



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

**OMAHA COALITION MEETING**  
*Wednesday, February 11, 2026*  
*9 a.m.*

Please use to sign-in:



## **A G E N D A**

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the January 21, 2026 Meeting Minutes  
*(please contact PEM staff with corrections)*
- III. BCC Efforts to Prevent and Treat Cancer in Nebraska  
*Andy Link, Buffett Cancer Center*
- IV. Focus Area Updates
  - a. Policy
    - i. LB 330
    - ii. LB 856
    - iii. LB 1085
    - iv. LB 1004
  - b. Enforcement
    - i. Expanding liquor enforcement operations
    - ii. Law Enforcement Training April 14-15
  - c. Youth
    - i. Youth Leadership Day
    - ii. Next meeting February 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00 p.m.
    - iii. Youth Leadership Retreat set for June 1-3, 2026
  - d. Awareness
    - i. February Research Summary available at [www.projectextramile.org](http://www.projectextramile.org)
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **March 11, 9 a.m. – Kaiser Treatment**  
*UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 201*

### **IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS**

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – March 3 & 4, 2026  
Youth Leadership Network meeting – February 23, 2026

**6001 Dodge Street, CEC 228**  
**Omaha, Nebraska 68182-0600**  
**402.963.9047**  
**[www.projectextramile.org](http://www.projectextramile.org)**

## PROJECT EXTRA MILE

### OMAHA METRO AREA COALITION MEETING MINUTES January 21, 2026

- I. Call to Order: Coalition Chair Tom Safranek called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members and speakers in attendance: Sharona Ernst, Palistene Gray-Moore, Derek Schwartz, Tom Safranek, Jeremy Leifeld, Jeremy Welsch, Nicholas Sauma, Alvin McCruel, Ed Kaiser, Micah Chaffee, Natalie Gordon-Nash, Suzanne King, and Chris Foster. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Lanette Richards, Brian Ortner, Shannon Nyhoff, Courtney Zimbelman-Burt, Julie Chytil, Elizabeth Woods, Maggie Ballard, and Ashely Rowe. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Cecelia Fuller, Beatha Kliewer, and Liene Topko.
- III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the December 10<sup>th</sup> meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.
- IV. 2026 Legislative Session: Liene Topko and Chris Wagner discussed the alcohol-related bills that have been introduced at the Nebraska Legislature:
  - a. [LB 856](#) (McKinney) – Imposes a 5% geographically targeted community reinvestment excise tax on covered businesses (gas stations, convenience stores, or package liquor stores that sell alcoholic liquor, tobacco products, or cigarettes for off-premises consumption) operating in qualified census tracts. Proceeds of the tax are designated for federally qualified health centers, homeless services, re-entry housing, healthy food access, childcare, and community development initiatives.
  - b. [LB 1004](#) (Clouse) – Indicates that beer, wine, and spirits are one-half of one percent or more alcohol by volume. Removes ‘near beer’ from the definition of beer and specifies that beer does not include nonalcoholic beer. Prohibits persons from selling or furnishing these products to minors.
  - c. [LB 1085](#) (Clouse) – Redefines a bottle club; adds requirement that LCC consider evidence by applicant and delinquent taxes; specifies penalty for selling alcohol without a proper retail license.
  - d. [LB 1151](#) (Clouse) – Creates a new class of liquor license, the regional craft brewery license for breweries producing between 20 thousand and 200 thousand barrels per year.
  - e. Carryover Legislation
    - i. [LB 178](#) (Clouse) Requires mandatory server alcohol training of all individuals engaged in the sale, service, or mixture of alcoholic products; LCC Executive Director shared an amendment is in the works to address cost concerns.
    - ii. [LB 330](#) (Juarez) Increases the sales tax of alcoholic products to 15.5% (10% increase) with the proceeds being split 50/50 between the Alcohol Addiction Prevention and Treatment Fund and the Education Future Fund. Sen. Juarez is working on an amendment to increase the sales tax by 3%, rather than by 10%.

