



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

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, January 21, 2026
9 a.m.

Please use to sign-in:



A G E N D A

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the December 10, 2025 Meeting Minutes
(please contact PEM staff with corrections)
- III. 2026 Legislative Session
 - a. New Legislation (through Day 9)
 - b. Carryover Bills
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Policy
 - i. US Dietary Guidelines
 - ii. Federal substance abuse prevention funding
 - iii. Policy Work Group meeting following Coalition
 - b. Enforcement
 - i. December Compliance Check Results
 - ii. Law Enforcement Training
 - c. Youth
 - i. Recap Youth meetings with Senators
 - ii. Next meeting January 26th at 7:00 p.m.
 - iii. Youth Leadership Retreat set for June 1-3, 2026
 - d. Awareness
 - i. January Research Summary available at www.projectextramile.org
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **February 11, 9 a.m. – Buffett Cancer Center**
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 209

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – February 3 & 4, 2026

Youth Leadership Network meeting – January 26, 2026

6001 Dodge Street, CEC 228
Omaha, Nebraska 68182-0600
402.963.9047
www.projectextramile.org

PROJECT EXTRA MILE

OMAHA METRO AREA COALITION MEETING MINUTES December 10, 2025

- I. Call to Order: Chris Wagner called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members and speakers in attendance: Ed Kaiser, Palistene Gray-Moore, Alvin McCruel, Saral Sapkota, Nicholas Sauma, Brian Ortner, Lorelle Mueting, Jim Timm, Maggie Ballard, Ashley Pick, Derek Schwartz, Cole Williby, Sharona Ernst, Suzanne King, Jason Jones, and Tom Safranek. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Cecelia Fuller, and Liene Topko.
- III. Looking Back at 2025: Chris Wagner thanked coalition members for their support throughout the year. He then highlighted policy initiatives PEM was a part of, including LB 330 which was introduced at the request of the Youth Leadership Network, and submitting comments on federal issues such as the dietary guidelines and alcohol labeling. Liene Topko shared results of alcohol compliance check, saturation patrol, and party patrol enforcements as well as highlights of the Law Enforcement Training. Cecelia Fuller discussed the Youth Leadership Network's efforts to improve health and wellbeing of Nebraskans, as well as the Youth Leadership Retreat and Day. Wagner then briefly touched on PEM's 30-year celebration and media efforts throughout the year, as well as opportunities to provide technical assistance and presentations to community members and presenting at a national conference.

Brian Ortner with AAA Nebraska invited coalition members to attend the 2025 Wet Lab event on December 19th. The event will highlight the dangers of impaired driving and be open to the public.
- IV. Additional Discussion/Announcements: none
- V. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, January 21st at 9:00 a.m.

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 2026!





GROW YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND MAKE FRIENDSHIPS THAT LAST A LIFETIME

YOUTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK FALL MEETING SCHEDULE

JANUARY 26, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

FEBRUARY 23, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

MARCH 16, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

APRIL 20, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

**EXTRA MEETINGS
AS NEEDED**

**YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY
AT THE STATE CAPITOL
SPRING 2025**

**YOUTH LEADERSHIP
RETREAT
SUMMER 2026**

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 www.projectextramile.org/youth or contact us at youth@projectextramile.org or (402) 963-9047

Find us on:



RESEARCH SUMMARY

Date Compiled: January 2026

Key takeaways from included research:

- A meta-analysis examined whether exposure to digital alcohol marketing is associated with alcohol use among adolescents and young adults. A review of 31 studies (62,703 participants) found that those exposed to digital alcohol marketing had significantly higher odds of past 30-day alcohol use, binge drinking, and susceptibility to drinking among never users compared with unexposed peers. Most participants were adolescents, and results were consistent across outcomes despite high study heterogeneity. Overall, the findings suggest a clear association between digital alcohol marketing exposure and pro-alcohol behaviors, though more research is needed to determine causality.
- Another study modeled the effects of raising Scotland's minimum unit price (MUP) for alcohol from £0.50 to £0.65 and found it would substantially reduce alcohol consumption, deaths, and alcohol-related harm over 20 years. The largest benefits are projected among the most disadvantaged populations and heavy drinkers, including large reductions in harmful and hazardous drinking. Overall, increasing MUP levels appears to strengthen public health gains and reduce health inequalities.
- Alcohol-related hospitalizations among U.S. adults stayed mostly stable from 2016 to 2022, but hospitalizations for alcohol-related medical complications increased. During this period, in-hospital mortality, length of stay, self-directed discharges, and costs all rose, with total hospitalization costs reaching \$32.6 billion in 2022. These findings suggest that although hospitalization rates have not grown overall, alcohol-related harms are becoming more severe and costly, highlighting the need for stronger prevention and early treatment of alcohol use disorder.
- A new study found that alcohol use reported on routine AUDIT-C screenings in primary care predicted all-cause mortality over up to eight years of follow-up. Compared with low-risk drinkers, people reporting no alcohol use or very high-risk drinking had higher mortality, while those with moderate-risk drinking had lower mortality, with stronger effects seen in younger adults. Overall, the results show a J- or U-shaped relationship between alcohol use and death, supporting routine alcohol screening as a useful tool for identifying patients at higher risk.
- Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is a common, chronic disease that causes major health, social, and economic harm in the United States, contributing to over 90,000 deaths and hundreds of billions of dollars in costs annually. Alcohol misuse damages nearly every organ system, increasing the risk of brain disorders, liver disease, heart problems, cancer, metabolic disease, and immune dysfunction, with growing impacts among women and older adults. Despite available treatments, AUD remains underdiagnosed and undertreated, underscoring the need for stronger prevention efforts and continued investment in alcohol research.

