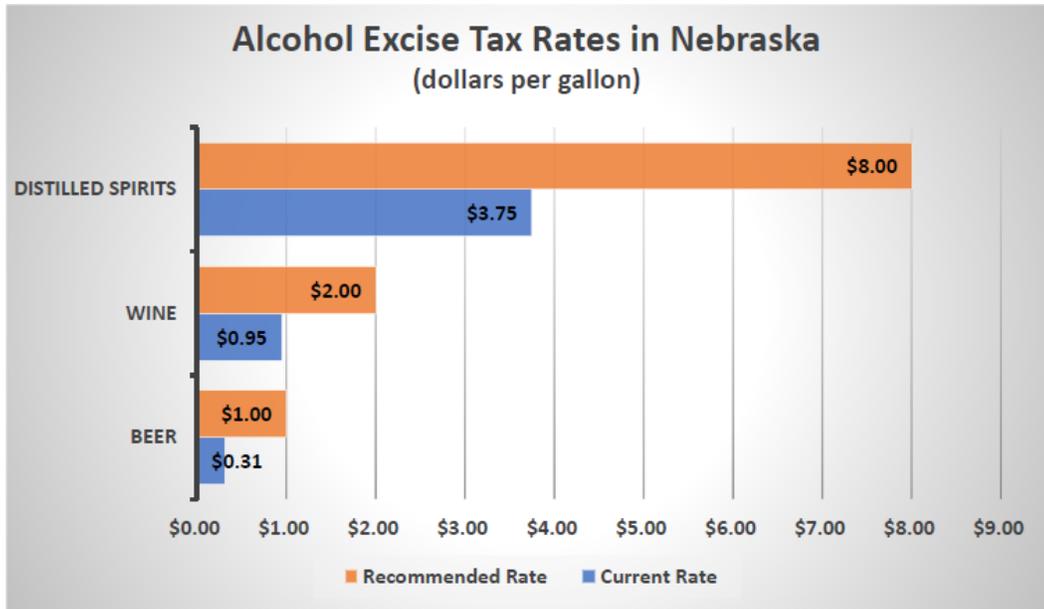


The erosion of taxes after 1970 is due to decreases in the size of tax increases in the 1970s and 1980s. Declines in the frequency of tax increases followed. Researchers noted that laws that index tax rates to inflation could reduce morbidity and mortality. Instead, the [alcohol industry is benefiting from the coronavirus pandemic](#), according to study author Jason Blanchette. Relaxed regulatory actions across the country in response to the pandemic have undoubtedly contributed to alcohol industry gains [with sales of beer, wine, and liquor up as much as 53 percent](#).

Excise taxes naturally lose their effectiveness over time. Alcohol taxes are implemented at the federal and state level and are beverage-specific, with different rates for beer, wine, and spirits. Excise taxes are based on volume, unlike sales taxes, which are based on the sales price. When taxes are based on volume and not adjusted regularly, their effects are diminished through inflation. Mirroring the decline of the federal rate due to inflation, Nebraska's inflation-adjusted excise tax on a six-pack has dropped from 32 cents to 17

cents since 1970.

The most recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Prevention Status Report](#) indicates that Nebraska ranks among the worst states in terms of alcohol excise tax rates.



A study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that doubling the alcohol tax would reduce alcohol-related mortality by an average of 35%. Nebraska had an estimated 703 alcohol-related deaths in 2015 alone, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Had our taxes been twice as high that year, the state could have saved an estimated 246 lives.

## Model Predicts Alcohol-Related Liver Disease Will Rise Sharply in the U.S.

**Policies to reduce excessive alcohol use will prevent disease burden and deaths**

Alcohol-related liver disease is a top contributor to liver transplants in the U.S. A [new study](#) in *The Lancet* notes that the number of deaths due to alcohol-related liver disease has been growing due to increased high-risk drinking in recent years.

