

# The Extra Mile

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

## Miles to Go: Sunday Alcohol Sales Approved in Gordon

**Council abdicates responsibility by punting decision on public health and safety**

On May 12th, residents in the city of Gordon narrowly voted in favor (229-193) of expanded alcohol sales during a special election asking residents if the community should allow on- and off-premises alcohol sales on Sunday.



The Gordon City Council voted to deny an ordinance to allow Sunday sales in May 2019 despite continued pressure from the Chamber of Commerce and local bar and restaurant owners. Project Extra Mile sent a letter thanking members for their leadership but, unfortunately, they failed to uphold the decision when the council later adopted a resolution to hold a special election on the matter, abdicating their responsibility as elected officials to consider the available evidence and make an informed decision in the best interests of the city and its residents.

In a piece published in the *Sheridan County Journal Star* on May 6th, Project Extra Mile Coordinator Liene Topko reported that data shows that 71% of driving deaths in the county involved alcohol. She also noted that "the citizens of Gordon have the right to make informed decisions and should consider not only the convenience of alcohol sales on Sunday, but also the negative impacts that allowing alcohol sales on Sunday will have on public health and safety."

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) recommends maintaining existing limits on the days alcoholic beverages are sold. Researchers have found allowing previously banned alcohol sales on either Saturdays or Sundays [increased excessive alcohol consumption and related harms](#), including motor vehicle crashes, DUIs, police encounters with intoxicated people, and assaults and domestic disturbances. A 1995 repeal of a ban on Sunday sales was associated with a 30% increase in motor vehicle fatalities on Sundays compared with other days of the week in New Mexico.

Studies have also found that [limiting the times of sale](#) can also impact alcohol consumption and related harms. Increasing hours of purchase by two or more

hours in on-premise settings has been shown to lead to similar problems. Yet those in favor of expanding alcohol sales often point to the same tired arguments, such as "existing laws are antiquated" or "we can't legislate morality."

Far too many elected and appointed officials continue to disregard scientific evidence when it comes to making sound policy decisions. From our perspective, this issue is about protecting the health and safety of the community and unfortunately, the Gordon City Council failed to demonstrate the courage to do so.

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## California Alcohol Beverage Control Finds Big Loopholes

### Minors easily access alcohol through delivery options

In an [advisory](#) released by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, the agency shared that recent enforcement actions found significant violations involving third-party delivery services delivering alcohol to minors.



The news came as little surprise to public health advocates who have spoken out about the problems associated with loosened alcohol policy restrictions in response to the coronavirus, notably increased opportunities for individuals to have alcohol delivered directly to their homes.

***Most concerning is that minors are routinely able to purchase alcohol through delivery from restaurants. There have been instances in which the licensee's own employees have done so, but a far greater rate has been evident among third-party delivery services.***

- California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control

In Nebraska, Project Extra Mile has shared research about illegal deliveries of alcohol to minors with both the Omaha City Council and the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (LCC). Despite those concerns, all off-sale alcohol retailers in the State of Nebraska can deliver alcohol with [limited regulatory structure](#) and enforcement in place.

The Department indicated that in permitting the delivery of distilled spirits and retailer-packaged alcoholic beverages in response to the pandemic, there had been a "marked increase in deliveries" in the state. Researchers have examined youth access to alcohol through alcohol delivery services. A 2012 study published in the [Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine](#) found that 45 out of 100 alcohol orders attempted by underage buyers through Internet purchases were successful, even after providing their real driver's license when asked for age verification. Delivery services like UPS and FedEx rejected only 28 percent of orders placed by minors.

The study's authors concluded that "Age verification procedures used by Internet alcohol vendors do not adequately prevent online sales to minors."

Additional [research findings](#) from VicHealth in Australia found that alcohol delivery services like Uber Eats and BWS Online aren't adhering to safety standards and deliver alcohol "regularly to people who already are intoxicated, fail to check IDs, and leave alcohol unattended."

Most of the public health community's efforts have been focused on fighting the coronavirus over the last several months, and rightly so. At a time when many cities and states are considering relaxing alcohol policies permanently, elected officials and other leaders need to hear from the community about the negative impact on health and safety. It's simply not acceptable to disregard public health implications in circumstances when research and common sense tell us otherwise.

