

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, August 9, 2023
9 a.m.

A G E N D A

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the June 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes
(please contact PEM staff with corrections)
- III. Liquor Licensing in Nebraska
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Throwback Arcade Lounge
 - ii. Volleyball Day
 - iii. Jell-O Shot Challenge
 - b. Policy
 - i. Omaha Vision Zero Open House
 - ii. Policy Work Group Update
 - iii. Biden Competition Report / TTB Trade Practices
 - iv. LCC's Proposed Rule Changes
 - c. Youth
 - i. Leadership Retreat Recap
 - ii. Leadership Network – Next meeting: August 28th at 7:00 p.m.
 - d. Awareness
 - i. July & August Research Summaries available at
www.projectextramile.org
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **September 13th, 9 a.m.** with Diane Riibe
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 209

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS

Vision Zero Open House – August 15, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

Youth Leadership Network meeting – August 28, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – September 6-7, 2023

PROJECT EXTRA MILE

OMAHA METRO AREA COALITION MEETING MINUTES

June 14, 2023

- I. Call to Order: Dr. Tom Safranek called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members and speakers in attendance: Palistene Gray-Moore, Carey Pomykata, Sharona Ernst, Greg McVey, Ashely Pick, Jordan Cedillo, Maggie Ballard, Hayden Romig, Alvin McCruel, Daniel Rubin, Janine Fell, Margie Magnuson, Rebekah Rangel, Lacey Craven, Kipp McKenzie, Matt Kelly, Jackie Alba, Cole Williby, Jeff Sobczyk, Dina Newsom, Benny Foltz, Steve Schroeder, Michelle Cowan, Lorelle Muetting, and Tom Safranek. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Jeanne Bietz, Brenda McDonald, Jim Boucher, Lanette Richards, Ryley Thomas, Julia Holmquist, Janet Anderson, and Kristina Konecko. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Beatha Kliwer, and Liene Topko.
- III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the May 10th meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.
- IV. Better, Not Bitter: Author and Iowa resident Michelle Cowan shared how the tragedy of losing her husband to a drunk driver in Bennington, a writer's workshop, and beginning to lose her sight inspired her to write a book about the events of 2009 and her family's attempt to find justice for her husband through policy change in Nebraska. The driver that killed her husband had been drinking at a bar in Omaha prior to the fatal crash. Unfortunately, the bar was never held accountable for overserving the driver. Michelle and her daughter decided to advocate for a dram shop law that would cover overservice to adults (a Nebraska law passed prior to the crash only applied to minors that are served alcohol). Despite the Cowan family's, Congressman Tom Osborne's and Senator Tom Carlson's best efforts, the bill did not advance out of committee.

The coalition then discussed limits on how much alcohol can be served to an individual and how those differ between states. The director mentioned that one of the draft Vision Zero Task Force's recommendations is to require liquor licensed establishments in Omaha to require mandatory training of all staff. The director also highlighted ongoing work to enforce overservice laws/regulations.

- V. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Chris Wagner highlighted alcohol's role in Omaha's first homicide of 2023 inside of the Capitol District, which is an "entertainment district" that allows open consumption of alcohol in unsupervised areas.
 - ii. Wagner informed the coalition that it was recognized with a Community Star Award by the Prevention Means Progress (PMP) Coalition for its collaborative policy advocacy.

- b. Policy
 - i. Liene Topko invited coalition members to join the coalition's Policy Work Group which will meet on July 18th at 10 a.m. to discuss policy goals for the next year.
- c. Enforcement
 - i. Wagner shared that the organization is working with the Nebraska State Patrol and National Liquor Law Enforcement Association (NLLEA) to send a liquor investigator to the fall conference.
- d. Youth
 - i. The Leadership Scholarship winner was announced. Recipient Janine Fell shared that she lost a friend a year ago to an alcohol-impaired driving, which motivated her to join the group and advocate for change.
 - ii. The 2023 Youth Leadership Retreat will occur on July 24-27 at Mahoney State Park.
- e. Awareness
 - i. The June Research Summary is available at www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary

VI. Additional Discussion/Announcements: none

VII. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Liquor Licensing



Citizens' Guide

***A guide to the liquor licensing
process in Nebraska***



*The most important political office is
that of the private citizen.*

-Louis D. Brandeis

Steps for Neighborhood Involvement

1. getting notified

Are you being notified of new liquor license applications in your neighborhood?

Register your neighborhood association with the City of Omaha Planning Department online at www.cityofomaha.org. Indicate that you would like to be notified about city council and planning board hearings pertaining to your neighborhood. Be prepared to provide your neighborhood boundaries, as well as your mailing address and e-mail address.

The city council will send out letters and electronic notices to associations if registered with the Planning Department. Notices are also sent to any resident living within 300 feet of a business seeking a liquor license. However, if the applicant is a new business owner at a current liquor license, the city is NOT required to give anyone notice of the hearing.

The electronic notice will allow you to review the agenda and any additional submitted documents for the city council. If you are not part of a registered neighborhood association, you can still view the city council agenda by going to the City of Omaha Web site (www.cityofomaha.org).

You will need to read through all of the material sent to you to determine if there is anything relevant to your area. While this may be a tedious process, it is crucial in order to stay on top of local licensing issues.

The Omaha City Council meets weekly on Tuesdays at 2:00 p.m.

2. getting organized

Does your neighborhood have a policy in place for addressing alcohol-related problems or new and existing liquor licenses in your area?

did you know?

Alcohol Outlet Density refers to the number of on- and off-sale outlets in a specific land area.¹

On-sale licenses sell alcohol for consumption on the premises.

Off-sale licenses sell alcohol for consumption off-site.

Most neighborhood associations have changes in leadership every few years. It may not always be clear why the association voted to oppose or approve past liquor license applications. In 2007, the Joslyn Castle Neighborhood addressed this issue by creating a specific policy for preventing alcohol-related problems through the licensing process.

Encourage your neighborhood leaders to develop a policy regarding liquor licensing in writing. Create specific points of discussion for your neighborhood. Ensure that your members vote on the policy and keep the points of discussion on file for reference.

learn more

Growing concern and frustration among inner-city neighborhoods over the growing number of liquor licenses for off-sale alcohol outlets led to a grassroots effort to form the **Alcohol Impact Coalition** (now known as **LOCAL**) in 2007. Neighborhood leaders from twelve neighborhoods east of 72nd Street began meeting to address the impact of the oversaturation of off-sale liquor businesses on struggling neighborhoods and to discuss ways to change local and state laws.

LOCAL's mission is to develop a strategy that will minimize the impact of alcohol outlet density, abuse, crime and negative impact in our neighborhoods and establish accountability in the licensing of alcohol outlets.

The coalition is also working to ensure that the residents of Omaha, especially those in the older neighborhoods facing urban decline, are given an equal voice in the licensing of new or existing liquor outlets as they strive to preserve and enhance the quality of life in their neighborhoods.

3. getting smart

Do you know what factors the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission takes into account when approving liquor licenses?

During the 2006 session, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 845 that established additional provisions related to the issuance of retail licenses. Statute **53-132** of the Liquor Control Act identifies specific factors the Liquor Control Commission must consider when making a determination of whether to grant or deny a license application. The provisions are outlined on page 7 of this booklet.

Learn about the zoning requirements in your neighborhood by contacting the City Planning Department. Alcohol outlets cannot be located within 150 feet of a church, school or hospital, or a home for indigent persons or veterans. No alcoholic liquor can be sold within 300 feet of college campuses or universities. However, a waiver can be granted by the Liquor Control Commission to lift the university and church distance restrictions.

Does the applicant have other liquor licenses? If so, determine if the applicant has any past violations of the Liquor Control Act by checking the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission's Web site at www.lcc.ne.gov. Click on 'search for licensees,' and license histories can be retrieved by Doing Business As (DBA), applicant name, city, zip code, etc.

Consistently review media sources for local licensing issues.

Information you may find beneficial as you try to understand the liquor licensing landscape in your community includes the items below. For further information inquire with Project Extra Mile.

- LB 845
- Nebraska Statute 53-132
- The Lancaster County District Court's affirming decision regarding the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association case
- The Supreme Court Opinion regarding the Orchard Hill Neighborhood Association case
- Local and national research on alcohol outlet density and the impact on communities

did you know?

