



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

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, August 13, 2025
9 a.m.

Please use to sign-in:



A G E N D A

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the May 14, 2025 Meeting Minutes
(*please contact PEM staff with corrections*)
- III. 100 Deadliest Days of Summer
Brian Ortnier, AAA Nebraska
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. O'Connor DUI
 - ii. Hobie Rupe
 - b. Policy
 - i. Federal Funding
 - ii. TTB Comments – due Friday
 - iii. U.S. Dietary Guidelines
 - c. Enforcement
 - i. Law Enforcement Training Recap
 - ii. Saturation Patrols & Compliance Checks
 - d. Youth
 - i. Youth Leadership Retreat Recap
 - ii. Leadership Network next meeting August 25th at 7:00 p.m.
 - e. Awareness
 - i. June – August Research Summaries available at
www.projectextramile.org
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **September 10th, 9 a.m.**
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 128

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – October 1, 2025

Youth Leadership Network meeting – August 25, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

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

PROJECT EXTRA MILE

OMAHA METRO AREA COALITION MEETING MINUTES May 14, 2025

- I. Call to Order: Coalition Chair Tom Safranek called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members and speakers in attendance: Sharona Ernst, Cody McGee, Adam Turnbull, Jeremy Welsch, Derek Schwartz, Jason Sharp, Jeremy Leifeld, and Alvin McCruel. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Erin Bone, Jona Beck, Carrie Christofes, Maggie Ballard, Jayna Schaaf, Jeffrey Foote, Jeremiah Johnson, Ken Yoho, Brian van Berkum, Nolan Siemonsma, Lanette Richards, Jeanette McFee, and Tom Safranek. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Beatha Kliwer, and Liene Topko
- III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the April 9th meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.
- IV. Preview of 2025 Liquor Law Enforcement Training: Carrie Christofes, executive director of the National Liquor Law Enforcement Association, shared about the NLLEA. Their membership represents 43 states with over 1,700 members, including in Nebraska. The organization has a variety of initiatives including: record management systems of alcohol law enforcement, a direct-to-consumer workgroup focused on shipping/delivery, a professional development committee, place of last drink (POLD) implementation & evaluation, alcohol law enforcement training, and an annual conference. As a part of their training arm, the NLLEA will come to Nebraska in August for two 2-day trainings focused on alcohol enforcement on topics such as report writing and documentation, sales to minors, sales to visibly intoxicated, source investigations, license inspections, and nuisance establishments.
- V. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Liene Topko shared that Krush Lounge in downtown Omaha surrendered their liquor license. However, they have opened as a BYOB members club. Krush, Club 180, and Club Omaha are all similar concept businesses that have raised issues among the Liquor Control Commission since they do not have a liquor license, but alcohol is being consumed. Inv. McGee with the Nebraska State Patrol shared that operating without a liquor license is a misdemeanor with a \$100 fine.
 - b. Policy
 - i. Liene shared that a bill ([H.R.3011](#)) was introduced federally to allow the USPS to ship alcohol directly to consumers, this is the fourth attempt to achieve this. A North Carolina study found that 45% of businesses delivered alcohol to minors.
 - ii. The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) is accepting comments regarding alcohol labeling until August 15. Improvements include nutritional and allergen labeling. It would also be beneficial if

containers listed how many standard drinks are in it, rather than just alcohol content levels. Coalition members are encouraged to submit comments online. More details can be found on the May newsletter.

- iii. There are rumors that there may be an attempt to get LB 33, removal of 'near beer' from the definition of beer, out of the committee, however the session is nearing the end so this will likely be during the 2026 session.

LB 113 increases the number of retail locations a licensee can have and how many gallons a micro distillery may self-distribute further eroding the three-tier alcohol regulatory system. LB 186 was amended into LB 113 and changes provisions related to entertainment districts to allow patrons to cross a street/highway with an open container if traveling between entertainment district licensees. The bill has been approved by the Governor.