- f. PEM's legislative tracking sheet is available on the website:  
<https://www.projectextramile.org/policy/nebraska-legislative-tracking-sheet>

V. Focus Area Updates

a. Policy

- i. Wagner shared that the 2025-30 Dietary Guidelines for Americans were released. The new guidelines are to "limit alcoholic beverages," rather than having numeric guidelines for men and women. This iteration of the guidelines had moved away from the typical process for these and ignored the science-based recommendations of the committee.
- ii. Wagner also discussed how PFS grant funding had been cut by the Trump administration. Cuts were reversed within 48 hours due to immediate backlash.
- iii. The Policy Work Group will meet following the coalition meeting.

b. Enforcement

- i. Topko informed the group that the December 2025 alcohol retail compliance checks had a 4% non-compliance rate which brought the overall total to 55 (8%) of 653 businesses being cited for selling alcohol to minors in 2025. Law enforcement in the room discussed how many of those cited for selling had shared they did not receive proper training.
- ii. The 2026 Law Enforcement Training will focus on alcohol retail compliance checks and will take place in western and central Nebraska.

c. Youth

- i. Wagner shared that the Youth Leadership Network (YLN) has met with over 20 senators or their staff to discuss LB330 and approximately 60% of these indicated leaning toward support for the bill. Based on their feedback, the Senator is amending the bill.
- ii. Cecelia Fuller announced the 2026 Youth Leadership Retreat has been scheduled for June 1-3, 2026.
- iii. Next YLN meeting is on Monday, January 26<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. The students will continue planning for a spring awareness event.

VI. Awareness:

- a. The January Research Summary is available at  
[www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary](http://www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary)

VII. Additional Discussion/Announcements: N/A

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

## TRAINING TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Understanding the scope and consequences of underage drinking today
- Research on the effectiveness of youth alcohol enforcement efforts
- Planning, implementing, evaluating, and communicating on alcohol compliance checks
- Overcoming challenges while conducting compliance check operations
- Building partnerships and community support for underage drinking prevention efforts



## OUR TRAINER:



**Retired Special Agent  
Nancy McGee**

served for nearly 30 years in the Missouri Department of Public Safety— Division of Alcohol and Tobacco Control. As a special agent stationed in the St. Louis District specializing in alcohol enforcement, McGee was responsible for enforcing Missouri’s Liquor Control Act. She was in charge of administering the state’s alcohol compliance check program as well as coordinating the department’s efforts on college campuses and with community coalition groups.

For more information, contact  
Project Extra Mile at  
402-963-9047  
-or-  
info@projectextramile.org

# LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

## Multi-Agency Alcohol Compliance Checks



**projectextramile**

April 14, 2026 - North Platte, NE  
April 15, 2026 - Grand Island, NE

Funding provided by:



Space is limited to 30 participants per training site. Registration is available at [www.projectextramile.org](http://www.projectextramile.org) or by scanning the QR code.

# Law Enforcement Training 2026



In collaboration with the Nebraska Department of Transportation-Highway Safety Office, Project Extra Mile is coordinating a FREE Law Enforcement Training on the topic of **Multi-Agency Alcohol Compliance Checks**

This training is **FREE** for all Law Enforcement

This project is supported by the Nebraska Department of Transportation - Highway Safety Office (CFDA 20.616).



## Training Locations

**North Platte, NE**

April 14, 2026

**Grand Island, NE**

April 15, 2026

### Who should attend?

#### Law Enforcement:

- Liquor Investigators,
- Traffic Officers,
- Patrol Officers,
- City/County/State Attorneys

#### Liquor Regulators

#### Community Coalitions

#### Health Departments

### Daily Schedule

Trainings will run from:  
**8:00am - 4:00pm**

Breakfast and Lunch will be provided.

**Deadline to register is April 3, 2026**

Registration is limited to 30 participants per site.  
Law Enforcement will be prioritized over other interested parties.

# 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](http://www.projectextramile.org/youth) or contact us at [youth@projectextramile.org](mailto:youth@projectextramile.org) or (402) 963-9047

Find us on:



# YOUTH LEADERSHIP RETREAT

Project Extra Mile is a network of community partnerships across the state of Nebraska working to prevent excessive alcohol consumption, including underage drinking and its harms.

This is only possible through improved laws, increased enforcement, media advocacy, increased awareness and most importantly, powerful young voices leading the way!

## LEARN TO USE YOUR VOICE TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE!

### Where:

Haven150  
12370 S 150th Street, Omaha, NE

### Who:

Students entering grades 8-12 who are interested in becoming an effective leader to make positive change in their community are encouraged to attend.