Fans at Memorial Stadium purchased more than \$4.3 million of beer and seltzer, beating expectations

Written by Aaron Bonderson

While Nebraska's football team struggled at times this year, finishing at 7-5, fans guzzled beer and seltzer at a championship level.

Nebraska Athletics generated more than \$4.3 million in alcohol sales this season at Memorial Stadium, according to a report provided by the University of Nebraska.

That figure came in higher than projections during the first year of alcohol sales at the stadium.

After the Board of Regents approved alcohol sales at all university athletic venues last fall, Director of Athletics Troy Dannen said "we will conservatively estimate \$3-4 million" in alcohol sales throughout the course of the season.

Earlier this year, a report ranked alcohol sales at Memorial Stadium through September tops in the country among the 21 college football programs that responded to open record requests.

All concessions, including alcohol, generated more than \$10 million in revenue for the athletic department. That's a 75% increase from last year's total of nearly \$5.8 million.

Food, water and soda sales remained flat compared to last year, at more than \$5.7 million. An athletic department spokesperson said that could be due to more people opting for beer this year rather than soda. Nebraska football played seven home games in each of the last two seasons.

There were many unknowns heading into the season at Memorial Stadium, according to Seth Dorsey, Chief Financial Officer for the athletic department.

"But overall, it went as expected," he said. "Items purchased were up. There was a substantial amount of alcohol purchased through various mediums, whether it be premium or concession, across a variety of products."

At both Devaney and Memorial Stadium, there's room for improvement including adding more points of sale, Dorsey said. That includes potentially adding a mixture of runners in the stands, kiosks and full-blown concession stands.

"It's more complicated than it comes across, but that's no excuse," Dorsey said, "and we need to figure out how to get more points of sale out there to hopefully have a better experience, whether people want the hot dog or they want the nacho."

With the introduction of alcohol at Memorial Stadium, the number of items sold per fan increased. For food, concession stands sold out of Runzas and Valentino's Pizza at times.

As for alcohol related incidents and arrests, Dorsey said it seems binge drinking went down at Memorial Stadium.

"We've been tracking data with police, and across the board, there have been positive results," Dorsey said.

DUI arrests and alcohol-related calls were down from last season, however in the middle of the season, there was a slight uptick in the average number of alcohol violations in the stadium from more than one to four.

The Huskers were the final school in the Big Ten to approve alcohol sales for football games.

Volleyball fans, meanwhile, purchased about \$182,000 worth of beer and seltzer this season during the first year of alcohol sales at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Food, water and soda sales grew from almost \$1.1 million in 2024 to nearly \$1.3 million this fall.

In total, the Bob Devaney Sports Center sold more than \$1.4 million in concessions, including alcohol.

The number of items sold increased at Devaney this season. But fans had more choices at higher price points than before, he said, driving up the total sales number.

“There wasn't much variety there before. It was the traditional items that you saw between Runzas and hot dogs and Val's, which those are still available at all those stands. But there were also additions of Chick-Fil-A, for example,” Dorsey said. “So, we expected there would be an increase in revenue, but the primary driver was an increased product mix, and some of the increased product mix being of a higher dollar value item.”

The 30-0 Huskers finished the regular season undefeated, for the third time in school history, joining the 1994 and 2000 teams. They host Long Island University Friday night in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Husker football will hear about its official bowl game placement on Sunday.

Experts Warn Binge Drinking Drives Early-Onset Breast Cancer, While Cessation Reduces Risk

Written by Brooke McCormick

Alcohol increases breast cancer risk, with binge drinking particularly driving early-onset cases, underscoring the need for public education, clinical intervention, and further research, experts said during yesterday's special session, "Open Bar and All You Can Eat? The Impact of Lifestyle in Breast Cancer Risk and Recurrence," which helped kick off this year's San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS).