LB 124 changes penalties for a motor vehicle homicide of an unborn child as a result of impaired driving to equal those of an adult. This bill was amended into LB 530 which has been placed on Select File.

LB 330 increases the alcohol sales tax by 10% with revenue going toward prevention, treatment, and law enforcement. The bill remains in the Revenue Committee.

c. Enforcement

- i. Topko shared that enforcements are being scheduled to look at retail and social access to alcohol by youth to focus on preventing underage drinking.

d. Youth

- i. The 2025 Youth Leadership Retreat will take place on June 3-5 at Haven 150. Registration is limited to the first 20 students. A promotional video was played.

VI. Awareness:

- a. The May Research Summaries are available at www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary

VII. Additional Discussion/Announcements: n/a

VIII. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

University of Nebraska regent accused in DUI crash no longer employed as prosecutor

Written by Justin Diep

A University of Nebraska regent who also served as a prosecutor is no longer employed by the Douglas County Attorney's Office after being charged with driving under the influence and injuring two people in a car crash.

Elizabeth O'Connor, 34, is accused of causing a crash near 63rd and Blondo Streets around 8:30 p.m. on May 21 that sent one person to a hospital with a broken back and a broken pelvis that was initially considered life-threatening, according to an affidavit filed by an Omaha police officer.

"This is a personnel matter and there will be no further comment," a statement from the County Attorney's Office said. "We thank her for her prior service to Douglas County."

O'Connor joined the County Attorney's Office in February 2020, according to her LinkedIn profile.

The affidavit claimed O'Connor, who was also treated for minor injuries at the Nebraska Medical Center, "displayed objective symptoms of intoxication including bloodshot/watery eyes, slurred speech and a moderate odor of an alcoholic beverage emitting from her breath." The officer also alleged in the affidavit that a "half-empty" bottle of Fireball whisky was found in O'Connor's SUV.

The affidavit alleges O'Connor had a blood alcohol content of 0.321 — four times the legal limit — in a blood draw.

O'Connor was first elected to the University of Nebraska Board of Regents representing District 4 in 2018 and was reelected in 2024. O'Connor's district encompasses Omaha roughly east of 72nd Street and north of Harrison Street.

The Omaha City Prosecutor's Office is prosecuting O'Connor's case to avoid a conflict of interest.

In a statement, a University of Nebraska spokesperson said the university "is deeply saddened by the events leading to the recent announcements" involving O'Connor.

"We understand that this is an ongoing legal process. We extend our best wishes for a speedy recovery and complete healing to her, her family and all of those involved in these events," the spokesperson said.

A Douglas County judge set O'Connor's bail at \$25,000 at her first court appearance on Friday. She was released from jail after posting 10% — \$2,500 — of that amount. O'Connor is next scheduled to appear in court for a preliminary hearing on Sept. 9.

Driving under the influence and causing bodily injury is punishable by up to three years in prison and 18 months of post-release supervision, along with a \$10,000 fine.

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission suspends director, citing joint federal-state investigation

Written by Zach Wendling

The Nebraska Liquor Control Commission suspended its executive director, Hobert “Hobie” Rupe, without pay Thursday after a federal search warrant was served on the commission a day before.

The now two-member commission met for less than 3 minutes. Commissioner Bruce Bailey of Lincoln, the commission chair, said the search warrant came based on “a joint federal-state investigation into alleged criminal conduct.”

“These alleged offenses relate to his fitness and ability to continue to serve in his present position,” Bailey said. “An immediate suspension is necessary pending receipt of further information.”

Bailey and Commissioner Kim Lowe of Kearney both voted to suspend Rupe. No other details were shared. Rupe’s current salary is \$130,596.96.

A spokesperson for the FBI Omaha office confirmed federal agents executed the search warrant Wednesday, and no arrests were made.

“Because it is an ongoing investigation, I cannot comment further,” the FBI Omaha spokesperson said.

The Nebraska Attorney General’s Office declined to comment Thursday. A call to Rupe went to voicemail.

