



## The Extra Mile

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

### Miles to Go:

**Alcohol now kills more than 95,000 Americans each year**  
Increase in substance use during the pandemic raises alarm

Alcohol is a leading cause of preventable death and disability in the United States. Recent research indicates an increase in substance use since the coronavirus pandemic began earlier this year.



A new study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that excessive alcohol use contributes to [more than 95,000 deaths in the United States each year](#), or 261 deaths per day. Alcohol-attributable deaths shorten each life by an average of almost 29 years, or a total of 2.8 million years of potential life lost (YPLL).

Over half of these deaths are due to drinking too much over time, which leads to certain types of cancer, liver disease, and heart disease. Short-term effects from consuming a large amount of alcohol in a short time contributed to most of the YPLL due to poisonings that involved a substance in addition to alcohol (e.g., other drug overdoses), suicide, and motor vehicle crashes.

The study authors noted that little progress had been made in preventing deaths caused by excessive drinking since the last estimates. The average annual estimates of alcohol-attributable deaths and YPLL in their current research are slightly higher than those for 2006–2010, and the age-adjusted alcohol-attributable death rates are similar. According to the CDC, states and

communities can prevent alcohol-attributable deaths in several ways, including:

- Implementing effective strategies to prevent excessive alcohol use, such as those recommended by the [Community Preventive Services Task Force](#). Examples include regulating the number and concentration of alcohol outlets and limiting days and hours of alcohol sales.
- Enforcing existing laws and regulations around alcohol sales and service.
- Partnering with law enforcement, community groups, health departments, and healthcare providers to reduce excessive drinking.
- Tracking the role of alcohol in injuries and deaths.
- Monitoring and reporting on [measures](#) of excessive alcohol use and the status of effective alcohol policies.

The pandemic is also associated with increased strain on mental health. The CDC [surveyed U.S. adults](#) from June 24–30, 2020, and found that many are experiencing adverse mental health conditions associated with COVID-19. Several populations surveyed were disproportionately affected, including younger adults, racial/ethnic minorities, essential workers, and unpaid adult caregivers. These groups reported experiencing worse mental health outcomes, increased substance use, and elevated suicidal ideation.

Overall, 40.9% of the 5,470 individuals who completed surveys during June reported an adverse mental or behavioral health condition, including:

- having anxiety disorder or depressive disorder (30.9%)
- experiencing trauma- and stressor-related disorder (TSRD) symptoms related to COVID-19 (26.3%)
- starting or increasing substance use to cope with stress or emotions associated with COVID-19 (13.3%)
- seriously considering suicide in the preceding 30 days (10.7%).

The CDC's [website](#) provides additional information on the relationship between COVID-19 and alcohol use, including ways individuals and communities can respond now. Several [public health and prevention groups](#) across the country are calling on governors and other elected officials to reinstate alcohol policies that have recently been weakened in response to the pandemic. These regulations are in place to protect public health and safety, but unfortunately, many of them have been rolled back over the last six months. This change has increased alcohol access and availability when individuals and communities are struggling with more mental health problems.

In Nebraska, [Legislative Resolution 450](#) is an interim study to examine the Executive Order issued by Governor Ricketts regarding the law permitting the sales of alcohol for off-premises consumption, and whether the law should be amended to make the temporary waiver permanent. The study's hearing date has not yet been announced.

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## Going the Distance: Neighbors, Law Enforcement, and City Voice Opposition to Omaha Liquor License

LCC denies license after hearing oral and written testimony from over 40 citizens

On August 4, the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (LCC) denied a liquor license application for Reign Ultra Lounge in Omaha. The decision came after a monthslong process in which both the City of Omaha and multiple citizens

expressed concern about the application. The Omaha City Council issued a recommendation to deny the license at a hearing in February.

Of the forty-one citizens who filed a formal protest against the license, twelve individuals provided testimony during the hearing. The City of Omaha, represented by Senior Attorney Ryan Wiesen and Captain Mark Matuza of the Omaha Police Department, also testified why the license should be denied. Many problems were highlighted, including fights, significant noise, trash, and parking issues in the neighborhood. One citizen indicated she had moved out of the area in response to these issues. After a three-and-a-half-hour hearing in July, the LCC took the matter under advisement to review the evidence, and the application was denied unanimously on August 4.