Before his term ended on January 20, then-Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, called for alcohol labels to include cancer warnings, noting links to at least 7 types: oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, colorectum, liver, and breast.² Despite the recent attention on the connection between alcohol and cancer, Julia R. Palmer, ScD, MPH, of Boston University, highlighted in her presentation, "Alcohol, Genetics of Alcohol Metabolism, and Breast Cancer Risk," that the first evidence linking the two emerged in 1977 from a study by William and Horm, which included breast cancer among several associated cancers.³

A second study published 5 years later built on this work by controlling for known and suspected breast cancer risk factors and using 2 different control groups.⁴ It found that women who consumed 4 or more drinks per week were estimated to have more than twice the risk of breast cancer than those who drank very little or not at all.

Palmer noted that an influx of research followed over the next 5 to 10 years, with the most impactful being the 1987 prospective Nurses Health Study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.⁵ It reported a small increased breast cancer risk for women consuming about 1 drink per day and a higher risk for those drinking more than 1 daily or over 7 per week. This study, she said, caused researchers to pay closer attention to the relationship between alcohol and breast cancer.¹

Today, the preponderance of evidence indicates alcohol as a risk factor for breast cancer, with risk increasing alongside consumption.

"By now, there have been studies done in many other countries, pretty much all parts of the world," Palmer said. "Results aren't completely consistent, but almost all of the studies find that women who drink at least a drink a day, or maybe a little bit less, have an increased risk of breast cancer, so across all populations."

She further examined how different patient factors influence risk, including drinking patterns. Even very light drinking was found to increase risk, though Palmer noted that self-reported intake often underestimates true consumption, potentially skewing results. Binge drinking, defined as drinking 6 or more drinks in a day or a large quantity at least once a month, also increases risk, even after women take control of their drinking habits.

Contrary to past beliefs, the type of alcoholic beverage consumed does not affect risk, and the relationship is observed in both pre- and postmenopausal women. As for breast cancer type, Palmer noted alcohol consumption to be more strongly linked with estrogen receptor-positive disease.

She concluded by highlighting the potential genetic factors of this connection. Palmer explained that alcohol is primarily metabolized by alcohol dehydrogenase into acetaldehyde, a carcinogen. Genetic variants influence how quickly alcohol is metabolized, namely ADH1C, which is common globally, and ADH1B, found mostly in Asian populations.

Although these variants affect alcohol metabolism, studies indicate they have minimal impact on breast cancer risk. Instead, Palmer highlighted that alcohol's effect could likely be driven more by hormonal changes, as it increases circulating female hormones and androgens, with more research needed.

The Impact of Alcohol Cessation, Reduction on Breast Cancer Risk

Mary Beth Terry, PhD, of the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, built on Palmer's presentation with her own, "Effects of Alcohol Consumption and Cessation on Breast Cancer Risk," exploring whether stopping or reducing alcohol consumption lowers breast cancer risk. She noted that she was first invited to speak on this relationship at SABCS 7 or 8 years ago, at a time she assumed the connection was widely known, but it remains an important topic that is still not well understood today.

Terry focused on what happens to breast cancer risk if someone stops drinking. Of the hundreds of studies on breast cancer and alcohol, only 21 addressed cessation or reduction, with evidence being limited due to inconsistencies in cohort studies and the limited biological data.⁶ However, available studies indicate that stopping alcohol consumption completely reduces the risk of hormone receptor-positive breast cancers.

She emphasized that there are fewer epidemiological studies on alcohol cessation than smoking cessation, partly due to cultural bias, yet they remain essential.¹

"...we don't really think people stop drinking or reduce drinking unless they're of that tail of the distribution that has alcohol use disorder," she said. "Well, I would argue that these kinds of questions are coming up more and more, and especially when we're looking at early-onset cancer, we need to be asking these questions about patterns of use, reduction of use, and cessation of use."

Terry underscored that sufficient data existed to establish this association decades ago via meta-analysis. Still, the evidence went largely untranslated since it was not a clinical trial, leaving many patients unaware of alcohol's link to breast cancer. She noted that the delay in understanding is partly due to superficial clinical assessments, with physicians often labeling patients as "social drinkers" without meaningful discussion, and the widespread underreporting of alcohol consumption, as highlighted by Palmer earlier.

Research comparisons have also been flawed historically, Terry added, often using nondrinkers as a reference group, which mixes never-drinkers with "sick quitters," including past binge drinkers with hard-to-reverse effects. Additionally, mechanistic studies on cessation are extremely limited, mostly focusing on men with alcohol use disorders, leaving key questions, such as how stopping alcohol consumption affects women's hormone levels, unanswered.

Additionally, early-onset cancers disproportionately affect women, with two-thirds of cancers diagnosed under age 50 in the US and globally being in women, most frequently breast cancer, followed by thyroid cancer. Although alcohol is not the only factor, Terry emphasized the importance of acknowledging its role, particularly binge drinking. US data show that binge

drinking, independent of regular alcohol consumption, strongly predicts these early-onset trends in patients diagnosed with breast cancer under age 40.⁷

To address alcohol-related cancer risk, she suggested using counter-marketing strategies like those used in successful antismoking campaigns, emphasizing education for young people about the dangers of alcohol, particularly before age 25.¹ Terry highlighted the role of clinicians in prevention, noting their “incredible power” to discuss the dangers of alcohol, especially binge drinking, with patients.

