



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

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, May 13, 2026
9 a.m.

Please use to sign-in:



A G E N D A

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the April 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes
(please contact PEM staff with corrections)
- III. Transforming Prevention Through Authentic Youth-Adult Partnerships
Nigel Wrangham, NigelStrategies
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. T-N-A Grocery
 - b. Policy
 - i. Dept. of Ag rulemaking postponed
 - ii. Legislature:
 - 1. Deregulation of near beer,
 - 2. Bottle Club bill: Redefine bottle club, require LCC to consider unpaid taxes of applicant, increases penalty for selling w/o license (from Class I misdemeanor to Class IV felony for second offense)
 - 3. LB 330 & 856
 - c. Enforcement
 - i. Law Enforcement Training Summary
 - ii. LCC Engagement Survey
 - d. Youth
 - i. Youth Leadership Retreat, June 1-3, 2026
 - e. Awareness
 - i. PHAN Cafe
 - ii. Earned media
 - iii. Research Summaries available at www.projectextramile.org
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **August 12 @ 9 a.m.**
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 209

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PROJECT EXTRA MILE

OMAHA METRO AREA COALITION MEETING MINUTES

April 8, 2026

- 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: Saral Sapkota, Pat Gromak, Richard Stacy, Claudia Granillo, Nicholas Sauma, Lindsey Fox, Ed Kaiser, Lorelle Muetting, Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell, Tom Safranek, Sharona Ernst, Alvin McCruel, Lauren Garcia, Palistene Gray-Moore, Caleb Vaughan, Jim Timm, and Jason Jones. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Cole Williby, Courtney Zimbelman-Burt, David Berrigan, Jenna Allison, Paige Brenneman, Tracy Burmeister, Julie Lubisi, Julie Chytil, Lanette Richards, Melissa Baron, Betsy Jurgensen, Jayna Schaaf, Elizabeth Woods, Ashley Pick, Jona Beck, Will Meier, Suzanne Crane, Allison Haun, Benita McVicker, Matt Walz, Thomas Sellers, JaNae Vinson, Andy Link, Joanna Rodriguez, A'Jamal-Rashad Byndon, Journey Noyes, Brian Ortner, Thomas Giffie, Jackson Schott Hintz Paula, Maneesh Jain, Pi-Wan Cheng, Rachel Cole, Shelly Aust, and Satish Sagar. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Beatha Kliewer, and Liene Topko.
- III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the March 11th meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.
- IV. Emerging Research on Alcohol & Cancer: Dr. David Berrigan gave an overview of the research on alcohol and cancer, detailing his role at the National Cancer Institute and his assignment to the U.S. Surgeon General's Office for the advisory on alcohol & cancer. He also detailed the evolving federal guidance on alcohol consumption and health, highlighting how the political climate appears to be contributing to a growth in misinformation and the growing power of the alcohol industry over science.
- V. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Policy
 - i. Liene Topko discussed the 2026 legislative session. The Legislature passed the budget, however no new revenue was included and they are likely to be in a shortfall again next year so there will likely be another opportunity to advocate for increasing alcohol taxes. She also shared that the near beer bill did not pass. Chris Wagner highlighted the advocacy efforts of the Youth Leadership Network students for increasing the price of alcohol to reduce associated harms.
 - ii. Wagner informed the group the Department of Agriculture is holding a rulemaking hearing on April 21st regarding cannabinoids in food items. He encouraged coalition members to submit comments in support of these rules.
 - b. Enforcement
 - i. Topko noted that the Lincoln, Omaha, and Ralston Police Departments, Douglas County Sheriff's Office, and Nebraska State Patrol participated in impaired driving enforcements and issued the following citations: 70 DUIs, 9 MIPs, and 8 open containers. OPD, RPD, and DCSO operations

were funded by PEM through Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare grant funding.

- ii. Wagner informed the coalition that two law enforcement trainings will be held on April 14 & 15 in North Platte and Grand Island on multi-agency alcohol compliance checks.

c. Youth

- i. Wagner invited Caleb Vaughan (one of our YLN students) to share about his experience presenting at the UNO Amplify Impact Event about the Network, Retreat, and Leadership Day.
- ii. Registration for the Youth Leadership Retreat is open until May 20th. Students in 8-12th grades are invited to attend from across Nebraska.

VI. Awareness:

- a. Topko shared the YLN students have created social media posts for alcohol awareness month regarding the alcohol & cancer link and encouraged attendees to support their post on the organization's three social media platforms.
- b. The April Research Summary is available at www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary

VII. Additional Discussion/Announcements:

Liene Topko informed the attendees that the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission has posted an engagement survey to gather suggestions for legislation as well as rules & regulations from the public. She encouraged attendees to participate in the survey and provide a public health perspective on improvements. The survey is on the LCC's website.

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

Op-ed: Too many Nebraskans are dying of alcohol-related cancers. Here's how to change that

Written by Chris Wagner

April is Alcohol Awareness Month. Coincidentally, it is also Esophageal and Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Month.

These awareness months have more in common than many realize. That's because even moderate alcohol consumption increases the risk of developing these and at least five other types of cancer.