A bar, lounge, pub or tavern on a residential city block increases the expected number of felonious assaults on that block by 68.9% and increases the expected number of auto thefts by 27.4%.²

4. getting it done

How do you go about mounting opposition against a liquor license in your neighborhood?

Depending on whether it is a new application, a license renewal or simply a complaint will ultimately determine your course of action, outlined on pages 5 and 6. Once you have been notified of a hearing, you usually do not have a lot of time to plan. Therefore, it is crucial to familiarize yourself with the process and the research on alcohol outlet density, underage drinking prevention, and other strategies for addressing alcohol-related problems.

Make sure that your group knows that a hearing before the local municipality is important, but it is not the final step in the process. After the city council hearing, applications are sent to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (NLCC) for final approval. The case may even continue to the Lancaster County District Court or to the Nebraska Supreme Court. Your group should be aware that this can be a long process.

The city issues a recommendation and all applications will go on to the NLCC for final approval or denial of the license. There have been cases where the city has recommended denial of a liquor license and the commission has later approved the application. The opposite is true as well.

If the city recommends approval of the license, citizens have the opportunity to submit Form 146 "Request to File Citizen Protest Against New Application" to the NLCC within 10 days after the receipt of a recommendation from the local governing body. This form must be submitted by no fewer than 3 citizens protesting the issuance of the license. If the city recommends denial of the license, it is still imperative to file a citizens' protest with the NLCC. This provides additional opportunity to share concerns and submit evidence at the state level hearing before the commission, which serves as the legal foundation for any appeal to the district court. NLCC Form 146 "Request to File Citizen Protest Against New Application" can be found on the NLCC website.

Only citizens who have submitted Form 146, indicating their reasons for objecting to the liquor license, may testify at the hearing. The NLCC hearings are held in Lincoln each month (Nebraska State Office Building, 14th and M Streets, 1st Floor). Keep in mind that the commission refers to provisions in Statute 53-132 to consider license applications, so plan ahead to lay out your concerns in a concise and orderly manner.

In addition to personal testimony, you may also present other documentation:

- If there are problems with litter, weeds, inappropriate use of signs, etc., take photographs and note the date and time they were taken.
- Present a petition opposing the license signed by neighbors, church leaders, business owners, and other concerned residents who live within your city boundaries.
- Finally, encourage neighbors and friends who object to the license to attend the hearing. A strong showing of opposition at the hearing may be the deciding factor.

guidelines for protests

NEW APPLICANT Liquor Licenses

- Who:** At least 3 citizens who reside within the city, county or village where the application is filed.
- What:** Objections regarding a liquor license with specific issue (objections) of protest listed clearly using NLCC Form 146 “Request to File Citizen Protest Against New Application.”
- When:** Within 10 days after the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission receives a recommendation by a local governing body on a liquor license application.
- Where:** Objections submitted in writing to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission.
- Why:** Upon receipt of the protest, the commission will set a hearing to provide opportunity to hear citizen concerns.

note: If you have concerns regarding a liquor license in your community, it is imperative to engage at the beginning of the process with a new liquor license applicant. For existing applications, citizens are currently unable to appeal a local governing body’s decision to renew an existing license to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission.

AUTOMATIC RENEWALS of Liquor Licenses

- Who:** At least 3 citizens who reside within the city, county or village where the license is held.
- What:** Objections regarding a liquor license automatic renewal with specific issue (objections) of protest listed clearly.
- When:** For class C licenses, the clerk will publish the notice of the automatic renewal between July 10 and 30 of each year; for all other licenses, the clerk will publish the notice between January 10 and 30 of each year. Deadline to protest renewal of Class C licenses: August 10. Deadline to protest renewal of all other license classes: February 10.
- Where:** Objections submitted in writing to the local governing body.
- Why:** Upon receipt of the protest, the local governing body will set a hearing to provide opportunity to hear citizen concerns.

note: For existing applications, citizens have the opportunity to protest license renewals annually. However, if the local governing body opts to renew the license, citizens have no recourse at the state (commission) level.

COMPLAINTS of Residents

- Who: At least 5 citizens who reside within the city, county or village where the license is held.
- What: Complaints regarding a liquor license based on violations of the Liquor Control Act.
- When: Anytime.
- Where: Objections submitted in writing to the local governing body.
- Why: Upon receipt of the complaints, the local governing body will set a hearing to provide opportunity to hear citizen concerns if the complaints are in violation of statute.

Omaha’s Good Neighbor Ordinance

In 2012, the Omaha City Council passed the Good Neighbor Ordinance. The ordinance uses the city’s land use powers to set conditions of operation on alcohol-sales establishments that reflect community standards.

In order to report nuisance activity to the city, contact the mayor’s hotline at (402) 444-5555 or hotline@ci.omaha.ne.us. Request that the complaint be sent to the planning department as part of the alcohol ordinance.

contacts

Local Protests

Omaha City Clerk
402-444-5557
1819 Farman Street
Suite LC-1
Omaha, NE 68183

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission
301 Centennial Mall South
PO Box 95046
Lincoln, NE 68509-5046
LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION
www.lcc.ne.gov

Hobert Rupe, Executive Director
hobert.rupe@nebraska.gov
Ken Yoho, Asst. Attorney General
(legal questions)

Shannon Nyhoff, Legal/Enforcement Division
(hearing dates, penalties)

Brenda Hiland, Licensing Division
(license applications, including SDLs)

LeAnna Brange, Audit/Revenue Division

402-471-2571

402-471-2574

402-471-2955

402-471-4889

402-471-4881

402-471-4892

note: Special Designated Licenses, or short-term temporary licenses for special events, can be protested by citizens to the local governing body. The local governing body has the sole authority to grant SDLs.

considerations

The commission must consider these 10 criteria when issuing licenses.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNING BODY

If the city council or county board issued a recommendation to deny the application, the vote should be shared at the Liquor Control Commission.

EXISTENCE OF A CITIZENS' PROTEST

Gather signatures of residents who oppose the liquor license and ask your association, surrounding organizations and other citizens to send NLCC Form 146 "Request to File Citizen Protest Against New Application." If you can demonstrate a broad scope of community concern, you may have a better response.

EXISTING POPULATION AND PROJECTED GROWTH

Is the population of the city, village, or county stagnant or is it projected to grow?

NATURE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Paint a picture of your neighborhood. Provide census data including income levels, housing characteristics, median age of residents and the proportion of families and children. What are the struggles you already face in your neighborhood?

EXISTENCE OR ABSENCE OF OTHER RETAIL LICENSES WITHIN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Can you produce documentation that this license will cause an undue concentration of licenses that will require the use of additional law enforcement resources? This may require a bit of work on your part, but it is an important component of the licensing process. Find out how many businesses have a liquor license within a one-fourth and one-half mile radius of the location. How many establishments have off-sale, on-sale or combination licenses?

Contact the police chief to request crime statistics for your area, or visit www.crimereports.com. Ask for the top ten aggravated crimes within a one-half mile radius of the business during a specific timeframe. Create a map of existing businesses in your neighborhood.

TRAFFIC FLOW

Are there any existing motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic flow issues at the location?

ADEQUACY OF EXISTING LAW ENFORCEMENT

What is the crime rate in the area and are current problems being addressed now? How will another alcohol outlet impact crime? Does law enforcement have the resources and plans to address these problems?

ZONING RESTRICTIONS

Are there any zoning issues at the local level of government? Is the business within 150 feet of a church, school, hospital, or home for the aged or indigent? Within 300 feet of a college campus or university?

SANITATION

Are there sanitation issues surrounding the proposed location? Is there consistently litter of beer bottles and weeds, public urination and other problems?

did you know?
There is a 15-16% difference in individuals' drinking attitudes and 11% difference in individuals' alcohol consumption attributable to density of alcohol outlets in their neighborhoods.³

PUBLIC INTEREST

Is it in the “public’s interest” to have another alcohol outlet in your area? How many outlets are in the area now, and what is the population being served?

Reference: Nebraska Liquor Control Act, 53-132

learn more

The Orchard Hill Neighborhood Association appealed a decision of the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission to grant an additional liquor license in their neighborhood. In August 2007, the Nebraska Supreme Court ruled in the Orchard Hill case that the commission must consider the neighborhood when determining whether or not to issue a license.

The Supreme Court decision was a significant victory for neighborhoods and affirmed that residents do have a voice in the licensing process.