She concluded by underscoring that stopping alcohol use reduces breast cancer risk, though evidence on the impact of limiting intake remains limited. Particularly, Terry stressed the need to inform the public about the relationship between binge drinking and cancer risk.

“I do think, as public health practitioners, we have enough data now to say, independent of regular alcohol drinking, binge drinking is separate,” she said. “We should definitely start promoting intervention studies to find people, identify people, and get them into care who admit to binge drinking.”

Omaha City Council recommends approval of liquor license for Benson Grocery

Written by John Chapman

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - The Omaha City Council voted 6 to 0, recommending approval of a Class D liquor license for Benson Grocery.

If approved by the state, that would give the future grocery store on 54th and Northwest Radial the OK to sell beer, wine and liquor.

Representatives of the owners told the City Council that Benson Grocery will operate as a grocery store.

"They'll have a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, canned foods and vegetables, dairy, all of your grocery and convenience items," said David Houghton, attorney for the applicant.

Community concerns

People who live in the area are OK with the grocery store, but there are people who are not OK with another alcohol outlet in the area.

"I oppose the liquor license because we have plenty of liquor opportunities in the Benson area also because it is close to both Benson High School and the junior high next door, and I think it creates another opportunity for school children to find a little trouble," one resident said.

Jack Griswold, a business owner in the area for more than five decades, voiced his opinion through a letter to the council. Griswold says if approved, there would be liquor sales across the street from a church and close to schools and a city park and he writes there are already two smoke shops in the area and other places to buy alcohol.

There are others who point to other neighborhood grocery stores that sell fresh fruits, vegetables and grocery items. But some store feature and promote alcohol sales as the primary attraction.

Council questions

Councilmember Ron Hug wanted to know how much of the store's space would be dedicated to the sale of alcohol.

"They do not have any blueprints I think the building length is approximately 60 feet by 50 feet," the attorney said.

Hug asked, "OK, so the area to sell alcohol will be how big?"

"I don't have a floor space percentage on what will be dedicated to alcohol sales," the attorney replied.

"So we don't know the percentage of the floor space that will be used for selling alcohol, yeah, I don't have that in the application," he said.

Expert perspective

Chris Wagner is the executive director of Project Extra Mile, an organization dedicated to preventing alcohol related harm. He tells us too many outlets that sell alcohol in one area is one of the main reasons that leads to excessive alcohol use.

“The more available it is more likely its going to be cheaper because the businesses are competing against one another and its easy to get,” said Chris Wagner, executive director of Project Extra Mile.

What happens here is not a done deal. If neighbors are passionate enough they can take their concerns to state officials in Lincoln.

“Ask for the liquor control commissions help as they have in certain situations in Omaha, they have denied applications,” Wagner said.

The Omaha City Council's approval for a liquor license for Benson Grocery is only a recommendation. Final approval or rejection will come from the Nebraska State Liquor Commission.

Omaha City Council meeting tenses up over liquor license application

Written by Madison Perales

OMAHA, Neb. — Discussion about potential liquor license recommendations at the Omaha City Council turned tense.

One owner is looking to open a bar that would replace the 415 Bar in Downtown Omaha, but City Council members are concerned about the owner's experience and understanding of the historical issues tied to the building.

People who live in the area around the 415 Bar said they wouldn't oppose the business.

"If they're cool and have good security, I see no problem with it," said Jesse, a downtown Omaha resident. "I've got to say, there has been nights we've been out here, and we had to go inside because things that happened, people started fighting."

Mikisha Shields owns the 879 Bar, which would replace the 415 Bar on 13th Street.

She said the name comes from her and her husband's radio station numbers.

"It's going in an area that has been troubled before," District 3 Council Member Danny Begley said. "That's what we want to stay ahead of."

The application shows Shields doesn't have prior experience in the liquor business, adding she plans to include free alcohol shots and have celebrity guests like DJs.

"Since we are a radio station or we're connected to the radio station, we have access to all celebrities in the pop-rock genre," Shields said in the council meeting. "We actually hire them to come into town, and either do a performance or just a presence."

These flags were raised by District 7 City Council Member Aimee Melton.

"It does not end well," Melton said in the council meeting. "For your customers, for the Omaha police that will have to respond, and that's part of the problem is it's not just our Omaha police, but our Omaha firefighters as well."

Begley said in an interview with KETV that he wants his district to remain safe with positive business.

"We're not against them, but I want to hear on the record how they plan to stay above board on safety issues, and it's going to be a good business for the city," Begley said.