The model released by researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, and Georgia Tech analyzed three different scenarios related to levels of alcohol consumption. Study authors

concluded that without substantial interventions to address high-risk drinking in the U.S., disease and deaths due to alcohol-related liver disease would increase. In a "status-quo" scenario, in which current drinking trends continued, more than 1 million people are estimated to die from alcohol-related liver disease by 2040, with 35% projected to be younger than 55 years.



"Our study underscores the need to bring alcohol-related disease to the forefront of policy discussions and identify effective policies to reduce high-risk drinking in the U.S.," said senior author Jagpreet Chhatwal, Ph.D., a senior scientist at the MGH Institute for Technology Assessment and an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force, an independent, volunteer body of public health and prevention experts, recommends [evidence-based community strategies](#) to reduce harmful alcohol use. These recommendations include approaches such as regulating alcohol outlet density, increasing alcohol taxes, and enhanced enforcement of laws prohibiting alcohol sales to minors.

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## U.S. Coast Guard Says Alcohol is a Leading Contributor of Boating Deaths

**Game and Parks Commission working to prevent alcohol-related harm**

Alcohol was a factor in 141 of 613, or [23% of boating deaths](#) throughout the United States last year, according to the U.S. Coast Guard's [2019 Recreational Boating Statistics Report](#). Alcohol use impairs judgment, vision, balance, and coordination, and past reports suggest that alcohol is a contributing factor in about one in five boating fatalities, according to the CDC.



Operating a boat while intoxicated is a federal offense, subject to a \$1,000 fine. Additionally, operating a boat with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 percent or above is considered [Boating Under the Influence \(BUI\)](#) in Nebraska. It carries a penalty of up to \$1,000 fine, up to six months in jail, and the loss of boating privileges for six months. A court may also order individuals convicted of BUI to attend an alcohol treatment program.

Both [alcohol possession and consumption are now banned](#) in areas overseen by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala. While the use of alcohol at Lake McConaughy has been prohibited since 1995, alcohol possession was allowed before this year. Consumption and possession were previously allowed at Lake Ogallala after the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission lifted a consumption ban at state parks in 2010.

**To create a safer, family-friendly environment, possession and consumption of alcohol is prohibited at Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala State Recreation Areas.**

*Nebraska Game and Parks Commission*

"The commission encourages boaters to enjoy the boating season with friends and family, and we also encourage them to do it in a safe and responsible way," said Craig Stover, the administrator for the law enforcement division. ["Drinking alcohol while boating can have serious, even deadly consequences"](#) and our goal is to make sure everyone is enjoying their time on the water and

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## Did You Know?

### Special Designated Licenses in Nebraska

Over 5,200 temporary Special Designated (liquor) Licenses (SDLs) were issued last year in Nebraska in addition to 2,788 permanent licenses granted in 2019. SDLs contribute to the growing problem of alcohol outlet density in the state. These licenses may be issued for the sale or consumption of alcohol at a designated location to applicants holding a retail/caterer liquor license in Nebraska and non-profit organizations within the state. The Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (LCC) does not issue SDLs without the approval of the local governing body.

This provision in the Liquor Control Act allows the local governing body to establish criteria for approving or denying these types of licenses. The local city council or county board can deny temporary permits and decide whether or not the event occurs. During a June 15th meeting of the Chadron City Council, members voted to reject an SDL to local liquor license applicant The Ridge.

The Panhandle Prevention Coalition recently sent a letter to the LCC expressing concerns about the business' repeated negligence. The Ridge's past violations have included selling alcohol to minors and open container after hours. The LCC placed a condition on the license following these violations, but that restriction was recently lifted. Despite the change, the police chief and council expressed continued concerns about issuing the SDL, and the city denied it in a 3-2 decision.



**Omaha Metro  
Coalition Meeting**



**OUR**  
**MEETING**  
NEXT

Wednesday  
**August 12, 2020**  
9:00 a.m.



**For more information:**  
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