According to the CDC, Nebraska has 1,001 alcohol-related deaths per year due to excessive alcohol use, with 112 of those deaths being from alcohol-attributable cancers. What's particularly troubling is that any alcohol consumption elevates your risk for developing one of those cancers but the more you drink, the more at risk you put yourself.

That's a big problem for Nebraska. While we're middle of the road for the percentage of adults who report any drinking in the past 30 days, we're the third-worst state for binge drinking with nearly 20 percent of adults reporting binge drinking at least once in the past month.

The 2025 Surgeon General's Advisory on Alcohol and Cancer Risk made the alcohol & cancer connection even clearer. It noted that 16 percent of women who have less than one drink per week will develop an alcohol-related cancer in their lifetime.

That risk increases to 19 percent for one drink a day and 22 percent for two drinks a day. For men, the risk is lower but still notable: Less than one drink a week presents a 10 percent risk, which increases to 13 percent at two drinks per day.

The advisory recommends updating warning labels on alcoholic beverage containers to highlight cancer risk and recommended that the U.S. Dietary Guidelines account for alcohol's cancer risk so that Americans can be better informed about the health risks of alcohol consumption.

Unfortunately, the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines had the alcohol industry's fingerprints all over them. They removed minors under the age of 21 from the listed groups that should avoid alcohol.

The recommended limits on alcohol consumption were also replaced with a vague recommendation that Americans should "consume less alcohol for better overall health." There was also no mention of cancer or the fact that less than one drink per week increases your risk of developing an alcohol-related cancer.

Research shows that approximately 16,800 cancer deaths could be prevented if adults who drink excessively reduce their consumption to within the previously recommended limits found in the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines.

The good news is that states have the ability to regulate how alcohol is sold within their borders. It might surprise you to learn that many of our state senators understand the harms that alcohol causes in Nebraska — from the 1,001 annual deaths, to the underage drinking tragedies in the headlines, to the chronic diseases it causes, the crime, and the \$1.2 billion in annual economic costs that we all pay in one way or another through our tax dollars or insurance premiums.

Omaha-area high school students spent the better part of the last two years advocating for increasing the price of alcohol (Legislative Bill 330) so that the Nebraskans who drink the most pay the most and reduce their drinking and their burden on society.

Most senators that expressed a position on the issue supported an increase in the price of alcohol that could've generated tens of millions of dollars in revenue to address our state's ongoing budget deficit. Yet the power of the alcohol industry kept the bill stuck in the Revenue Committee

A similar price increase was used in Maryland and has produced exciting results — significant reductions in underage drinking (26%) and binge drinking (28%), adult binge drinking (17%), impaired driving among 15-34-year-olds (6%) and sexually-transmitted infections (24%). Lives were saved and Maryland communities were safer.

Evidence-based policies such as increasing the price will reduce alcohol-related cancers, crime, and economic costs. The only thing we lack is the political will needed to enact these policies. Why keep enriching the industry at the expense of our children's well-being and our community's safety? It will take a village to make this happen, but we are closer than you might think.

Chris Wagner is the executive director of Project Extra Mile, a network of community partnerships working to reduce alcohol-related harms statewide

UNL's late-night ride program takes off, but funding questions loom

Written by Chris Dunker

The numbers point to success: Thousands of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students have signed up for and used the new Husker Late Night Ride program.

But Libby Wilkins says the clearest sign comes from what she's hearing at bars and off-campus social events.

"I've heard people say things like, 'I'm pretty sure I'm fine to drive, but I have a free Uber,'" said Wilkins, a senior agricultural leadership major from Ainsworth. "That is exactly what we want to be able to provide for students."

The outgoing UNL student regent and president of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska said the partnership between the university, Husker Athletics, and ride-hailing company Uber has been more of a hit than anyone imagined.

As of Friday morning, more than 5,900 undergraduate students at UNL have signed up to receive free ride vouchers from Uber. Each voucher, valued at \$10, allows students to take a ride within a 3-mile radius of campus between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m.

Since the program started in late January, nearly 13,800 rides have been taken by Husker students, which Wilkins said illustrates how the program is meeting student demand.

Students can simply open their Uber app, hail a ride, and the voucher automatically applies to their fare, she said. If the ride costs more than \$10, the student pays the difference, which often amounts to less than \$2.

"This is a really tangible thing for students because it's something they already use," Wilkins said. "It isn't just a random program or one that only students in the right circles use. A significant amount of the student body is able to use this in a way that's seamless."

Long history at UNL

The Husker Late Night Ride program, which followed NU on Wheels — better known to many as 475-RIDE — came together at the right moment.

Started in 1999 following the death of UNL student Laura Cockson, who was struck and killed by a drunk driver, NU on Wheels gives students who called the number a free ride anywhere between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m.

Funded by ASUN, the free ride program saw the number of users decline throughout the 2010s following the arrival of several ride-share options in the Capital City, until the student government pulled its funding altogether in 2018-19.

Over the next few years, the number of drunk driver arrests made by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Police Department began to spike, according to data from the department.