### When:

June 1-3, 2026

### Cost:

Cost is \$100 per student and includes overnight lodging, food, t-shirt, activities, and training costs.

**REGISTRATION ENDS  
5/20/2026**

📞 402-963-9047

🌐 [www.projectextramile.org](http://www.projectextramile.org)





**RESEARCH SUMMARY**  
Date Compiled: February 2026

**Key takeaways from included research:**

- This Canadian survey found that simply knowing alcohol causes cancer was not enough—believing the link mattered for policy support. Adults who were both aware of and believed that alcohol causes cancer were more likely to support policies restricting alcohol availability and marketing than those who were not aware or did not believe. The findings suggest that strengthening belief and acceptance of alcohol’s cancer risks may increase public support for alcohol control policies.
- This study found that alcohol screening and brief intervention in primary care led to small reductions in drinking and modest improvements in blood pressure among patients with hypertension and unhealthy alcohol use. After two years, patients who received brief intervention had slightly fewer heavy drinking days, drank marginally less overall, and showed small but meaningful declines in systolic and diastolic blood pressure compared with those who did not. These benefits weakened by five years, but the results suggest brief alcohol interventions can support better cardiovascular health at the population level.
- Although binge drinking among U.S. college students has declined, it remains common, especially across different state policy environments. This study found that students in states with more restrictive alcohol policies were less likely to drink, drink frequently, or binge drink, with effects strongest among students ages 21–24 but still significant for underage students. The findings suggest that strong state alcohol policies help reduce college drinking and can support campus and community prevention efforts.

## **Driver cited for DUI after single vehicle accident blocks train tracks in Merrick County**

Written by Carter Anderson

In the newly released Dietary Guidelines for Americans (2025–2030), federal health experts aren't mincing words: drink less alcohol.

This isn't just vague health advice; it's a response to mounting, robust scientific evidence linking alcohol consumption directly to breast cancer risk.

And yes, even a single daily drink can start to tip the scales.

From "moderation" to "minimization"

For years, the official messaging around alcohol focused on "moderation." You've probably heard the rule of thumb: one drink a day for women, two for men.

But this new guidance goes a step further, shifting away from that flexible phrasing toward something more definitive. Why? Because science keeps showing the same thing: there's no safe level of alcohol when it comes to breast cancer.

That's not scare tactics, it's science.

### **Alcohol's Hidden Role in Breast Cancer**

So, how exactly does alcohol play into cancer development? The mechanism is surprisingly well understood.

When your body processes alcohol, it breaks it down into acetaldehyde, a toxic compound that can damage DNA and disrupt the way your cells repair themselves. That's a recipe for mutation and, potentially, cancer.

Alcohol also increases levels of estrogen and other hormones that are known to fuel hormone-sensitive breast cancers, the most common type. On top of that, alcohol can interfere with how your body absorbs folate, a B-vitamin essential for DNA repair.

In other words, alcohol isn't just an innocent indulgence; it's a cocktail of cancer risk factors.

### **No Type of Alcohol Is "safe", and No Amount Is without Risk**

It doesn't matter if you're sipping wine, beer, or a fancy craft cocktail. The type of alcohol makes no difference; what matters is how much you're drinking and how often.

Research paints a clear picture:

A major study from the UK, known as the Million Women Study, found that each additional drink per day raised breast cancer risk by about 12%.

A comprehensive 2024 meta-analysis confirmed the linear relationship: even half a drink a day increased risk by 5%. With three drinks daily, the risk jumped by over 20%.

The National Academies of Sciences reported that even low-level drinking (less than one drink per day) was linked to a 10% higher risk.

That's not a small bump; it's a statistically significant increase starting from zero. Essentially, there is no "safe" starting point. Risk begins with the first sip.

What Does This Mean for You, or Someone You Love?

For most women, the baseline risk of breast cancer is already high; about 1 in 8 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed at some point in their lives. While many risk factors (like genetics or age) are out of your control, alcohol is one lever you can actually pull.

And for women with a family history of breast cancer, or with genetic mutations like BRCA1 or BRCA2, the risks tied to alcohol become even more important. The danger from drinking stacks on top of an already elevated genetic risk, amplifying potential harm.

That's why experts are urging women to rethink their relationship with alcohol, not out of guilt or shame, but out of empowerment. This is about having all the facts and making an informed choice.