Melton said she's unsure if Shields understands what she's taking on, given prior history, saying "about half of it [the business plan] is what not to do."

The council vote failed 3-4, denying the license recommendation.

The City Council can only recommend the approval or disapproval of a liquor license. The Nebraska Liquor Control Commission makes the final call.

Report: Americans spent \$228 billion on alcohol last year. Where did adults spend the most?

Written by Nick Jachim

(NEXSTAR) – Americans spend an unbelievable amount of money on alcohol over the course of a year. Just last year alone, \$228 billion was spent on alcohol across the United States.

While some states spent vastly more than others on adult beverages — such as California, which spent the most in the country at roughly \$29 billion — the states where the average adult spent the most on alcohol over the last year may surprise you.

SmartAsset analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis and discovered how much the average adult over age 21 in each state spent on alcoholic beverages last year.

To find the top answer, you'd have to head to the northernmost part of the country: In Alaska, the average adult spent roughly \$1,250 on alcohol. All the while, the state as a whole paid nearly \$675 million.

Not far behind was Wyoming at \$1,237 per adult, followed by Colorado at \$1,202, and Massachusetts at \$1,185.

Here are the states where the average adult spent the most on alcohol, according to SmartAsset.

Rank	State	Alcohol Spending per Adult (21 and older)	Total Amount Spent on Alcohol (millions)
1	Alaska	\$1,249.76	\$674.7
2	Wyoming	\$1,237.84	\$543.7
3	Colorado	\$1,202.45	\$5,435.6
4	Massachusetts	\$1,185.54	\$6,470.3
5	Rhode Island	\$1,155.82	\$988.8
6	New Hampshire	\$1,119.73	\$1,236.4
7	Oregon	\$1,104.87	\$3,638.1
8	Hawaii	\$1,095.34	\$1,213.4
9	Washington	\$1,070.99	\$6,455.2
10	Montana	\$1,051.01	\$906.4
11	Vermont	\$1,039.04	\$525.9

Rank	State	Alcohol Spending per Adult (21 and older)	Total Amount Spent on Alcohol (millions)
12	New Jersey	\$1,037.31	\$7,396.2
13	Virginia	\$1,019.08	\$6,702.9
14	California	\$1,001.37	\$29,466.8
15	New Mexico	\$994.06	\$1,592.3
16	Maine	\$985.08	\$1,092.8
17	Texas	\$972.04	\$21,704.4
18	Florida	\$959.37	\$17,332.2
19	Minnesota	\$954.14	\$4,077.7
20	Nevada	\$949.91	\$2,345.3

As for states that spent the most on alcohol, as mentioned above, California led the way at about \$29 billion. Texas wasn't far behind, spending roughly \$21 billion on alcoholic beverages, followed by Florida at about \$17 billion and New York with \$12 billion.

Nebraska law limiting online content for kids takes effect Jan. 1

Written by Hannah Nazarenius

A new Nebraska law aimed at protecting children online will take effect Jan. 1, putting restrictions on how social media and other online platforms design content for minors.

The Age-Appropriate Online Design Code Act, known as LB504, requires certain online services to set accounts for minors to the highest privacy settings, limit data collection and restrict features designed to keep users online longer, such as autoplay and infinite scrolling.

Supporters of the law say it's necessary to curb the addictive design of these platforms and cut down on the amount of personal data collected from children. They argue that social media companies design features that encourage prolonged use, often at the expense of young users' well-being.

The law will also prohibit platforms from advertising products such as drugs, gambling and alcohol to minors. Additionally push notifications will be disabled during school hours from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and overnight on weekdays during the school year.

The bill was proposed by Lincoln Senator Carolyn Bosn at the request of Gov. Jim Pillen, making Nebraska the third state to enact such legislation.

The bill did face opposition from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Nebraska, which testified against the bill during legislative hearings. The organization warned the law could interfere with free speech and pressure platforms over moderate resulting in restricting lawful content.

Dylan Severino of ACLU Nebraska said enforcement by the state general attorney could become politically influenced, depending on who holds office. He argued that one administration might restrict information on topics such as firearms, while another could limit content related to gender identity.

"If anything, this bill has made it more clear that legislating content to protect minors is simply impossible in practice," Severino said. "The time and effort would be much better spent into education and outreach so that families can protect themselves."

Although the law will take effect Jan. 1, enforcement will not begin until July 1, 2026. The state attorney general's office will have the authority to bring civil actions against companies that violate the bill. Penalties can amount to \$50,000.

Troubled downtown nightclub for sale, ending long saga with city of Omaha

Written by Philip Catalfamo

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - After battling with the city for years, Krush Ultra Lounge in Old Market is officially up for sale. Signs are up around the troubled nightclub.

City officials tell First Alert 6 its a chance to welcome in a new business hopefully with less issues.