"The Liquor Control Commission has been charged by the Legislature to promote the health, safety and welfare of the people of the state and encourage temperance in the consumption of alcoholic liquor by sound and careful control and regulation of the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcoholic liquor."

Nebraska Liquor Control Act
53-101.01 (4)

The Nebraska Liquor Control Commission is comprised of three commissioners and an executive director. Each commissioner serves a six-year, fixed term and must represent one of the three congressional districts within Nebraska.

Commissioners are appointed by the governor. The executive director, as a staff member, has no set term and holds his position at the discretion of the commissioners.

powers & duties

- Final administrative approval of all retail liquor licenses.
- Conduct citation hearings, which include deciding innocence or guilt and imposing sanctions on licenses.
These sanctions range from a letter of reprimand to suspension, cancellation, or revocation of the license.
- Establish rules and regulations.

current members

Chairman Commissioner Bruce Bailey

First Congressional District

Mr. Bailey is the founder and current partner at Design Associates of Lincoln, an architectural and engineering firm doing business across the United States. His term expires May 24, 2023.

Commissioner Harry Hoch

Second Congressional District

Mr. Hoch is the past president of H & H Distributing in Grand Island and previously served two terms on the National Beer Wholesalers Board. His term expires May 24, 2024.

Commissioner Kim Lowe

Third Congressional District

Ms. Lowe has partnered with her family in their real estate holdings, focusing on collections and maintenance. Along with her husband, she has been involved in the alcohol industry. Her term expires May 24, 2027.

Commission Director Hobert B. Rupe

Mr. Rupe was appointed executive director by the Commission in December 2003. Prior to serving as executive director, he was an assistant attorney general for the State of Nebraska from May 1994 until January 2004.

*Don't give up - while the process may seem daunting,
remember that you are making
a positive difference in your community.*

¹ Marin Institute

² Murray, 2005

³ Scribner, Richard: Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research, February 2000.

contacts

Agency	Telephone	Web site/E-mail
Crime Reports		www.crimereports.com
Omaha City Clerk <i>Elizabeth Butler</i>	444-5557	www.cityclerk.cityofomaha.org cityclerk@cityofomaha.org
Omaha City Council	444-5557	
<i>Pete Festersen, District 1</i>	444-5527	pete.festersen@cityofomaha.org
<i>Juanita Johnson, District 2</i>	444-5524	juanita.johnson@cityofomaha.org
<i>Danny Begley, District 3</i>	444-5525	danny.begley@cityofomaha.org
<i>Vinny Palermo, District 4</i>	444-5522	vinny.palermo@cityofomaha.org
<i>Don Rowe, District 5</i>	444-5528	don.rowe@cityofomaha.org
<i>Brinker Harding, District 6</i>	444-5523	brinker.harding@cityofomaha.org
<i>Aimee Melton, District 7</i>	444-5526	aimee.melton@cityofomaha.org
Omaha Deputy City Attorney <i>Ryan Wiesen</i>	444-5115	www.law.cityofomaha.org
Omaha Planning Department	444-5150	www.planning.cityofomaha.org
Omaha Police Department	444-5600	www.police.cityofomaha.org
Liquor Control Commission	471-2571	www.lcc.ne.gov
Project Extra Mile	963-9047	www.projectextramile.org
Douglas County Board of Commissioners	444-7025	www.commissioners.douglas-county-ne.gov
Sarpy County Board of Commissioners	593-2100	www.sarpy.com/boards-commissions/county-board

The Good Neighbor Ordinance

Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 53-132 and 53-134.03 authorize a local governing body to regulate the business carried on with a retail liquor license so the business and activity is consistent with the public interest, while §§ 14-103 and 18-1720 authorize the city to define, regulate, suppress and prevent nuisances.



As a result of the multi-year collaboration between LOCAL and the City of Omaha, the Omaha City Council approved Ordinance No. 39471, or the Good Neighbor Ordinance, in October of 2012, which establishes that the sale of alcohol is a type of business that can have potentially harmful impacts on the community and requires special regulatory attention to promote and ensure public health and safety. The Ordinance gives the Council the ability to suspend or revoke a license's certificate of occupancy if it fails to abate a nuisance.

PROTECTS our neighborhoods

Numerous studies confirm that neighborhoods with a higher concentration of alcohol outlets experience higher rates of alcohol consumption, resulting in increased alcohol-related problems. Limiting the physical availability of alcohol is one of the most effective approaches for reducing excessive drinking and its many health and social consequences.

The ordinance is a tool for proactively addressing nuisances such as:

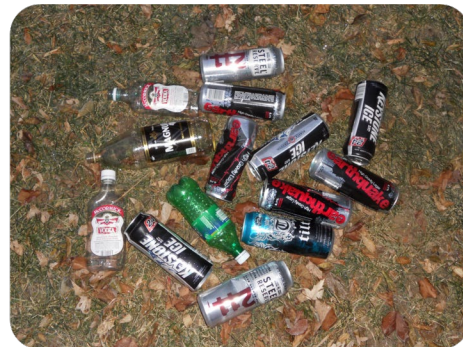
- * Sale to Intoxicated
- * Sales to minors
- * Graffiti
- * Disturbance
- * Prostitution
- * Public Urination
- * Noise
- * Public Indecency
- * Loitering
- * Illegal Drug Activity

The City now has regulatory oversight through its land-use powers to control the environment around alcohol outlets to ensure it reflects community standards. The Ordinance was first initiated by the City in response to poor business management practices at Maria Sangria's Restaurant, which resulted in numerous disturbances, shootings and an increased need for police presence in and around the premise.

The utilization of the Ordinance that led to Maria Sangria's Restaurant abandoning its appeal to the Douglas County District

Court demonstrates the flexibility of the Ordinance, and its potential as a foundation for future regulations seeking to ensure that alcohol-selling businesses remain good neighbors.

Nevertheless, it is also a tool to address smaller nuisances at problem establishments can be abated and prevented before they spiral out of control. In this way, liquor license owners have an opportunity to become a strong community partner by adequately addressing these problems without the need for further action from the City or neighbors.



PROMOTES a thriving business environment

Research has long acknowledged the impact increased alcohol outlets have on the economic viability of an area. The Good Neighbor Ordinance can be an important tool for ensuring that projects promoting economic development and revitalization are created and implemented with the public interest in mind.

Neighbors, business leaders, developers and many others are determined to revitalize the city through projects like 75 North, the Lumberyard and Capitol District projects. Each of these projects requires significant investments of money, time and dedication from the city and its partners. Unfortunately, all can be lost if a problem alcohol sales establishment moves in and wreaks havoc in the neighborhood.

The Ordinance sets citywide standards of operation to encourage a business to be a good neighbor by not adversely affecting or jeopardizing the public health, peace or safety of persons residing, working or using the surrounding area. It also gives the city the power to bring businesses into compliance or declare the business a public nuisance and pull its Certificate of Occupancy if it fails to abate the issues.



REQUIRES effective reporting and enforcement

In order for the Ordinance to be an effective tool for keeping neighborhoods safe and thriving, a greater emphasis is needed on its use as the best way for addressing problems that can result from inadequate management practices related to alcohol-sales businesses within the city in a preventative and proactive fashion. An effective reporting system established for the Ordinance is needed to ensure that complaints by neighboring residents and businesses are being received in a timely manner, and that police calls for service or other attention from city code enforcement and others are being compiled for problem businesses. In doing so, the City will have a full picture of the problems a business might be facing and allows more immediate attention to abate and prevent further problems.

If properly executed and enforced, the Good Neighbor Ordinance can prevent neighborhood alcohol-sales establishments from becoming city-wide headaches while promoting safe and healthy neighborhoods for those who live, work and play in Omaha.

Report **problems related to alcohol outlets in your neighborhood** to your city councilmember and the Omaha Mayor's Hotline at (402) 444-5555 or by email to hotline@cityofomaha.org. Please be specific in your complaint; document the date and time of complaint (for follow-up); and let them know you'd like the city to utilize its Good Neighbor ordinance.

To find your councilmember's email, visit <https://citycouncil.cityofomaha.org/council-members>

YOUTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. ADVOCACY. AWARENESS. ACTION

READY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



Youth in grades 8-12 in the Omaha Metro Area are invited to join Project Extra Mile's Youth Leadership Network. Members will learn about the harms of excessive alcohol use in our community, develop the leadership skills needed to make real change, and put those skills into action!