Time to Have the Conversation

Let's be honest, alcohol is deeply embedded in culture. From "rosé all day" memes to wellness influencers casually sipping wine during self-care routines, it's often glamorized as part of a healthy lifestyle. But science tells a different story.

This updated guidance isn't about fear; it's about facts. And it's an invitation to start a conversation with your doctor, especially if breast cancer runs in your family.

Every woman deserves to know how alcohol may be influencing her health, especially when it's something she can actually do something about.

Bottom Line? Drink Less, and Feel Empowered Doing It

You don't need to quit drinking entirely to benefit. Even cutting back can help reduce your risk. Public health data also show that U.S. states with the highest alcoholism rates tend to face heavier long-term health burdens tied to alcohol use.

There's no magic number, but the science is crystal clear: less is better than more, and none is better than some when it comes to breast cancer risk.

## Split vote in favor, sends convenience store application to Nebraska Liquor Commission

Written by Doug Kennedy

BEATRICE – A liquor license application has been advanced by the Beatrice City Council on a split vote, after hearing opposition from a church that is next to the proposed new business.

The council Monday night voted 4-3 to advance the application to the Nebraska Liquor Commission. Beatrice Petroleum LLC would do business as N-P Mart 36, at 6th and Ella...in a former U.S. Bank branch and drive-up. The convenience operation is seeking a Class-D liquor license for sale of beer, wine and liquor.

The store is next to the First Christian Church, whose Interim Pastor is Jeff Collins.

"We feel strongly that allowing the sale of alcohol in close proximity to our church, would be detrimental. Concerns such as loitering, littering and overall appearance will detract from our mission to provide a safe and welcoming environment for our congregation. A church serves as a spiritual refuge...and it shouldn't be overshadowed by an establishment selling products that are counter-productive to healthy families and a wholesome community."

Julie Collins also objected to the license application, noting the presence of several other businesses selling beer or liquor in the city. The pastor and his wife and the church's board oppose the application. Julie Collins spoke of what she sees as the impact on children.

"They learn, what we normalize. They learn what we tolerate. They learn what we prioritize. When we continue to add alcohol outlets, especially near a church...what are we teaching them? Are we teaching them that profit matters more than protection? That...convenience matters more than, character....that, another business matters more than their future?"

City Councilman Terry Doyle was one of four elected officials voting no on the application.

"I just think that there's a better thing that we can put on that corner, than that. It's a nice enough corner, that I don't think we will have to wait very long. I spoke to three different businesses in the past about going there and for whatever reason they decided not to. But, all three of them would have been something different than this. So, I think we will be able to fill that corner with something else."

The matter came to the attention of the church Monday morning when City Councilman Duane Ruh contacted them. An e-mail notice of the plan initially was mistakenly sent to the Centenary United Methodist Church, which is north of the site.

The over 25-hundred square foot former bank building is about 75 feet from the First Christian Church. Voting with the majority, Councilman Dave Eskra feels there's more to consider.

"This convenience store is selling a lot more stuff than just alcohol. They're there for fuel. They're there for all the other conveniences they could bring to the downtown area where people live.....because they can't currently get them. We're putting all the eggs in the alcohol basket. And I understand where you guys are coming from. But, I also believe that 85-or-95 percent of their sales probably aren't alcohol."

The application now goes to the state liquor commission for a decision. The commission has the authority to hold a separate hearing under state law, on the church's objections to the application.

State law carries a restriction of 150 feet for any liquor establishment from a church, unless waived by the church.

The \$1.5 million investment would become N-P Mart's 36th store in Nebraska. Most are located in Omaha or Lincoln but there stores in about a half-dozen smaller cities in the state.

Voting to recommend license approval were Mike McLain, Ted Fairbanks, Gary Barnard and Dave Eskra. Voting no were Terry Doyle, Duane Ruh and Dana Hydo. Alex Eckhoff was absent from Monday night's meeting.

## **Omaha police believe alcohol was involved in crash that injured 2 women, 2 children**

Written by McKenzy Parsons

OMAHA, Neb. — Omaha police said alcohol is considered to be a factor in a crash that injured four people.

The incident happened near Interstate 480 and Arbor Street just before 9 p.m. on Friday.