First Alert 6 spoke with Virginia Orea who visited Krush when it went by its previous name Throwback Arcade Lounge.

"I really like the floor, I know that was a good piece of the center of attention," said Orea. "It was nice, I went there for a couple of birthday celebration,s and the drinks were really cool."

Virginia runs a photography business and rents the studio next door. She hasn't been inside the building since it changed names in 2024. Despite that, she tells First Alert 6 she is sad to see it leave the Old Market.

"They played older music and stuff like that," said Orea. "It was really nice having the music choices that there was and it's hard to find that now with other bars and clubs around."

Krush Ultra Lounge had its share of controversy over the years. A constant police presence including a shooting in September 2024 resulted in ownership voluntarily giving up its liquor license in April 2025.

"You always want businesses to succeed and our law committee at the city council that I was on at the time working through this," said District 3 Omaha city Council member Danny Begley. "We worked as hard as we could to make them successful, and sadly, that did not happen, and that is why we are moving on."

The sale marks an official end to a long saga between Krush and the city. Now, a new business venture can come into the space as the neighborhood moves on.

"We are always excited when we close some chapters that were challenging to us but it is also about the vision of the future. This is a great location that anybody that wants to move in and buy this location it will be a great spot."

Virginia Orea had some suggestions of what she would like to see replace Krush.

"It would be nice to another club or another bar. Or it would be nice to even just make it another business, bakery, I do not know," said Orea.

First Alert 6 reached out to a former owner of Krush for comment. They declined an interview.

New book details the fight to close the beer stores in Whiteclay

Written by Paul Hammel

LINCOLN – Beginning in 2013, Oklahoma attorney and college instructor John Maisch made dozens of 700-mile trips over four years to visit the alcohol-soaked village of Whiteclay, Nebraska.

Maisch, who grew up in Grand Island, had earned a reputation as a tough prosecutor of liquor violations in Oklahoma.

When he stumbled almost accidentally onto the story of Whiteclay – an unincorporated village on the South Dakota border where beer stores sold more than 3 million cans a year to the adjacent and officially dry Pine Ridge Indian Reservation – he knew he had to do something.

The more he learned, the more he became outraged.

Fact finder

His trips became fact-finding missions, building a case against what he saw as violations of liquor laws. Without any background in movie making, Maisch produced a documentary on the “wounds” caused by Whiteclay – an epidemic of alcoholism, fetal alcohol syndrome and alcohol-related assaults on the reservation, where alcohol possession and sales were outlawed.

Maisch’s crusade, which culminated in the closing of the Whiteclay beer stores in 2017, is now detailed in a book, “Whiteclay: An American Tragedy,” written by Maisch before his death in 2022.

Maisch’s widow, Julia, took up the task of getting the book published, because she knew her husband wanted people to know about the long-ignored injustice delivered by the beer sales in Whiteclay, especially to the babies born on the reservation with lifelong disabilities due to drinking by their mothers.

“When you have an opportunity to speak up, to help the voiceless, the children who can’t rely on adults to care for them, it’s our responsibility to do something about it,” Julia Maisch told the Nebraska Examiner.

The closings were an historic accomplishment, one that few thought would happen.

The 186-page book details the ups and downs of the campaign to close the beer stores, from fiery exchanges with liquor regulators and cordial meetings with then-Gov. Pete Ricketts and his wife, Susanne, to a disappointing lack of action by Sheridan County officials.

Alcohol had flowed from Whiteclay to the reservation for decades, but the remote village was far from the media spotlight, and in the northwest corner of Nebraska, it had become accepted that in Whiteclay you’d find drunken men and women, urinating, defecating and passing out on the highway through town.

In the book, he wondered if attitudes would change, given the large haul of taxes paid by the beer stores.

Focus on the law

But Maisch knew that legally, alcohol could not be sold in places where there was inadequate law enforcement, and Whiteclay had no local police and the county sheriff’s office was 23 miles away. He eventually began researching the economic cost to Sheridan County and the state of jailing

vagrants and those who committed assaults in Whiteclay and treating the children scarred by fetal alcohol syndrome.

His documentary, “Sober Indian/Dangerous Indian,” introduced many to the lives of four men who lived, panhandled and drank on the streets of Whiteclay. The book provided more detail about their struggles with alcoholism and flirts with sobriety, and of the toll it took on their families.

Along with Native American activist Frank LaMere – a longtime advocate to close the beer stores – Maisch criss-crossed the state and nation, screening the documentary and exposing the misery of Whiteclay. It led to testimony at legislative hearings and those of the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission, and the appointment of task forces. Like an investigator, he dug up data and personal stories of those damaged by the flood of beer coming from a village of less than 20 residents.

“Although most public officials I encountered may disagree, my objective was always to engage – not enrage – those who were involved in the Whiteclay issue,” Maisch wrote. “But more times than not, I found myself getting into verbal spats with elected and appointed officials because, in my opinion, they lacked the moral courage to do what their oaths required them to do.”

