

The Extra Mile

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

Omaha Gives!

Your support of our work will help to improve the health and safety of Nebraskans

Omaha Gives! is Wednesday, May 20th. Please consider supporting Project Extra Mile in our efforts to advocate for evidence-based policies and practices to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, alcohol rules and regulations that are in place to protect public health and safety have been rolled back, dramatically increasing alcohol availability at a time when individuals and communities are already struggling. We are working to address this issue to ensure the health and safety of all Nebraskans. Thank you for supporting our work during these difficult times. To donate, visit www.omahagives.org.

Please help support Project Extra Mile
by Participating in

OMAHA GIVES!

powered by the Omaha Community Foundation



MAY 20, 2020

Alcohol Isn't a Silver Bullet

The following commentary by Executive Director Chris Wagner appeared in the Lincoln Journal Star on April 9, 2020.

Nebraska is the fifth-worst binge drinking state in the country, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - a statistic supported by the United Health Foundation's annual America's Health Rankings.



The CDC also identifies the city of Lincoln as the fourth-worst binge drinking city in the country. As a result, our state has some of the highest alcohol-related harms, including being the second-worst state for self-reported drinking and driving with 955 episodes per 1,000 population, a figure nearly twice the national average of 505.

Despite this, discussions are occurring to allow alcohol sales at Memorial Stadium, a move that will surely cement these rankings for many years to come.

COVID-19 has complicated our lives over the last month, and, based on Gov. Pete Ricketts' recent comments, that will continue for at least another month. These are difficult times that have negatively impacted a growing number of individuals, businesses and organizations, forcing Americans to face uncertain futures, including the University of Nebraska.

Shortly after his hiring as the UNL athletic director in 2017, Bill Moos was on record saying that Nebraska had no need for alcohol sales at Memorial Stadium, mostly due to our consecutive sellout streak - currently at 375 games.

The idea of adding alcohol sales resurfaced last week in response to the coronavirus and its economic impacts. In a column by Steven Sipple headlined "With economic concerns growing, Moos ramps up consideration of alcohol at Memorial Stadium," Moos suggests alcohol is one option that ought to be considered to make up for potential lost revenue.

On its face, it sounds like it could work. However, once one digs deeper into the substantial scientific research out there about how excessive alcohol consumption leads to increased rape, violence, impaired driving and cancer among other things, it begins to look like a very short-sighted view that completely ignores the harms that will be created in the community and paid for by taxpayers.

In its Sunday editorial on the topic, the Journal Star seemed only to be concerned with the University of Nebraska's lost revenue stream should the coronavirus epidemic not be resolved in time for football season.

The editorial board was eager to dismiss any harms as "perceived" unless those harms are measured in terms of lost alcohol sales at local restaurants and bars around the stadium. The arguments in favor of adding alcohol sales haven't changed, but now proponents are claiming the need is urgent due to the virus, despite no indication as to how it will impact college sports next fall.

On the contrary, the harms of alcohol in our state are real and measurable. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services noted in its 2017

epidemiological survey that alcohol was the sixth-most common cause of death in 2015 due to an estimated 703 alcohol-related deaths, 83 of which occurred on our roads according to NDOT Highway Safety Office statistics.

In addition, research shows that Nebraska has approximately \$1.2 billion in annual economic costs due to excessive alcohol consumption - \$491 million of which are paid for by Nebraska taxpayers.

So what does this have to do with alcohol sales to adults in Memorial Stadium and other venues that host college sports? Access matters. The best way to prevent underage and binge drinking and the harms that follow is to limit the availability of alcohol.

Right now, we have the best policy on this: Alcohol sales are not allowed. This policy needs to continue according to a 2007 report by U.S. Surgeon General and a 2012 report by the Task Force of the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Both reports recommend restricting the sale of alcohol on campus and at facilities such as stadiums and arenas.

The University of Nebraska should be particularly interested in preventing alcohol-related harms given college drinking data collected by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

According to NIAAA, about 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries that include motor-vehicle crashes. Furthermore, 696,000 of college students are assaulted by a student who had been drinking, while 97,000 students experienced alcohol-related sexual assaults or date rape. Based on all the evidence, we urge the university to keep alcohol out of sports venues and off campus.

Let's do everything we can to ensure the health and safety of our students and communities.