According to police, a 2023 Chevrolet Trailblazer was heading south on the interstate when it left the roadway, hitting a pole and a tree.

Four people, including two children, were taken to the hospital with serious injuries.

The investigation is ongoing.

## **North Platte group raises concerns about federal dietary guidelines**

Written by Sarah Person

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. (KNOP) - A local substance abuse program is raising concerns about changes to federal dietary guidelines, saying critical health information about alcohol has been removed or weakened in the new recommendations.

The Community Connections Substance Abuse Program says important information has been taken out including key definitions and data points from the guidelines that help Americans understand alcohol-related statistics.

“With the new dietary guidelines regarding alcohol, HHS has omitted key definitions, pertinent health information, and key data points that allow the American population to clearly see the statistics in our dietary guidelines,” said Mackenzie Slonaker, Community Connections’ Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinator.

The changes could lead to increased health problems and alcohol-related deaths among Americans and Lincoln County residents. Slonaker says public perception and readily available information will lose value without the complete data.

“We know that the risk, for example, the public perception and the readily available information will lose its value and will ultimately cause Americans present and future and residents of Lincoln County, possibly more health related issues and more deaths related to alcohol across the board, even just spreading the information to your friends and family. I think all, all the small actions matter,” she said.

The organization encourages community members to reach out and make their voice heard about the guidelines changes.

## **Neighborhood violence linked to higher substance use among one in four US teens**

Written by Lisa Lock

One in four U.S. adolescents is exposed to violence in their neighborhood, and those teens are more than twice as likely to use cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs to cope, according to a new study from the University of Texas at Arlington. Published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, the study was led by UT Arlington School of Social Work Professor Philip Baiden and drew on national data from the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Researchers analyzed responses from 20,005 adolescents ages 12 to 18, offering new insights into early pathways to substance use, a persistent public health concern.

"Our study reminds us that violence is not a rare or isolated experience for many young people—it is a daily reality," Dr. Baiden said. "Youth exposed to neighborhood violence often carry the psychological weight of chronic stress, fear, and trauma. Many turn to alcohol, marijuana, vaping, or other substances to self-medicate or numb the emotional impact of these experiences."

According to the 2024 National Institute on Drug Abuse annual report, 58.3% of individuals ages 12 or older reported using tobacco, vaping nicotine, alcohol, or an illicit drug in the prior month. Substance misuse contributes to preventable illness and death nationwide.

Catherine LaBrenz, co-author of the study and a UTA School of Social Work associate professor, noted that previous research has shown neighborhood violence can alter how the brain processes emotions. "When teens experience chronic fear or trauma, it can increase vulnerability to substance use," Dr. LaBrenz said.

The researchers examined five substance categories: cigarette smoking, alcohol use, electronic vaping products, marijuana use, and prescription opioid misuse. Exposure to neighborhood violence was associated with higher odds of using all five substances, even after controlling for demographics, mental health symptoms, physical activity, and bullying involvement.

The study also revealed several notable patterns. Cyberbullying is more strongly linked to substance use than traditional school bullying. In addition, students who participate in team sports tend to report higher rates of alcohol use.

"Cyberbullying is distinct in that it follows adolescents everywhere—there is no escape," Baiden said. "If someone is bullied on a school playground, it's traumatizing, but you could brush it off and might be able to outgrow it. When it is cyberbullying, it spreads widely, persists indefinitely and you don't know who has access to it, which makes its emotional impact even more traumatic. You can't just delete it."

The study also identified a nuanced relationship between team sports and substance use. Participation in team sports such as football, for example, was linked to increased alcohol use.

"Team sports can offer structure, belonging, and social support, but they also expose adolescents to peer cultures where alcohol use may be normalized," Baiden said. "That helps explain why we see increased odds of drinking among youth who participate."

Baiden and LaBrenz said the findings could help inform policies and prevention strategies aimed at reducing substance use among adolescents. Further research will focus on specific populations and potential interventions.

"It's not enough to document adverse effects," Baiden said. "We want to identify interventions that counselors, mental health professionals, and social workers can use when working with youth who experience neighborhood violence."

## There's a new leading cause of cancer death among people under 50, study finds

Written by Michael Bartiromo

(NEXSTAR) – Colorectal cancer now has the highest mortality rate of any cancer among people under 50 in the U.S., according to a study conducted by researchers with the American Cancer Society (ACS).