The misery of Whiteclay hit the national radar in 1999, when two Native American men who frequented the beer-soaked village were found dead a few yards from the beer stores.

LaMere, a member of the Winnebago tribe who lived across Nebraska from Whiteclay, began calls for change at the village. Nebraskans for Peace, as well as activists from the American Indian Movement took up the call, organizing protest walks and seeking legislative changes. A documentary, “The Battle for Whiteclay,” detailed the sordid history of alcohol sales from the village.

But bills in the Nebraska Legislature died in legislative committees, and attention to Whiteclay often fell from the radar, to be reignited, sporadically, by a protest march or discovery of a death on the streets.

Concerned citizens gather

Maisch began assembling a group of other concerned citizens, like Dennis Carlson, a retired attorney who investigated cases of legal malpractice for the Nebraska Supreme Court, and Alan Jacobson, a Lincoln business owner appalled by what he saw in Whiteclay.

There also were people involved in the fight against fetal alcohol syndrome, caused when a pregnant woman consumed alcohol. A key ally was Nora Boesem, a former pediatric nurse from Newell, South Dakota, whose family had become foster parents for dozens of kids from the reservation who suffered from fetal alcohol-related impacts.

Through Maisch, reporters learned about, and published stories about, one of Boesem’s foster children, Arianna, who was born prematurely, with damage to almost every internal organ due to fetal alcohol syndrome. She required several taxpayer-funded surgeries, daily pain medications and required almost constant care.

Lasting impacts

The book includes other heart-wrenching stories about those scarred by alcohol-fueled domestic abuse, women sexually assaulted and left on Whiteclay streets, and men seeking sobriety and later relapsing to the beer stores.

More than once in the book, Maisch expresses surprise at how forthcoming those impacted by Whiteclay's alcohol were about the sordid impact on their lives.

"As a Christian, I was convinced that God was with us every step of the way as we battled to close Whiteclay's beer stores," he said.

In the end, Maisch saw signs of hope in Whiteclay. Ambulance and law enforcement calls fell, and the village was no longer a contributor to the woes of the reservation, and new programs involving children and providing a "maker's space" for Native artists and crafters were established.

"Nothing changes if we protect our own comfort at the expense of others' pain," he wrote.

"Nothing changes when we refuse to be unsettled, But when we are willing to feel that discomfort and step across the line and stay with it, something begins to shift."

"That is where the healing begins. That is where justice takes root."

Exclusive: The Trump Administration killed a draft proposal to halve alcohol limits, sources say

Written by Emma Rumney and Jessica DiNapoli

LONDON/NEW YORK, Jan 8 (Reuters) - Last spring, a group of officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was drafting a proposal to halve the recommended limit for alcohol consumption for men to one drink a day, according to two former government sources and a document seen by Reuters.

"Alcohol is known to cause cancer," the health officials wrote in the draft version of their proposal reviewed by Reuters. The group was tasked with leading an update to alcohol advice in the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the U.S. government's roadmap to healthy drinking and eating that influences school lunches, medical advice and other policies.

The draft proposal added that if both men and women had one or fewer drinks per day it could save thousands of U.S. lives per year. Advice for women would have remained the same at one drink per day.

"It seemed clear to me that the cancer epidemiology suggested that there was an increased risk of breast cancer and head and neck cancer associated with less than one drink per day," said David Berrigan, a former program director at the National Cancer Institute, an arm of the U.S. health department, who was part of the group that planned to recommend tightening the guidelines.

But the proposal never saw the light of day.

On Wednesday, the Trump administration took the opposite tack, publishing new guidelines that give no advice at all on servings, instead just advising Americans to drink less for better health.

SHIFTING ADVICE ON ALCOHOL

The change eliminates a recommendation in place for 35 years that men limit alcohol consumption to two drinks per day and women to one drink per day. It also followed a years-long lobbying campaign by the alcohol industry, worth some \$1.2 trillion in global sales according to drinks market research firm IWSR, to disrupt the health officials' work.

Public health experts and researchers warned the change could lead to higher alcohol consumption and, ultimately, more alcohol-linked death and disease.

"People will redefine that moderation around what it means to them and, obviously, that can be a very large range," said Karen Hacker, who served as Director of the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion in the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention until 2025.

In a statement, HHS said its policies were driven by evidence and gold-standard science. "It is absurd to suggest that anything other than science guides our work on this presidential priority."

At a White House press conference announcing the guidance on Wednesday, Mehmet Oz, celebrity physician and administrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, said that alcohol should be consumed in small amounts. "Don't have it for breakfast," he said.

"In the best-case scenario, I don't think you should drink alcohol, but it does allow people an excuse to bond and socialize, and there's probably nothing healthier than having a good time with friends in a safe way," he said.