FOCUSING ON EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO LEAD



Project Extra Mile has been creating community change for over 25 years and we are passionate about reducing alcohol-related harms in our community. In the Youth Leadership Network, we focus on teaching and practicing the skills needed to create change. Youth will receive expert guidance on projects that will utilize media literacy, public speaking, advocacy, problem-solving, and community organizing skills that they'll develop from this initiative.

A YOUTH-LED APPROACH



We're serious about youth leadership, which is why all projects are planned and developed by the youth themselves. Youth projects over the last couple years have included hosting a town hall, meeting with state senators, creating media campaigns to raise awareness, and more!

MEET AND LEARN FROM LOCAL AND STATE POLICYMAKERS

CREATE YOUR OWN MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

LEARN HOW TO USE YOUR INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP STYLE

MEET NEW FRIENDS AND DEVELOP SKILLS TO LAST A LIFETIME

COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY AVAILABLE FOR SPRING 2024!





GROW YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND MAKE FRIENDSHIPS THAT LAST A LIFETIME

YOUTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK FALL MEETING SCHEDULE

**AUGUST 28, 2023
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC**

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2023
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC**

**OCTOBER 16, 2023
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC**

**NOVEMBER 20, 2023
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC**

**DECEMBER 18, 2023
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC**

**YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY
AT THE STATE CAPITOL
SPRING 2024**

**YOUTH LEADERSHIP
TRAINING
SUMMER 2024**

HOW TO JOIN

The Youth Leadership Network is open to all Omaha-area youth in grades 8 through 12 who want to grow as leaders and are interested in preventing alcohol-related harms in our community with the skills they develop. To indicate your interest in joining us for our next meeting, please fill out the form using the QR code below. YLN is completely free to join!



Register here!

WHERE WE MEET

The Youth Leadership Network meetings are held once a month at the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center (CEC) on the University of Nebraska-Omaha campus at 6400 Dodge Street, Omaha, NE. Parking is free and food and drinks are provided at each meeting (must register for food).

LEARN MORE!

To learn more about the Youth Leadership Network, please visit projectextramile.org/youth or contact Liene Topko at liene@projectextramile.org or (402) 898-7358.

Find us on:





RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: July 2023

Key takeaways from included research:

- Researchers examined the prospective association of alcohol consumption with all-cause and cause-specific mortality among the US population. They determined that heavy or binge drinking had higher risks of all-cause, cancer, and accident (unintentional injury) mortality.
- In recent years, there has been more of a push to have health warning labels on alcoholic beverages. Researchers in Mexico conducted an experimental study to test potential impacts of visible health warning labels and how they impact individuals' thinking about health risks, product attractiveness, visual avoidance, and intention to change alcohol use among students aged 18-30 years. They found that these warnings could lead individuals to think more about the risks, reduce attractiveness, and decrease the intention to purchase and consume alcoholic products.
- A study was conducted to test associations of alcohol craving utilizing alcohol-related images with and without peers in the human laboratory while in the natural environment the ecological momentary assessment (EMA) was used. Researchers found that peers are a social context with was associated with increased craving for alcohol.
- A new study looked at changes in monthly alcohol-induced mortality among US adults by age, sex, and race/ethnicity. Researchers found that during the peak months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the risking trends in alcohol-induced mortality substantially differed by race and ethnicity. They concluded that behavioral and policy interventions as well as future investigations should be considered to reduce alcohol-induced mortality specifically among individuals who identified as Black or American Indian/Alaska Native.
- Researchers examined the impacts of distance learning-related parental stress during the COVID-19 pandemic and their alcohol consumption. Findings showed that stressed parents reported consuming more alcohol and binge drinking more often than those parents who did not have increased levels of stress resulting from distance learning.

RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: August 2023

Key takeaways from included research:

- The COVID-19 pandemic increased alcohol purchasing across the United States and the related harms. Researchers examined prevention policies during the pandemic as well as capacity to respond to alcohol-focused alcohol policy changes. They found that the pandemic exacerbated capacity limitations for alcohol harm prevention efforts and created new barriers to public health messaging. Researchers also suggested that states must have dedicated leadership and increase prioritization of these issues to reduce alcohol consumption and the associated harms.
- A study examined the global prevalence and burden of disease in disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) for alcoholic cirrhosis (AC) and alcoholic liver cancer (ALC). They found that Central Asia and East Europe contributed the highest age-standardized incidence, prevalence, death, and DALYs which have increased sharply in the past 30 years. Despite overall improvements in health, researchers called for greater prevention efforts of AC and ALC in middle and middle-high Socio-demographic Index (SDI) regions in Central Asia and East Europe while the focus in low SDI regions ought to be medical resources.
- A study conducted in Australia examined the changing social position of alcohol use among young people to identify how it has become framed as posing significant risk to them. Through interview, researchers found that discourses of risk and individual responsibility shape the socio-cultural value of alcohol among youth and therefore risk avoidance has become more prevalent through restraint and control as it relates to alcohol consumption.
- Another Australian study examined how drinking patterns are associated with risky gambling. They concluded that occasional heavy episodic drinking (HED) and monthly HED were associated with any gambling while frequent HED was not significantly associated, however the opposite was true when examining risky gambling, higher frequency of HED was associated with higher likelihood of risky gambling. Researcher emphasized the need for policies to discourage alcohol use while gambling.
- A British study examined whether alcohol dependence during adolescence increased the risk of depression in young adulthood. They found a positive association between alcohol dependence at age 18 and depression at age 24. Researchers concluded that psychosocial or behavioral interventions that reduce risk of alcohol dependence in youth could contribute to preventing depression in young adults.

Nebraska beers will be featured during Volleyball Day in Memorial Stadium

Written by Chris Dunker

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents cleared the way for beer sales in Memorial Stadium during a special volleyball doubleheader and country music concert later this summer.

In addition to four Nebraska schools taking to the court in front of a potentially record-breaking crowd, Husker Athletics said it is also planning to feature a trio of craft brewing companies based in the Cornhusker state.

Zipline Brewing Co. and Kinkaid Brewing Co. will each have two of their beers for sale during the event, according to Doug Ewald, executive associate athletic director and chief financial officer for Husker Athletics, while Empyrean Brewing Co. will have one.

One of Zipline's beers — its "Dear Old Nebraska Brew" — will be sold in a commemorative can for fans, Ewald said.

The event will be the second time since 2021 that regents have approved the sale of alcohol for a special event in Memorial Stadium. That summer, booze was put on sale for a Garth Brooks concert that drew more than 90,000 fans.

But it will be the first time beer sales will be available during a sporting event inside the century-old venue.

Ewald said Husker Athletics has been diligently planning the event using the lessons learned from the country music superstar's appearance two years ago, and is approaching it "like a home football game" with some differences.

While fans were in the stadium for a little more than three hours to see Garth, Ewald said the athletic department anticipates fans will be at Memorial Stadium for at least 6-7 hours on Aug. 30 if they choose to attend the full event.

The University of Nebraska at Kearney and Wayne State College will play an exhibition match at 4:30 p.m., with the Huskers slated to take on the University of Nebraska at Omaha in a televised match on the Big Ten Network at 7 p.m.

After the game, country music artist Scotty McCreery will play a concert for fans.

"One of the most important things for us is making sure we have adequate food for the entire day," Ewald said.

Supplies ran low, and in some cases out completely, during the 2021 event. Ewald said Husker Athletics is working with vendor Premier Catering to ensure plenty of Runzas and Valentino's pizza is on hand at Memorial Stadium's concession stands.

Because the special designated liquor license will be in Premier Catering's name and not the University of Nebraska, beer sales will once again take place in kiosks spread throughout the stadium.

Ewald said beer will be sold in 16-ounce cans rather than the 25-ounce size featured during the Garth Brooks concert.

Husker Athletic Director Trev Alberts, who along with volleyball Coach John Cook and Gov. Jim Pillen announced Volleyball Day in February, said beer sales were discussed as part of the concession offerings from the event's inception.

On Thursday, the Board of Regents made that a reality on a 6-2 vote, with Regents Jim Scheer of Norfolk and Kathy Wilmot of Beaver City opposed.

Scheer said while he didn't oppose the sale of alcohol at the event in principle, he believed the university should have taken action earlier in order to set expectations for Husker fans.

"My concern with this particular one is we've sold 80,000 tickets," he said. "Some of the people who have bought tickets have maybe perceived it as a more family-friendly event without alcohol."