Chairman Bailey made the motion to deny the license, stating “I do not believe the applicant has demonstrated that he can exercise management and control of the premise to ensure the business can conform to the rules and regulations of the Liquor Control Act. I do not believe the issuance of the license is required for public convenience or necessity. In making this motion, I consider the recommendation of the City of Omaha, the protestants and citizens of the area neighborhood, and the undue burden on the neighborhood and the local law enforcement.” The applicant filed a motion for reconsideration after the Commission’s [order was issued](#) on August 13, but the request was later denied on September 1.

Project Extra Mile offers technical assistance and resources related to the [liquor licensing](#) process in Nebraska. A [Liquor Licensing 101](#) ACTION Guide explains each stage of the licensing process, focusing on how community leaders can get involved in issues that impact the safety of their neighborhoods. For more information, contact [info@projectextramile.org](mailto:info@projectextramile.org).

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## New Healthy People 2030 Objectives

### Alcohol-attributable deaths increased in the past decade

On August 18, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released its objectives and targets for [Healthy People 2030](#), which “identifies public health priorities to help individuals, organizations, and communities across the United States improve health and well-being.” HHS's Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion has set public health objectives for the United States since 1980.



The Healthy People 2020 Midcourse Review provides an overview of progress made toward objectives in the first half of the last decade and outlines what’s needed to meet objectives. Of the 42 measurable [objectives related to substance abuse](#), ten objectives had met or exceeded their 2020 targets, one objective was improving, 12 objectives demonstrated little or no detectable change, and nine objectives were getting worse. Two objectives had baseline data only, and the remaining eight were informational.

The following measures related to alcohol use had worsened at the time of the Midcourse Review:

- Cirrhosis deaths (age-adjusted, per 100,000 population) - 9.1 (2007) vs. 10.2 (2013)
- Deaths attributable to alcohol (average annual number) - 79,646 (2001–2005) vs. 87,798 (2006–2010)

[Social determinants of health](#) (SDOH) are defined as “the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.” Healthy People 2030 has added objectives to address social determinants of health, which fall under five domains: economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.

Research assessing how alcohol use and harms are associated with [social determinants of health and inequities](#) is limited, according to the American Public Health Association's policy statement on addressing alcohol-related harms. The policy statement includes a recommendation for increasing federal research funding to improve understanding of the correlation between alcohol use and the social determinants of health.

To learn more about Healthy People 2030 and how current objectives developed, please visit [HealthyPeople.gov](https://www.healthypeople.gov).

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## 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Now Available

Nationally, one in three students reported current alcohol use

CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) monitors health behaviors and experiences among middle and high school students in the United States. Nebraska high school students are surveyed on several alcohol-related measures, including questions asking if they:

- Rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol
- Drove when they had been drinking alcohol

Nebraska's high school survey data, compared to national data, is summarized on the YRBSS [website](#). Representative middle school survey data is not available for the state. The study authors noted that the current data provides valuable insights into U.S. high school students' substance use behaviors during 2009–2019:

*“Encouraging findings include decreasing prevalence of current alcohol use and decreasing prevalence of lifetime use of marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, synthetic marijuana, and injection drug use. However, the findings in this report underscore that substance use among high school students remains common, with **approximately one in three students reporting current alcohol use**, one in five reporting current marijuana use, and **one in seven reporting current binge drinking**”*

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## The Science is Clear on the Link Between Alcohol and Breast Cancer in Women

Prevention efforts needed to address low awareness of risk

Next month, individuals and organizations around the world will commemorate Breast Cancer Awareness Month. A

recent article published in *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews* noted that [reducing alcohol consumption could significantly reduce the global burden of breast cancer](#) disease.



Worldwide data on the prevalence of alcohol consumption and the incidence rate of breast cancer estimates 144,000 new breast cancer cases and 38,000 breast cancer deaths annually are attributed to alcohol consumption, which is 8.6% of all incidence and 7.3% of mortality.