The study, published in the peer-reviewed Journal of the American Medical Association, used data obtained from the National Cancer Institute to analyze the rate of cancer deaths among men and women under the age of 50 between 1990 and 2023. The researchers found that mortality rates associated with some of the deadliest forms of cancer among younger Americans — lung cancer, brain cancer, breast cancer and leukemia — had actually declined.

But colorectal cancer bucked the trend, leaping from “the fifth most common cancer death in the early 1990s to first in 2023,” the American Cancer Society wrote of its findings.

“We weren’t expecting colorectal cancer to rise to this level so quickly, but now it is clear that this can no longer be called an old person’s disease,” Dr. Ahmedin Jemal, the study’s senior author, said. “We must double down on research to pinpoint what is driving this tsunami of cancer in generations born since 1950.”

Overall cancer deaths among people under 50 have drastically dropped by 44 percent since the 1990s, in large part due to better screenings and therapies, researchers say. The number of deaths from colorectal cancer in this same group, meanwhile, had risen “by 1.1% per year since 2005,” according to an ACS press release issued last week.

The release did not detail potential reasons for this rise in colorectal cancer deaths, though a representative for the ACS told NewsNation that researchers were looking into “diet and obesity for sure.”

This echoes previous findings from the ACS, as well as the opinions of medical experts who attribute at least some instances of colon cancer in young adults to “diet, decreased exercise and poor lifestyle choices like increased smoking or drinking,” Dr. Dana Hayden, a colon and rectal surgery specialist with UW Health in Madison, Wisconsin, said in 2023.

“But there are definitely some other factors that could be related to genetics, that could be related to tumor biology,” Hayden added. “So, we are trying to work very quickly to figure this out.”

The results of a study published in August 2025 also indicated a massive 50 percent spike in colon cancer diagnoses specifically among adults ages 45 to 49, Nexstar’s KXAN reported. But at least part of that percentage was due to a spike in diagnoses made after the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have delayed patients from seeking more prompt medical opinions.

The ACS researchers behind that study, too, said there were numerous possible reasons for diagnosis rates.

“There’s a wealth of research happening in this area right now looking at all kinds of factors such as diet, family history, even early-life exposures like antibiotics,” Dr. Rajesh Shah, of Baylor Scott & White Gastroenterology, told KXAN. “There will be a lot of interesting studies coming out in the next 5-10 years to give us a better sense of this.”

A separate study on the relationship between alcohol consumption and colorectal cancer was published just this past week in the journal *Cancer*. Researchers with the National Health Institute, as well as those with the Universities of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Queen's University in Belfast, found an association between long-term alcohol use and higher colorectal cancer risk.

More specifically, the researchers determined that drinkers who consumed 14 or more alcoholic beverages per week had a 25 percent higher risk of colorectal cancer when compared to those who drank less than one alcoholic beverage per week. Long-term drinkers also had a 95 percent higher risk of rectal cancer than those who virtually abstained.

The good news? The study's limited data suggested that former drinkers who had abstained from alcohol for at least 2 years had "lower cancer risk compared with those who sustained drinking levels."

Medical experts are also hopeful that new screening guidelines, which recently shifted the recommended starting age from 50 to 45, will catch precancerous polyps in the early stages. People with a family history of colorectal cancer, or those with certain bowel conditions, may want to be screened even earlier, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests.

"This research underscores the urgent need to protect and expand access to care, especially at a time when increasing health care premiums and cuts to prevention and screening programs threaten to reverse our progress and undo the gains we have achieved," Lisa A. Lacasse, the president of the American Cancer Society Action Network, said of the organization's recent findings.

She added, "We cannot afford to turn back the clock now."

## **Viewing alcohol ads linked to increased alcohol craving and consumption**

Written by Research Society on Alcohol

Watching ads that promote alcohol has been linked to increased craving for alcohol and increased alcohol consumption for certain people. A study published in *Alcohol: Clinical and Experimental Research* found that people who gravitated, either consciously or subconsciously, toward ads for alcohol instead of ads for other products experienced heightened craving for alcohol, and subsequently drank more than those who did not have a bias toward alcohol ads.

These findings highlight opportunities to reduce susceptibility to the harmful effects of alcohol advertising, both through tailored therapeutic interventions and through regulation targeting involuntary exposure to alcohol ads, particularly in the digital landscape.