Wilmot echoed Scheer's concerns, saying many Nebraskans identify Husker events as alcohol-free.

"To me, this is a type of family event and I'd like to keep it at that level," she said.

Regent Rob Schafer of Beatrice defended beer sales at Memorial Stadium for the event, pointing out that there have been no reported incidents at Husker sporting events where alcohol is sold.

"I'm a strong believer we should treat adults as adults," he said. "If they make a bad decision, there will be consequences."

Regents have gradually relaxed the ban on alcohol sales at Husker Athletics since 2021. Beer was later approved for the Big Ten Wrestling Championships in 2022, and for a two-year trial period for Husker men's and women's basketball.

Omaha City Council votes to recommend denial of Throwback Lounge's liquor license

Written by Jessica Wade

A downtown Omaha nightclub could lose its liquor license following a recommendation from the Omaha City Council.

While City Council members don't have the final say, they continued to raise concerns about the Throwback Arcade Lounge, located near 14th and Howard Streets.

The establishment was first called before the Omaha City Council last October by the City Council Law Committee due to a number of reported violent incidents at the nightclub since February 2021. The incidents include multiple large fights, staff members interfering with police, illegal parking and complaints from neighbors.

In October, the City Council voted to require the Throwback Lounge to reapply for a liquor license. The step gave the business a chance to address concerns without shutting down operations.

But after nearly two hours of discussion Tuesday, City Council members still had concerns. They unanimously voted to recommend that the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission deny a liquor license for the Throwback Arcade.

The council's denial doesn't seal the bar's fate. The liquor commission will make the final decision on the liquor license.

The Throwback Lounge is co-owned by Breanna Pham-Carr and Tony Pham. The couple opened the nightclub in November 2020 with a "strong learning curve," Pham-Carr said.

"We took a lot of advice. We've been working with the city hand in hand, hired off-duty officers," Pham-Carr said. "People feel safe."

The couple are in the process of selling the business, something they have attempted two other times.

Councilman Danny Begley said the on-again, off-again sale attempts concern him.

"I think it's been three times you've indicated that you're going to sell your establishment," Begley said "It's like Charlie Brown when Lucy is holding the football and Charlie Brown gives us that big swing and the football gets pulled away."

Several patrons spoke in support of the establishment and several neighboring residents spoke in opposition.

Holly Barrett, executive director of the Omaha Downtown Improvement District, said the business has created a great experience, but neighbors are concerned about what happens outside the bar.

"Unfortunately since (the opening), we have received nothing but complaints," Barrett said.

Joe Mraz, a lieutenant with the Omaha Police Department, told council members that he's seen improvements "come and go in waves."

The police see occasional issues at other downtown establishment, but the Throwback Lounge is unique due to large, unruly crowds, Mraz said.

David Grauman, an attorney with the city, alleged that a number of shows and events hosted by Throwback end with reported incidents.

Grauman pulled up a flier for an upcoming event at the Throwback that featured a show promoter he alleged has ties to gangs on the East and West Coasts.

Pham contended that concerns from the city and police around specific performers were racially motivated.

Pham said he'd like to see more proof from the city to support the claim that specific shows corresponded with an increase in incidents that require police involvement.

Councilman Brinker Harding noted that a number of supporters and opponents said they like the concept of the establishment, "but a good concept isn't the lone reason to allow for continued operation."

"I think you have to have good management in place," Harding said. "Quite frankly, I'm just not comfortable nor have I been convinced that that's what's happening here today."

A letter included with the Throwback's liquor application states that the owners still intend to sell the nightclub. If a sale is finalized, the new owners will have the opportunity to apply for another liquor license.

LSU Baseball Fans Consumed Ungodly Number of Jell-O Shots at MCWS

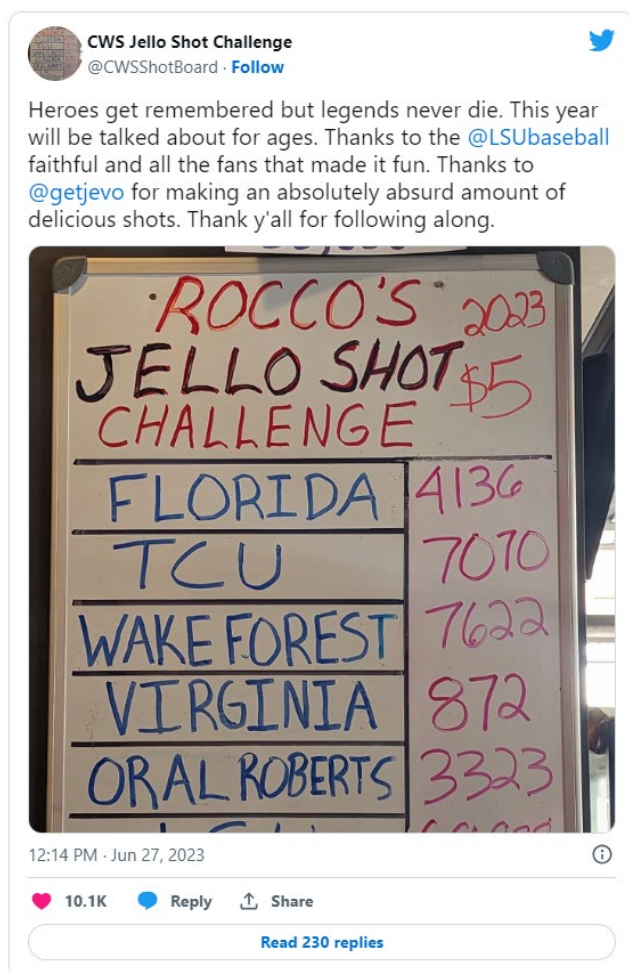
Written by Madison Williams

LSU may have won the 2023 College World Series title on Monday night, but Tigers fans also won an important contest this week in Omaha, Neb.: the CWS Jell-O Shot Challenge.

LSU fans dominated the competition against seven other schools at Omaha's Rocco's Pizza, the bar and restaurant where the contest is annually held. The Tigers purchased a record-shattering 68,888 Jell-O shots during the span of the College World Series.

The next closest amount purchased by a specific team's fandom was 7,622 bought by Wake Forest supporters.

Here's a breakdown of what the final tally for each school turned out to look like.



Each shot at Rocco's cost \$5, with \$1.50 of that going to charity—\$1 to a local food bank in the school's town and 50 cents to Omaha's Food Bank for the Heartland.

LSU's Jell-O shot record of 68,888 might seem unbreakable, but observers probably thought that was the case when Ole Miss supporters set the previous record of 18,777 last year.

Home Delivery of Alcohol Expanded During Pandemic, With Permanent Effects on Health

Written by Steven Reinberg

WEDNESDAY, June 28, 2023 (HealthDay News) -- During the COVID-19 pandemic home liquor delivery soared in the United States, as did binge drinking along with it, a new study finds.

"'Home delivery' refers to when restaurants, bars or retailers use their own employees or a third-party delivery system such as DoorDash or Uber Eats to deliver alcohol to consumers' homes," said researcher Elyse Grossman, a social and behavioral sciences administrator at the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Although the number of states that allowed home delivery was already trending upwards during the last two decades, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased these numbers."

Grossman's team analyzed legal databases and found that more states permitted home delivery during the pandemic. In January 2020, 21 states permitted home delivery of alcohol by retailers, which grew to 38 states by January 2022.

The number of states permitting home delivery of alcohol by restaurants or bars rose from 23 states to 39 states.

The findings were presented Tuesday at a meeting of the Research Society on Alcohol, in Bellevue, Wash.

"Although data from early in the pandemic showed large increases in alcohol sales, it was unclear at that time if individuals were increasing their alcohol consumption or only stockpiling the alcohol," Grossman said in a meeting news release.

"In May 2020, we conducted an online survey of U.S. adults ages 21+ living throughout the country; the final sample included 838 participants," she said. "We found that, of the adults who obtained at least some of their alcohol via delivery, they reported consuming significantly more alcohol and binge drinking significantly more often than participants who did not obtain their alcohol through delivery."

Although many states expanded their home delivery laws as a way to help businesses, Grossman said few considered the potential consumer on public health.

"In the future, it is important that public health be given greater weight when states are considering policy decisions which increase access to alcohol," she said.

"Furthermore, although we did not examine youth drinking habits -- given the increase in access to alcohol for youth via expanded home delivery laws, and the fact that retailers and third-party delivery drivers often do not check IDs -- we hypothesize that youth drinking habits were probably also negatively impacted by expanded home delivery laws and strongly urge future research in this area," Grossman said.