Alcohol's Toll on Mental Health

Supporting emotional well-being as crucial as physical health during the pandemic

A Kaiser Family Foundation poll found that nearly half of adults in the United States reported that their mental health had been negatively impacted by worry and stress related to the virus. As people struggle to adapt to the pandemic's implications in their daily lives, many may turn to alcohol or other drugs to ease their anxiety. Alcohol had played a significant role in deaths of despair even before the public health crisis began, contributing to increased overdoses, suicides, and liver disease. There is a heightened risk of substance abuse when people experience circumstances such as job loss, divorce, economic downturns, chronic pain, or psychiatric conditions.

Unfortunately, research has shown that alcohol only compounds the effects of stress. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) indicates that long-term, heavy drinking can alter the brain's chemistry, resulting in changes in hormonal balance. This, in turn, impacts the way the body responds to stress. A long-term heavy drinker may experience higher levels of anxiety when faced with a stressful situation than someone who never drinks or drinks only moderately.

Research shows a strong link between suicide and depression. Excessive alcohol use, including binge drinking, is also associated with increased suicide

risk. A research study in Colorado in 2018 found that of suicide decedents who had toxicological testing performed for alcohol (2011-2015), 41.9% had alcohol in their system at the time of death. The Commonwealth Fund's [2019 Scorecard](#) on State Health System Performance indicates that Nebraska also had higher rates of death from suicide and alcohol use than from other drugs in [2017](#).

The impact on emotional well-being is substantial and can be long-lasting for individuals facing the added burden of quarantine, according to a review published in *The Lancet*. Past studies have reported [psychological symptoms](#) during quarantine include emotional disturbance, depression, stress, and irritability, among several other adverse mental health effects. Several mental health advocacy organizations have provided a variety of resources for individuals and families that are looking for additional ways to cope during this difficult time.

If you or someone you know is suffering from mental stress, the National Suicide Lifeline can help. Call 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) to speak with someone today.

May is National Mental Health Month. For more resources to support emotional health and well-being throughout the pandemic, please visit the following websites:

- [American Psychological Association](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Indian Health Service](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

The Downside of Drinking

Alcohol is the number one drug problem in the U.S.

"Pained: Uncomfortable Conversations about the Public's Health," a compilation of essays about the health of Americans, released in March. Authors Michael D. Stein, professor of health law, policy, and management, and Sandro Galea, dean and Robert A. Knox Professor at Boston University School of Public Health, include a piece on alcohol use titled "The downside of drinking." They point to the current opioid epidemic and note that alcohol kills more Americans than fentanyl, heroin, and prescription drugs combined, and that "no level of alcohol consumption improves health." To learn more about the book, visit the publisher's [website](#).

"Simply put, alcohol is an eminently preventable cause of social harm and premature death."

-Galea & Stein, 2020

Did You Know?

Resources to address harms from increased alcohol availability during pandemic

The U.S. Alcohol Policy Alliance (USAPA) is hosting an interactive dialogue on May 8th titled "Alcohol and COVID-19: A Dangerous Mix." Public health experts will share state and national changes that have impacted alcohol availability as a result of the pandemic and discuss ways to ensure that temporary policies do not become permanent.

One of the presenters, Dr. David Jernigan, wrote a piece on why increased availability will very likely lead to more health problems. While many U.S. cities and states have relaxed laws on alcohol sales in recent months, two municipalities in New Mexico recently voted to ban alcohol sales at convenience stores to help address the spread of coronavirus.

Participants in the discussion on May 8th will have the opportunity to share their experiences and engage in further discussion with others. Visit www.alcoholpolicy.org or APHA for more information.

Additionally, the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association (NABCA) has a new resource available that provides an overview of policy changes related to alcohol in response to the coronavirus. The interactive dashboards available include operational changes to both restaurants and off-premise outlets. For more information, visit www.nabca.org/covid-19-resources.

Omaha Metro Coalition Meeting

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

9:00 a.m.

Please join us **VIRTUALLY**
for our coalition meeting being held via Zoom.

Project Extra Mile, 11620 M Circle, Omaha, NE, 68137 · 402.963.9047

We will be discussing

Alcohol Issues During COVID-19

Thank you for your involvement!

Jennifer Pollock

Jennifer Pollock, Coalition Chair

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://zoom.us/j/92228870673>

Meeting ID: 922 2887 0673

For more information:

(402) 963-9047

www.projectextramile.org

info@projectextramile.org