For the study, researchers showed video ads for beer and soft drinks to college students. In one test, the students were asked which ads they preferred to watch. In another test, they were shown the ads simultaneously while researchers measured which ads captured their attention.

After watching the ads, students rated their level of craving for beer and then sampled soda and beer in a taste test where they were asked to guess the brands and told they could drink as much as they wanted, while researchers measured how much they drank without the students' awareness. The students in both tests who chose to watch alcohol ads, voluntarily or involuntarily, reported higher craving for alcohol. Those who reported higher craving also drank more of the beer samples.

These findings, which confirm and build on prior research, can help clinicians identify individuals vulnerable to developing alcohol-related problems and offer therapeutic approaches to target the cognitive processes involved in the conscious and unconscious preferences for viewing ads. Specifically, cognitive behavioral therapy can help reduce voluntary viewing of alcohol ads, while cognitive bias modification can help reduce involuntary attention to such ads.

However, the authors note that additional structural safeguards may be warranted, as these individual therapeutic interventions cannot address the effects of ads beyond the individual's control. Social and other digital media often include embedded advertising, which can capture individuals' involuntary attention, suggesting a need for regulatory or other measures to limit embedded alcohol content, autoplayed ads, and other non-user-initiated viewing to reduce involuntary exposure to alcohol ads.

## Bill could change what counts as alcohol in Nebraska

Written by Jeremy Fredricks

Legislation would classify drinks under 0.5% ABV as non-alcoholic but maintain age restrictions for sales

- Nebraska legislation would classify drinks with under 0.5% alcohol by volume as non-alcoholic
- Sales to minors would remain illegal with no established penalties for violations.
- The proposal comes as nationwide non-alcoholic beverage sales near \$1 billion

### BROADCAST TRANSCRIPT:

New Nebraska legislation could redefine what counts as an alcoholic drink in the state, with supporters arguing it will modernize laws as non-alcoholic beers gain popularity.

The proposed bill would classify drinks with an alcohol by volume (ABV) level under 0.5% as non-alcoholic. While it would remain illegal to sell these products to anyone under 21, the legislation establishes no penalties for violations and does not prohibit minors from consuming these beverages.

Chris Wagner, who leads Project Extra Mile, opposes the legislation. I met with Wagner at his office on the University of Nebraska Omaha campus to discuss his concerns.

"I think there is obviously, already a high chance that if underage youth want to get their hands on actual beer or actual alcoholic beverages, it's easier for them to do than say high school youth or middle school youth," Wagner said.

Low-ABV drinks are becoming increasingly popular. Market research from Nielsen IQ in 2025 found that \$925 million was spent on total sales for non-alcoholic beverages, up 22% year over year.

Similar attempts to change alcohol beverage laws failed in 2023 and 2025.

Sen. Stan Clouse from Kearney authored the bill. His office did not respond to a request for comment.

A committee hearing is scheduled for Mon., Feb. 9

## **New federal guidelines downplay the harm of alcohol**

Written by Liene Topko

Proposed changes to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans significantly weaken the recommendations on alcohol consumption, risking serious unintended consequences for Nebraskans. Alcohol-related harms are already a major public health challenge in our state, contributing to higher rates of cancer, liver disease, motor vehicle crashes and preventable deaths — particularly in rural communities where access to health care and treatment services is limited.

In Nebraska, 1,001 individuals die annually as a result of alcohol-related causes, including heart disease and stroke (226), at least seven types of cancer (112), motor vehicle crashes (75) and suicide (59), among other causes.

When federal guidance minimizes the risks of alcohol or depicts drinking as a neutral or even beneficial dietary choice, it sends a confusing message to the public and undermines decades of evidence linking alcohol use to cancer and other chronic diseases. For decades, previous iterations of the Dietary Guidelines recommended that women consume no more than one drink per day and men no more than two. Removing these recommendations risks normalizing heavier drinking, especially when audiences see vague phrasing like "consume less."

Clear consumption limits help individuals make informed decisions. Nebraskans deserve federal nutrition guidance grounded in solid scientific evidence and that clearly communicates the health risks associated with alcohol. Stricter and more specific guidelines can save lives, reduce health care costs and support healthier communities statewide.