Findings presented at medical meetings are considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Alcohol consumption surged during the pandemic — and deaths followed

Written by Caitlin Gilbert, David Ovalle, Hanna Zakharenko

Rhode Island stand-up comedians Kirsten Logan and Frank Gazerro already drank plenty. The husband and wife were literally paid in drinks at nightclubs. Then came the pandemic.

Logan, 35, drank over the stress of continuing to report to work as an emergency veterinarian technician, even as the coronavirus spread. Stuck at home, Gazerro, 40, guzzled copious amounts of bourbon, or sometimes cheap grain alcohol, every day — until he was rushed to the emergency room with an inflamed liver in the fall of 2021.

Recently released federal data underscores their experience: U.S. consumption of alcohol, which had already been increasing for years, accelerated during the pandemic as Americans grappled with stress and isolation.

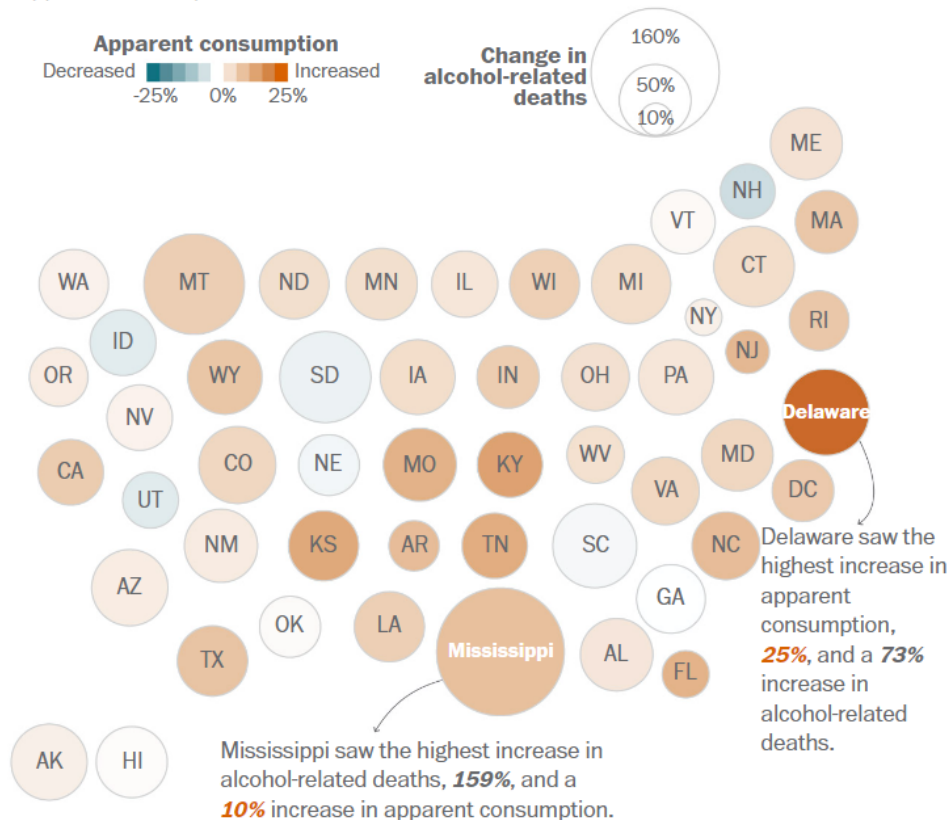
At the same time, the number of deaths caused by alcohol skyrocketed nationwide, rising more than 45 percent. In 2021, alcohol was the primary cause of death for more than 54,000 Americans, causing nearly 17,000 more deaths than just a few years before, in 2018, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Mississippi saw a 159 percent increase in alcohol-related deaths, the nation's biggest leap, along with a 10 percent rise in apparent consumption. In Delaware, consumption increased the most, by 25 percent, while alcohol-related deaths rose 73 percent.

George F. Koob, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), said the traumas of the pandemic — the fear of covid-19 infection, job losses, social isolation — added to the stresses that were already spurring people to drink. "The pandemic just made it worse," Koob said.

Alcohol-related deaths have risen in every state, amid a spike in pandemic drinking

Between 2018 and 2021, alcohol-related deaths increased in all 50 states. The size of the circle indicates the percentage increase in deaths, and the color indicates how much apparent consumption increased or decreased.



Source: CDC/NCHS, NIAAA

HANNA ZAKHARENKO/THE WASHINGTON POST

The highest alcohol consumption since 1988

Experts point to a variety of factors for the increase, among them stagnant alcohol taxes that make drinking cheap relative to inflation, increased marketing to women and social despairs that have led to crises of mental health and addiction in the United States.

According to NIAAA data, apparent consumption of alcohol, measured as gallons of ethanol sold per capita, increased by 6.6 percent between 2018 and 2021 across the United States, reaching an average of about 2.8 gallons per person annually — roughly 597 drinks per year — for Americans over 21.

That's the highest consumption level since 1988. The data from the agency's annual report, published in late April, represents "apparent" consumption of alcohol because it is inferred from alcohol sales data by state, as opposed to traditional survey data.

The drinking patterns reported by the NIAAA varied significantly by state. In nine states — including Florida, Tennessee and New Jersey — alcohol consumption increased by at least 10 percent.

The NIAAA data suggests that increased alcohol consumption may be more pronounced than previously believed. The 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health indicated that nearly 9 in 10 U.S. adults of drinking age reported drinking the same or less than they did before the pandemic.

Researchers say this type of survey data can mask risky behavior or changes in drinking habits because respondents often underreport their alcohol use.

Alcohol-related deaths increased in every state

As alcohol use was surging, so were alcohol-related deaths. Between 2018 and 2021, deaths caused by alcohol increased in every state, according to CDC mortality data.

Some states that had some of the biggest increases in consumption also had some of the largest spikes in alcohol-related death rates. In Mississippi, the rate of deaths caused by alcohol more than doubled in a four-year span, rising from 7 deaths per 100,000 residents to about 18 deaths per 100,000 in 2021.

“The costs of alcohol abuse and dependence are phenomenal,” said Jefferson Parker, a professor of psychiatry who co-directs a new addiction treatment program at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, which last fall received a \$6 million federal grant to help treat alcohol use disorder, along with opioid addiction.

New Mexico had more than 51 deaths per 100,000 residents, the highest rate of alcohol-related deaths in the country, and an increase of almost 50 percent from its rate in 2018. Death rates related to alcohol also nearly doubled in Montana, South Dakota and Delaware during that time.

Many different underlying diseases or conditions involving alcohol could cause death. Between 2018 and 2021, the rate of Americans dying from alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver, the leading alcohol-related cause of death, grew by 42 percent, while deaths stemming from alcohol dependence or harmful use disorders increased by 54 percent.

Younger drinkers saw the biggest increase in the rate of alcohol-related deaths, which spiked by nearly 80 percent among 25-to-44-year-olds, a Washington Post analysis of CDC data found. For every 100,000 people within that age range, 12 people died of alcohol-related issues in 2021, the analysis found.

Older age groups didn’t see rises that dramatic but already had high rates. People between the ages of 55 and 64 had the highest rate of alcohol-related deaths, at 42 per 100,000.

Those findings add to similarly grim statistics. A CDC study published last fall estimated that between 2015 and 2019, excessive alcohol use was to blame for 1 in 8 deaths of Americans between the ages of 20 and 64.

Driven by spirits sales and loosening of rules

The pandemic spike was notably driven by sales of spirits, which rose nearly 17 percent compared with less than 1 percent for both wine and beer.