Author Jo L. Freudenheim said, “Given the strength of the evidence linking alcohol to breast cancer, increasing awareness of risk is critical. It is time for a clear public health message identifying the role of alcohol in breast carcinogenesis and indicating that there is no apparent lower threshold of effect. Consumption levels of less than one drink per day are associated with increased risk. Further, drinking alcohol affects risk at all phases of life, including early and late life. The science is consistent and clear, but awareness is low. It is time for a focus on developing public understanding of alcohol, which is a very common exposure, and its connection with increased risk of breast cancer.”

Drinking alcohol also raises the risk of other kinds of cancer, including:

- Mouth and throat
- Voice box (larynx)
- Esophagus
- Colon and rectum
- Liver

Consumption of all alcoholic drinks, including wine, beer, cocktails, and liquor, has been linked to cancer. The body breaks down alcohol into a chemical called [acetaldehyde](#), which damages DNA and prevents repair of the damage. DNA controls a cell's healthy growth and function. When it is damaged, a cell can begin growing out of control and create a cancerous tumor. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of the link between alcohol use and cancer.

“We know from numerous prior studies that awareness of alcohol as a risk factor for cancer remains very low. Educating around alcohol allows us to drive home the message that the less you drink alcohol, the lower your risk of cancer,” said Dr. Noelle LoConte, MD, an oncologist at the University of Wisconsin Carbone Cancer Center and associate professor at the School of Medicine and Public Health.

In the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO's) [National Cancer Opinion Survey](#) in 2017, only 30% of the more than 4,000 Americans polled identified alcohol as a risk factor for cancer, and 38% of respondents said they limit alcohol consumption to prevent disease. The 2017 survey results were published a month before the organization issued a statement on the role alcohol plays in cancer development. Similarly, in the [2019 survey](#), more than two-thirds of adults indicated they didn't know that alcohol is a risk factor for cancer, and 40% said they limit alcohol consumption as a preventative measure.

## September Coalition Meeting Recap:

### Alcohol's role in violence against women

This month, Christon MacTaggart of Women's Fund of Omaha presented at Project Extra Mile's coalition meeting. Christon shared information about alcohol's role in violence against women. She discussed the organization's work to address critical challenges through systems advocacy, including public policy and research. An increase in both 911 and victim services program calls has been observed early in the pandemic, and the organization is analyzing quarterly data to learn more about the impact of COVID-19 on domestic violence. For more information, visit [www.omahawomensfund.org](http://www.omahawomensfund.org).



Project Extra Mile is committed to collaborating with organizations like the Women's Fund and others to prevent alcohol-related violence in Nebraska. In July 2019, Project Extra Mile opposed an Omaha liquor license application for Club 120, DBA Hustler Club, which requested a Class CK license. Executive director Chris Wagner expressed several concerns with the applicant's business plan and pointed to the research that shows that the combination of alcohol consumption with sexually-oriented business (SOB) activities leads to various public health and safety problems.

Throughout the pandemic, there has been reporting on [accounts](#) of increased violence, including cases that involve alcohol and other drugs. Several countries are [reducing access to alcohol](#) in response to the pandemic. In March, alcohol sales were banned in the Greenland capital to address violence against children. "Unfortunately, in Nuuk, [domestic violence has been on the rise](#) in recent weeks," said Martha Abelsen, the health minister.

There are several resources to help communities address violence. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recently issued a [statement with resources](#) titled *Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse Considerations During COVID-19* to stress the importance of addressing these issues. CDC has also published a [report](#), *Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence*, which identifies high alcohol outlet density as a risk factor for multiple forms of violence, including child maltreatment, intimate partner violence (IPV), youth violence, and suicide.

In a separate [publication](#), *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan*, CDC highlights the importance of addressing neighborhoods' physical and social environments to reduce IPV. Strategies focus on aspects of neighborhood settings that increase the risk for IPV, including alcohol outlet density, physical disorder and decay, and social disorder.