Campus officers arrested 20 people on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol in 2020, with five of those arrests being students who were enrolled at UNL.

The next year, 2021, UNL PD arrested 47 people (including 12 students) for DUI; that number jumped to 59 (including 15 students) in 2022.

Between 2020 and 2025, nearly 1 in 4 people arrested by UNL PD for DUI were students.

In the meantime, as ASUN continued exploring options to replace NU on Wheels, a breakthrough opened a new pathway: the NU Board of Regents approved the sale of alcoholic drinks at Husker football and volleyball games in October 2024.

To help win approval from ASUN and others ahead of the regents' vote, the athletic department pledged \$100,000 from the proceeds to support alcohol and binge-drinking education programs at UNL.

The idea of using revenue generated through beer sales to give Husker students a free ride won overwhelming support among students at the 2025 campus elections, Wilkins said, but the plan languished at the end of the semester and during summer break.

Beginning in the fall, Wilkins set about meeting with Ryan Lahne, assistant vice chancellor in UNL's Student Life office, and Athletic Director Troy Dannen about using the funds as seed money for the Husker Late Night Ride program.

"Troy said 'you can do whatever you want with the money,'" she said.

'Dream program'

In the last few years, Uber has launched partnerships at more than 600 colleges and universities on a wide range of ride voucher programs.

Anushka Lakhani, a go-to-market specialist for Uber for Business — Higher Education, said some of those programs give students a free ride home from a late night work shift or internship. In other places, Uber provides "first and last mile" rides from public transportation like trains.

UNL's late night ride idea has been adopted in other places, including the University of Iowa, Lakhani said, but its rollout and early adoption have the ride-hailing company gushing.

"Nebraska is our dream program in so many ways," Lakhani said.

Schools often put a lot of thought into how they want their programs to operate, she added, but how to get students' attention and interest is often an afterthought.

Wilkins, Lahne and others developed a coordinated social media campaign, a website with frequently asked questions, and got the Husker Late Night Ride program in front of students for a month before launch. Lakhani said that made a huge difference.

"There was a lot of intention and thought into how this was communicated to students that it's almost become a source of truth for me moving forward because we've seen how it's been successful," she said.

When the vouchers became available in January, Husker students snapped them up at a quicker rate than other universities that had rolled out a similar program.

"It has been an amazing program and far exceeded our expectations," Lahne said.

The university maintains a dashboard with a host of data showcasing how the Husker Late Night Ride program is being utilized.

- Most rides (87%) happen on Thursday (20%), Friday (39%), and Saturday (28.3%) night.
- 61% of rides take place before midnight. The busiest hour is between 10-11 p.m., where 23% of rides have happened.
- 1,437 students have used all 5 vouchers made available to them this semester.
- The average ride fare is \$11.50, meaning students who use a voucher pay \$1.50.
- The biggest tab for which a voucher was applied was nearly \$63; the smallest fare was \$1.26 cents.
- On average, students ride 2.14 miles, well within the 3-mile radius of City and East Campus.
- The shortest ride recorded is a meager 0.15 miles, or 792 feet, which is roughly the distance between the highest row in North Stadium and the highest row in what is now South Stadium.
- This year, to date, UNLPD has made a total of 12 DUI arrests. Only one has been a student.

Chris Wagner, executive director of Project Extra Mile, which seeks to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms, said those figures may not include arrests that happen away from campus.

"The fact that arrests are down doesn't mean that students aren't driving impaired -- they just aren't getting caught on campus," said Wagner, who spoke in opposition to the sale of alcohol at Husker events in 2024.

The program may provide a benefit to UNL students, he added, but it could come with some drawbacks as well.

Students may be drinking more because they know they have a ride waiting. Excessive drinking may also contribute to increased sexual assaults, violent crime, property crime, and health problems, Wagner said.

"That's not to say that it's not a good use of funds raised from alcohol sales, but it does gloss over the other harms that these sales cause for students and the broader community," he said.

For now, the program is set to continue. Three weeks after the Husker Late Night Ride started, Wilkins and Lahne sat down to talk. Lahne had good news and bad news.

The good news was the program had proved to be a smash with students. Usage roughly doubles that at Iowa, but it comes with a cost.

UNL had been chewing through the \$100,000 provided by Nebraska Athletics at an unsustainable clip.

While an additional \$25,000 in private funds was secured to help the university reach the end of the semester (a total in \$118,833 has been spent as of April 27), Lahne said changes might have to be made to ensure its survival.

"It's underfunded," he said. "Based on the usage we have seen, in the fall, it will either need new funds or be modified to reduce the number of rides a student can receive, or in the geographic footprint where rides can occur."

Nebraska Athletics has pledged to contribute \$100,000 to support the program for the 2026-27 school year – possibly more, according to a spokesman – but Wilkins said students will have to take the lead.

The upcoming graduate who is one of the late-night ride program’s biggest boosters but has yet to use it herself, hopes ASUN can work with alumni or donors to ensure more students can find a safe way home.

“If we want this program we think is so beneficial for the student body to continue, we’re going to have to find funding,” she said. “It’s a really important program, and it’s been really exciting to see it used so much.”