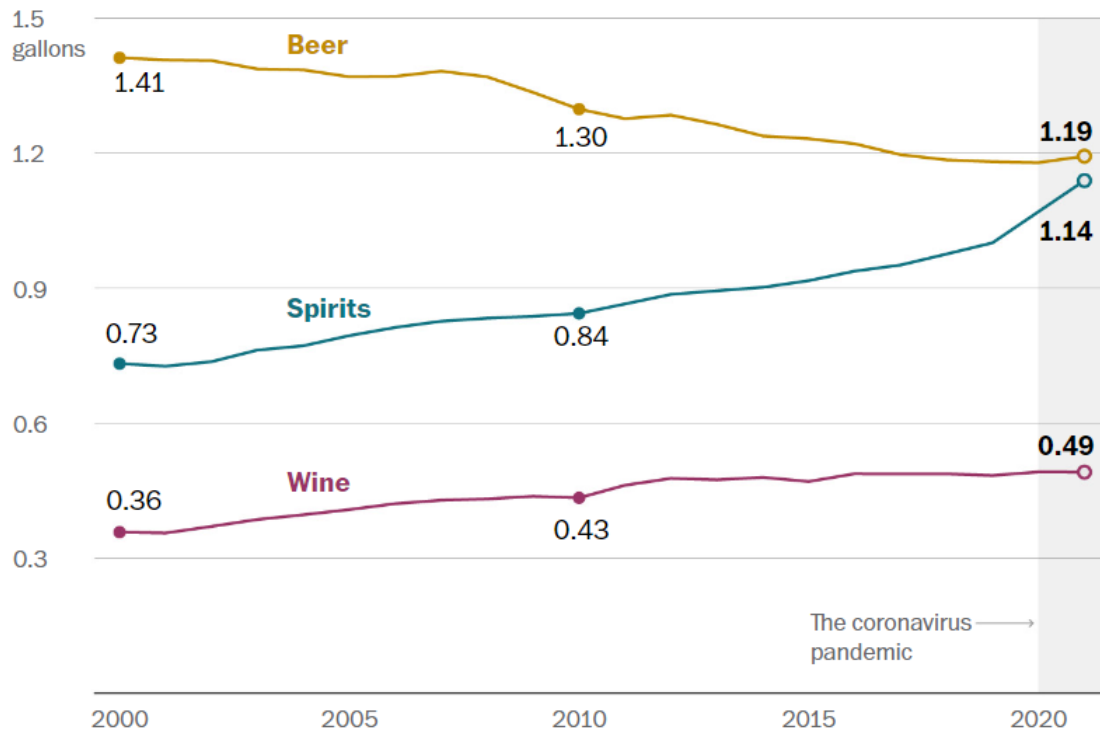
In Rhode Island, where Logan and Gazerro live in the town of Warwick, the state ranked third in terms of relative increases in spirits sales since 2018.

For Gazerro, a podcaster and consultant, his drinking escalated in his 30s and got worse during the boredom of pandemic shutdowns. There was a liquor store a few blocks from his apartment. The pandemic also spurred lawmakers in Rhode Island, among other states, to allow restaurants to sell takeout alcohol. Rhode Island has since made the measure permanent.

The growth of the spirits industry has been pronounced, helped by the popularity of luxury brands and ones backed by celebrities — think tequila brands launched by actors such as Dwayne Johnson or Mark Wahlberg. The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States reports that in 2022, the spirits revenue market share (42.9 percent) eclipsed that of beer (41.9 percent) for the first time. The council's president recently called it a "great American success story," according to CNBC.

Consumption of spirits increased during the pandemic

Apparent alcohol consumption (gallons of ethanol sold per capita to over-21-year-olds), between 2000 and 2021 for three types of alcohol



Source: NIAAA

HANNA ZAKHARENKO/THE WASHINGTON POST

The council cites changing consumer tastes toward high-end products, plus ready-to-drink beverages such as hard seltzers, and the proliferation of craft distilleries, which number more than 2,600 today.

During the pandemic, consumers who weren't spending on vacations or restaurants instead spent on luxury spirits they could stock at home, said Amanda Berger, the council's vice president of science and health.

"The majority of adults who choose to drink do so responsibly, and we have seen decreases in harmful drinking (including binge drinking and underage drinking) for more than a decade," she said.

While the share of Americans under 35 that report binge drinking decreased by about 20 percent between 2011 and 2021, binge drinking has remained at about 18 percent among 35-to-54-year-olds over the decade and increased by about 13 percent for those over 55, according to survey data from the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

Alcohol has become more affordable

Critics have long pointed to the affordability of alcohol as a driving force behind increases in consumption.

Congress last raised the federal alcohol tax in 1991. State taxes vary widely but have generally been stagnant, said Philip J. Cook, an economist and professor emeritus at Duke University, who has studied alcohol taxes and consumption. Congress helped the industry more recently, slashing federal taxes on certain alcohol producers in 2017, changes made permanent three years later.

"Alcoholic beverages are cheaper today than they were in the 1980s, relative to the value of the dollar," Cook said.

Public health officials say the cost to society is dire.

In Massachusetts, for example, a Boston University School of Public Health report in December found that the state's excise taxes have lost 72 percent of their value since 1980, when they were last raised, amounting to less than a nickel per drink.

"This is the cheapest and most available drug to American adults," said David H. Jernigan, a Boston University professor of health law and a critic of alcohol industry marketing.

In 2020, Massachusetts state alcohol tax revenue was just \$78.6 million, according to the report. Meanwhile, researchers estimated that in 2010, the last year for which data was available, excessive alcohol use cost the state \$5.6 billion in lost productivity, health care, criminal justice and other areas.

Berger, on the spirits council, disputed the criticism, saying that the spirits industry is one of the country's most "heavily taxed and regulated industries" in the United States and that those who abuse alcohol aren't deterred by higher prices. She said in a statement that tax hikes unfairly

raise the cost on “responsible consumers” and hurt hospitality businesses still reeling from the pandemic.

Increasing taxes remains a tough sell. An effort to increase taxes on beer and wine in Oregon earlier this year fizzled, and last month, its governor dropped a request to the state’s alcohol commission to impose a 50-cent surcharge on bottles of liquor.

In Massachusetts, liberal Democrats have introduced legislation that would double the excise tax on alcohol products, which could raise up to an additional \$89.5 million to be used for substance use education and treatment. But chances of the bill passing are not good — Rep. Kay Khan (D) has introduced a similar bill for years to no avail.

“It’s sort of a sacred cow,” Khan said. “It’s hard to get people to pay attention.”

Some are rethinking their relationship with alcohol

Koob, the director of the NIAAA, is hopeful about the future. He points out that many Americans are nevertheless rethinking their relationship with alcohol, as new research has also punctured the myth that drinking alcohol in moderate amounts is good for one’s health.

There’s been a noted decrease in alcohol consumption by underage drinkers, as well as the recognition of dry Januarys and the rising popularity of nonalcoholic alternatives, he said.

For Logan and Gazerro, they’ve been sober for more than a year, although it hasn’t been easy. “I loved everything about alcohol. It’s like an old friend I haven’t gotten to hang out with in a while,” Gazerro said.

Logan quit alcohol for her health — and to support her husband. But the cultural allure was strong. They felt awkward being out at nightclubs without a drink. So they started the Rhode Island Non-Alcoholic Beer Society, a networking group.

Said Logan, “I wanted people to be able to find restaurants that serve nonalcoholic beer, and stores that carried different varieties within the state.”

Rocco's Jell-O shot challenge pouring more than \$147,000 into participating schools' food pantries

Written by Jonah Gilmore

OMAHA, Neb. — The College World Series and Jell-O shot challenge may be over, but the donations from Rocco's Pizza and Cantina are just getting started.

This year, donations are being sent to all eight schools' food pantries, and the money will also help fight food insecurity in the metro.

"It was what I think any of us imagined it would be," Rocco's owner Kevin Culjat said.

The Jell-O shot challenge has become a big deal, and when we say big, we mean it.

"It's a \$142,000 and change," Culjat said.

That's the overall amount being sent to the eight schools that participated in the 2023 College World Series.

"When we contact these schools and say, 'hey, this is what we're doing,' a lot of the schools who weren't here the year before had no idea what I was talking about," Culjat said.

The checks being mailed to each school will benefit their food pantries.

"I really like the fact that it goes to food insecurities. That's a special place in my heart, my wife's heart, and we just want to continue to help that grow boat for the teams that come here, for the universities and the fans that support Omaha," Culjat said.

As those checks make their way across the country, a special check is staying in Omaha.

Stephanie Sullivan with Food Bank for the Heartland said the check they received is more than \$47,000.

"That will go directly back into our communities, keep food pantries shelves stocked and allowing our heartland neighbors to get access to nutritious food during some really troubling times. It just goes to show you that when everyone works together, whether it's a food drive or Jell-O shot competition. We can create sustainable change for our communities," Sullivan said.

Culjat said he's happy to make the challenge a tradition, helping fight hunger one Jell-O shot at a time.