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## Fears Rise Around an Increase in Alcohol-Related Deaths

**Communities must work to reduce alcohol availability**

A [new report](#) entitled *Pain in the Nation Update* by Trust for America's Health and the Well Being Trust has noted that more than 150,000 Americans died from alcohol, other drugs, and suicide combined in 2018. According to figures released for all states, Nebraska saw a 7% increase in the death rate due to alcohol in one year (2017 to 2018).



The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has pointed to the significant role [alcohol plays in deaths of despair](#), leading to overdoses, suicides, and liver disease, as well as to a wide range of other conditions. Alcohol use was already on the rise among middle-aged adults in the U.S. before the pandemic. Now, as people are experiencing circumstances such as isolation, job loss, stress, and an economic downturn at unprecedented levels, experts are worried that the problem will become significantly worse.

A new [study](#) released in May indicates that as many as [75,000 more people may die](#) from alcohol and other drug misuse and suicide, according to the Well Being Trust (WBT) and the Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies in Family Medicine and Primary Care. The study used information on deaths of despair from 2018 as a baseline (n=181,686) and projected levels of unemployment from 2020 to 2029 to estimate additional deaths based on economic modeling.

***Nebraska saw a 7% increase in the death rate from 2017 to 2018 due to alcohol.***

*- Pain in the Nation Update (Appendix B)*

Over the last several months, elected officials and regulators have scrambled to adopt regulations to loosen restrictions on restaurants and other alcohol retailers in an attempt to soften the economic impact of the coronavirus, making alcohol more easily accessible in a variety of ways. The many harms that result when alcohol is more readily available, particularly during stressful, uncertain times, have not been publicly considered in many of these decisions.

Consistently, policymakers have partnered with the alcohol industry to overstate alcohol's positive impact on the economy and have ignored the costs of excessive alcohol use on society.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has estimated that [excessive alcohol use is responsible for about 88,000 deaths a year](#) in the United States, including 1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults aged 20 to 64 years. The harms associated with excessive alcohol use cost the U.S. \$249 billion in 2010, or about \$2.05 per drink or \$807 per person. Nebraska had \$1.16 billion in economic costs in 2010 alone (work productivity lost and increased health care and corrections costs) due to excessive drinking. Alcohol killed an estimated 703 Nebraskans in 2015, and 2,403 were hospitalized in 2014 with alcohol being the primary or secondary cause for the hospitalization, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

*Pain in the Nation* authors call for lowering excessive alcohol use through several evidence-based policies. They recommend [increasing the cost of alcohol, limiting the hours and density of stores that sell alcohol, enforcing underage drinking laws, and holding sellers and hosts liable for serving minors](#) as part of a comprehensive policy approach to address the alcohol, other drug, and suicide epidemics. The authors noted that a 10 percent increase in alcoholic beverages' price could reduce consumption by 7.7 percent.

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## Report Sheds Light on Unethical Marketing Practices

Over 50% of ads reviewed point to easy access to alcohol

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), an Australian non-profit organization working to stop the harm caused by alcohol, released a new [report](#) in May shining a light on predatory and unethical alcohol advertising.

In a May 13th news release from the organization, FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi noted that people are being inundated with alcohol advertising when they are increasingly isolated, anxious, and facing economic uncertainty. Among a sample of 107 social media alcohol advertisements reviewed by the organization during one hour, the following messages were the most prevalent:

- get easy access to alcohol without leaving your home (58%)
- save money (55%)
- buy more (35%)
- drink alcohol during the COVID-19 pandemic (24%)
- use alcohol to cope, 'survive', or feel better (16%)
- choose 'healthier' alcohol products (14%)

**Nearly three-quarters of advertisements (71%) reviewed explicitly or implicitly referenced the COVID-19 pandemic.**

In a news release sent out by FARE, Giorgi noted, "This study shows that alcohol companies are taking advantage of people's fear and anxiety by urging



us to drink alcohol to cope with isolation. This is all happening while people's lives have been turned upside down because of COVID-19."

The alcohol industry also continues to spread false information around "healthier" alcohol products to take advantage of recent health and wellness trends. A 2018 study published in *The Lancet* concluded that [no amount of alcohol consumption is considered safe](#) for overall health.

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## With Gratitude

Thank you to everyone who supported Project Extra Mile during Omaha Gives! on May 20th. This year, we celebrate twenty-five years since the organization's inception in 1995. For the past two and a half decades, countless individuals and organizations throughout the state have supported our mission. We couldn't be more grateful for your unwavering support.

We look forward to celebrating our 25th Anniversary with you on **October 21, 2021**.



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