There was never good data supporting the prior guidance of two drinks per day for men and one for women, he continued.

A White House official told Reuters it was clear from the new guidelines that the Trump Administration was not being influenced by industry, and added alcohol consumption was at a multi-decade low anyway.

Trump and Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. do not drink and the Make America Healthy Again social movement aligned with them makes minimal reference to alcohol, focusing its efforts on reducing childhood vaccinations, a position decried by major medical groups, and having fewer preservatives in food.

The International Alliance for Responsible Drinking, a group funded by leading brewers and spirits makers, says that drinking in moderation is low risk. Industry groups and companies either declined to comment, did not respond or said they wanted to ensure any changes to guidance were based on science.

Andrew Langer, director of the Center for Regulatory Freedom at the Conservative Political Conference Foundation, called the new guidelines a "compromise position" between "the neo-temperance movement saying people should not drink anything at all and another group who says the U.S. government shouldn't be making statements about alcohol."

He said it would be "a little hypocritical and disingenuous" for the administration to take steps to loosen regulations on marijuana and psychedelics while implementing tighter policy on drinking.

DUELLING ALCOHOL STUDIES

The U.S. dietary guidelines are the focus of lobbying by the industries they impact, including everything from sugar, cattle and dairy to the wine, beer, and spirits industries.

Top producers like Johnnie Walker whisky maker Diageo (DGE.L), opens new tab and Molson Coors (TAP.N), opens new tab, owner of Miller Lite, and their trade associations, started campaigning on the 2025-2030 guidelines at least as far back as 2021.

In 2022, Congress set aside \$1.3 million for a study on the health effects of alcohol to be conducted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), a congressionally chartered non-profit. Two former alcohol lobbyists said that the industry lobbied lawmakers for the study.

Funding for the study was first proposed in a bill introduced by Senator Tammy Baldwin, Democrat of Wisconsin, a major production hub for Molson Coors, the second-largest brewer in the U.S.

Lobbying disclosures show lobbyists for Molson Coors and the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States petitioned lawmakers on Baldwin's bill in 2022. The spirits industry body said in a statement it wanted to ensure alcohol guidance is grounded in "sound science - not opinion or ideology."

Baldwin's office said the legislation was written with input from several lawmakers but that she stood by funding the study as "sound science necessary to inform public health guidelines."

Molson did not respond to requests for comment, and Diageo declined to comment.

Released in December 2024, the NASEM study concluded that moderate drinking is associated with a lower risk of dying from any cause, a finding the industry regularly promotes, though it also found some negative health effects.

Meanwhile, in February 2022, officials at HHS began planning a separate study on the health effects of alcohol, public records show. That study, conducted by six scientists commissioned by the health officials and called the Alcohol Intake and Health Study, warned that even one drink a day can raise the risk of liver, mouth and throat cancers. Draft findings from that study were released in January 2025.

Industry groups argued that the NASEM report was more independent, credible and scientific than the government's work, which it said was being led by scientists biased against alcohol, a position public health groups disputed.

In January 2025, Science Over Bias, a coalition of alcohol, agriculture and hospitality associations, said in a statement the HHS report was the product of a "flawed, opaque and unprecedented process, rife with bias and conflicts of interest" and should be disregarded.

Priscilla Martinez, one of the HHS-commissioned scientists who worked on the Alcohol Intake and Health study, said that "people should know alcohol causes cancer." She added that she is disappointed that the report, which she called scientifically rigorous, had been sidelined.

ALCOHOL EXPERTS FIRED OR REASSIGNED

On February 13, around a month after both studies were released, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. was sworn in as Trump's health secretary.

In early April, Kennedy laid off more than 10,000 people in a major overhaul of the health department and its agencies. Two out of five key health officials that planned to recommend tighter guidelines, including the CDC's alcohol lead, were fired as part of the mass layoffs, according to two former government sources.

The remainder were subsequently removed from the alcohol project, the two people said. One of those people said the remaining team were removed and replaced in May.

Dorothy Fink, a senior health official with a background in endocrinology, took over writing the guidelines for alcohol, three sources familiar with the matter said. Fink did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

An HHS spokesperson pointed Reuters to information in the scientific report accompanying the guidelines, which stated that the Trump Administration had pursued its own evidence reviews and scientific work to inform them, conducted by subject matter experts.

The Trump administration ultimately used the industry-preferred NASEM study for the new alcohol guidelines, according to the scientific report.

Jennifer Tiller, a newly appointed senior advisor at USDA, also oversaw the guidelines for drinking, meeting with alcohol trade groups in the spring and summer, emails obtained by Reuters show. Tiller previously worked as a Congressional staffer, a role in which she questioned the health officials' work on alcohol, according to emails obtained by Reuters.

Tiller referred Reuters' questions to the USDA press office. A USDA spokesperson said the guidelines are based on scientific evidence: "Recommendations, just like evidence, evolve over time."