"We wrote all those checks and sat around there with my wife and talked about what we had accomplished, and it just makes you feel good at the end of the day," Culjat said.

Nebraska's 2023 traffic fatalities fall well below recent averages

Written by Kevin Cole

Nebraska's 108 roadway fatalities in 2023 are significantly below the number at this time last year and 18% fewer than the state's most recent five-year average.

The state recorded 108 traffic fatalities through Wednesday morning compared to 132 by the same time in 2022 and 116 in 2021. That's an 18% decrease, according to the Nebraska Department of Transportation's Highway Safety Office. The state's five-year average, from 2018 to 2022, is 122.6 fatalities.

The 108 fatalities thus far represents a 12% decrease from the five-year average. That's good news for Bill Kovarik, administrator of the Highway Safety Office who credited the work of law enforcement campaigns funded by state grants for overtime hours.

"Traffic patterns have increased back to normal growth but fatalities are slightly down," Kovarik said. "We can hope this is, in part, due to our continued partnership with law enforcement's increased enforcement activities."

Law enforcement agencies across the state have been participating in several safety campaigns including special attention to distracted driving and drug impaired drivers in April. The "Click it or Ticket" seatbelt campaign ran from May 15 to June 4 and a special speeding enforcement is running now through the end of July. The Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over special enforcement is scheduled for Aug. 16 to Sept. 4.

Grants from the Highway Traffic Safety Office for law enforcement overtime hours this year will total an estimated \$875,000. That is the same amount as in 2022 but nearly double the amount spent in previous years, Kovarik said.

"The Highway Safety Office continues to get the message out across the state with our advertising campaigns about dangerous driving in hopes of reaching additional drivers," Kovarik said. "Most fatal crashes are avoidable and we all need to work toward zero traffic fatalities."

The state's fatality decrease is especially welcome after a disappointing upswing in fatalities in 2022, Kovarik said. Speeding, distracted driving and failing to use seat belts were seen as the main culprits as Nebraska traffic deaths increased by 15% in 2022.

The 254 deaths on Nebraska roads in 2022 were 33 more than in 2021. That toll was also is the most fatalities since 2007 when the state recorded 256 traffic deaths.

The biggest difference in the 2023 decrease appears to be between the number of urban and rural deaths. Urban fatalities stood at 33 as of Wednesday, which is just about on the mark for the five-year average of 32.6 and well below the 42 recorded last year.

Omaha police have responded to 24 fatalities as of Wednesday morning. That compares with Omaha's 27 fatalities through July 15, 2022.

Rural deaths, however, have declined significantly. There have been 75 deaths on rural roadways in the state are 15 fewer than the 90 fatalities at this time in 2022 and the five-year average of 89.8

There has been just three pedestrian fatalities this year compared to nine in 2022, a 67% decrease. There have been no deaths involving trains compared to three last year.

There has been only one fatality for all-terrain vehicles and two for bicycles. Motorcycle deaths, though, are up by one.

Fourteen people on motorcycles have been killed on the state's byways compared with 13 in 2022, nine in 2021 and 19 in 2020. The five-year average for motorcycle deaths is 13.6.

Nebraska is not alone in seeing a reduction in 2023 roadway deaths, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The NHTSA estimated that nationwide 9,330 people died in traffic crashes in the first three months of the year.

That represents a decrease of about 3.3% as compared to 9,645 estimated fatalities during the same time in 2022. The first quarter of 2023 represents the fourth straight quarterly decline in fatalities after seven consecutive quarters of year-to-year increases in fatalities, beginning with the third quarter of 2020.

The NHTSA estimated that for the first three months of 2023, fatalities decreased in 32 states, while 18 states and Puerto Rico have projected increases in fatalities as compared to the same period in 2022. The District of Columbia remained unchanged.

"After spiking during the pandemic, traffic deaths have been on a slow but consistent decline for the past year," U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said. "This is an encouraging sign as we work to reverse the rise in roadway deaths, but there is much more work ahead to reinforce this downward trend and make it permanent."

The projected decrease occurred alongside a 2.6% increase in vehicle miles traveled. The estimated fatality rate for the first three months of 2023 decreased to 1.24 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, down from the projected rate of 1.32 during the same time in 2022.

"This is very good news, but we know that far too many people are dying on our roadways in preventable crashes," said Ann Carlson, chief counsel for the NHTSA. "We are taking significant action to reduce traffic fatalities, including moving forward on new vehicle standards to make cars even safer, investing millions of dollars to improve infrastructure and roadway safety, and working with our state and local partners to help drivers make safe decisions on the road."

Gay Water, a new canned cocktail, wants to be the anti-Bud Light

Written by Jordan Valinsky, CNN Business

NEW YORK — In a sea of canned cocktails, Gay Water wants to stand out.

Launching Thursday is a brightly colored canned vodka and soda beverage that proudly displays who it's for, instead of backing off from support for the LGBTQ+ community as other companies have done in recent months. In other words, where Bud Light has buckled under pressure as bigotry grows against the LGBTQ+ community, Gay Water's creator Spencer Hoddeson wants his new boozy brand to be the antithesis of that.

"The key issue that Bud Light tapped into was the fact that they didn't understand their core audience and know enough about them," Hoddeson, a gay man, told CNN about the controversy that began when the Anheuser-Busch beer brand sent influencer Dylan Mulvaney a can of beer. "They just went silent and I think in 2023, you have to be communicating because people communicate themselves if they're not hearing from you."



Gay Water, a canned vodka soda, launches Thursday.

Gay Water, however, is out and proud. The canned cocktail is named after a colloquialism given to the popular mixed drink (vodka and soda) ordered at bars by the gay community. It's also one of the few openly queer-owned alcohol brands, which Hoddeson said sparked him to create because he wanted more representation in the category.

"We're creating a brand that creates representation, particularly in spaces where representation is lacking like liquor stores, bars, restaurants and grocery stores," he said. "Putting a product with the word gay in the title is representation itself," which he hopes reclaims the word from the negativity it's sometimes associated with.

He thought of creating Gay Water about a year ago while on a vacation with his friend that had got a job within the beverage industry. The two chatted about the limited amount of gay people within it, and with Hoddeson burnt out from his traditional day job in tech, started the canned cocktail.

Big online

Hoddeson built up a strong social media following on TikTok and Instagram during Covid-19 and is using some of the money from that (as well as from friends and family) to help fund Gay Water. He worked together with a queer designer creating the colorful packaging, which pulls inspiration from '90s Nickelodeon shows and pop art.

"I wanted to build something that is queer and part of the community, but isn't necessarily rainbows and unicorns that you see all around pride," he said. "Gay is an umbrella term and the idea behind the brand is to be as inclusive as possible, which means we want allies, we want straight people to be part of this community we're building."

For now, Gay Water is sold largely online (with a few retailers) and comes in four sugar-free flavors — watermelon, lime, peach and grapefruit — at launch. Six-packs with a single flavor cost \$18.25 and 12-packs with a variety of flavors cost \$36.50.

Although spiked seltzers have cooled off with drinkers, spirit-based drinks, like High Noon, have grown in popularity. And despite the hundreds of brands on shelves (after all, a canned vodka soda isn't something unique anymore), Hoddeson said it's "exactly the right time" to join the space.

"When i look at a lot of brands entering the market right now, what they're missing is the idea of who their audience is and who their community will be rather than what their product is," he said.

Canned cocktail boom

Sales of premixed cocktails surged about 36% last year, making it a \$2.2 billion industry according to figures from Distilled Spirits Council of the United States.

Gay Water might not have the deep pockets compared to its competitors, like White Claw, but "even at small scale, companies of many sizes are having success making spirit-based seltzers and premixed cocktails," Bryan Roth, an analyst for Feel Goods Company and editor of the alcohol beverage newsletter, Sightlines+, told CNN.

"There's lots of space in the spirit-based seltzer category in which Gay Water can play, especially if the brand can offer a cultural or emotional connection that will feel more exciting than the prospect of another pineapple-flavored vodka seltzer from national or international corporations," Roth said. "It's a top-heavy category where niches can be carved out in similar fashion to craft beer."

Of course, other drinks use the word "gay," too, including Gay Beer and So Gay Rosé, Hoddeson noted, which are also trying to reach the queer community and offer them an alternative in the straight-dominated space.

Hoddeon said there's a lot of "straight-coded brands that try to acquire the audience and that's what Bud Light did. There's clearly a desire for folks to have queer customers they just don't know the right way to go about it."