The Governor’s Office declined to comment on a legal issue for a state agency not directly under Gov. Jim Pillen’s control.

Rupe began serving as the Liquor Control Commission’s executive director Jan. 15, 2004. He previously served almost 10 years as an assistant attorney general. Rupe is admitted to practice before the Nebraska Supreme Court, the local U.S. District Court, the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1992, Rupe graduated from the University of Nebraska College of Law.

Pillen’s staff said the governor would “fill in due course” a vacancy in representation on the three-member commission for someone to represent the 2nd Congressional District. The six-year term of former Commissioner Harry Hoch, Jr., of Omaha expired last Saturday.

Voters in November gave the Liquor Control commissioners additional responsibility by placing the three commissioners also on the state’s new Medical Cannabis Commission. That new part of the job requires them to craft regulations by July 1 to begin licensing medical cannabis dispensaries by Oct. 1.

At the end of the Thursday meeting, Bailey told those in attendance: “You all may be wondering a lot of things, as we are, and you’ll know more over the next few weeks.”

Omaha metro law enforcement receives training on alcohol laws, safety

Written by First Alert 6 staff

Earlier this week, officers from more than a dozen agencies in Nebraska took part in a special training in Omaha.

According to Project Extra Mile, a local nonprofit, more than 1,000 people in Nebraska die from alcohol-related causes every year.

In the training held Wednesday and Thursday, law enforcement officers learned ways to handle problems surrounding drinking.

The program is designed to help police understand the law. This includes selling to minors and those who have already had enough to drink that night.

“Our communities are suffering from the crime that is alcohol-involved. So, it’s really about making the community safer and healthier,” Chris Wagner with Project Extra Mile said. “And that’s what this training is all about.”

The training also touched on dealing with bars that have repeat problems with alcohol sales.

The Nebraska Highway Safety Office and the National Liquor Law Enforcement Association also collaborated for the training.



RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: June 2025

Key takeaways from included research:

- Alcohol is a known carcinogen, but its link to pancreatic cancer has been unclear. This analysis of over 2.4 million participants from 30 cohorts found that higher alcohol intake was associated with increased pancreatic cancer risk, especially from beer and spirits. A 10 g/day increase in alcohol was linked to a 3% higher risk, with consistent results across gender and smoking status. The association was strongest in Europe, Australia, and North America, but not observed in Asia.
- This study examined how alcohol use among family caregivers of people with dementia is linked to abusive or neglectful behaviors. Researchers surveyed 453 U.S. caregivers over 21 days, tracking daily alcohol use and caregiving behaviors. They found that 18.1% of caregivers screened positive for hazardous drinking, and over 75% reported at least one abusive or neglectful incident during the study. Hazardous drinking and daily alcohol use were both independently associated with higher odds of abusive or neglectful behaviors.
- Another study examined caregiver alcohol use and risk of child maltreatment. This systematic review and meta-analysis from high-income countries examined both the incidence and recurrence of child maltreatment in relation to caregiver alcohol use. Caregiver alcohol-related diagnoses were associated with higher risks of both outcomes. Although findings were limited by high study variability, results remained consistent after sensitivity analyses. These findings support stronger efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm to children.
- This study explored how ethnic–racial identity (ERI), conversations about race, and racial discrimination relate to GPA and alcohol use among 1,033 college students of color. ERI exploration was linked to higher GPA for females, while positive race-related conversations predicted higher GPA for males. Negative conversations about race were associated with greater alcohol use for males, but not females. ERI resolution, racial discrimination, and negative conversations did not significantly impact GPA. These results highlight how cultural experiences differently affect academic and health outcomes by sex.



RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: July 2025

Key takeaways from included research:

- This study analyzed alcoholic liver disease (ALD) mortality trends in American Indians and Alaskan Natives (AI/ANs) from 1999 to 2020. Researchers found a significant rise in age-adjusted mortality rates from 27.2 to 88.4 per 100,000. Increases were highest among women, those aged 45–64, rural residents, and those in the Western and Midwestern regions of the U.S. Social disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed, highlighting the need to address social determinants of health in this population.
- Alcohol-associated liver disease (ALD) deaths in the U.S. more than doubled from 1999 to 2022, with the sharpest increases occurring after 2018 and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study analyzed over 436,000 ALD deaths, finding especially steep mortality increases among women, young adults (ages 25–44), and American Indian/Alaska Native populations. Both alcohol-associated hepatitis and cirrhosis deaths also rose significantly, with women and younger adults showing the most rapid growth. These trends underscore the urgent need for targeted public health strategies to address rising ALD mortality and related health disparities.
- Zero-alcohol drinks (<0.5% ABV) are often perceived by adolescents as alcoholic, especially when branded similarly to alcoholic products. In a study of 331 Australian adolescents, most categorized zero-alcohol drinks as alcohol, though with slower response times than for actual alcoholic beverages. These findings suggest zero-alcohol drinks may influence adolescents to like alcoholic drinks, highlighting the need for stronger regulations.
- This study examined how having a heavy drinker in one's life affects students' experiences and health. After adjusting for demographic and behavioral differences, students with a heavy drinker in their life had higher odds of experiencing alcohol-related harms (e.g., harassment, sexual harm), frequent mental distress, and using services due to someone else's drinking. These effects varied somewhat by the heavy drinker's relationship to the student but were consistently linked to negative outcomes.

Teens of any age who drink alcohol with their parents' permission drink more as young adults, new research shows

Written by Bernard Pereda

Children and teenagers of any age who sip or taste alcohol with their parents' permission are more likely to engage in risky drinking in young adulthood. That was the finding of a new study my colleagues and I published in the journal *Addictive Behaviors*.

In the study, we examined questionnaires filled out annually between 2009 and 2018 by 387 adolescents starting at age 11 and an accompanying parent. Topics included history of child and parent alcohol use, beliefs about alcohol and rules about alcohol in the home. The questionnaires also asked adolescents if they ever drank alcohol with their parents' permission, even just a few sips – and if yes, at what age they first did so.

We analyzed whether drinking alcohol with parental permission during adolescence predicted alcohol outcomes in young adulthood, at ages 18 to 20. These outcomes included how often and how much they drank, alcohol use disorder symptoms and negative consequences such as self-injury and regretting things said while drinking.

Then, we looked at whether the age at which this practice began affected likelihood of risky drinking. In our analysis, we also accounted for factors such as peer alcohol use, parental alcohol use and personality.

In our sample, drinking with parental permission began anywhere from age 5 to age 17, but typically started around age 12. We found that about 80% of the adolescents responded that they had drunk alcohol with parental permission. That number is higher than in some other studies, most likely because our study had a wide age range. Research exploring this topic generally focuses on younger adolescents, who are less likely to be allowed to try alcohol by their parents, but this practice becomes more common as adolescents get older.

We found that adolescents were more likely in young adulthood to drink more often and in greater amounts in families that allowed this practice compared with those that did not. The risk of experiencing symptoms of alcohol use disorder and negative consequences from drinking in young adulthood was also higher. Importantly, the age at which drinking with parents' permission began did not change this effect.

Why it matters

Parents play a critical role in teaching their children about alcohol. The family is often the first context in which children are introduced to alcohol, either by trying it themselves or by observing others drinking. In the U.S., studies suggest that 30% to 40% of children under age 13 try alcohol with parental permission.

Many parents view this as a protective strategy, believing that it reduces curiosity about alcohol and provides an opportunity to supervise safe drinking. Yet studies from several research groups have found that parents providing alcohol, even just sips or tastes, actually increases rather than decreases future drinking.

Our study is the first to explore whether the age that trying alcohol with parental permission makes a difference for increased potential of later alcohol use. Overall, the findings can inform public health messages explaining the risks of allowing adolescents to try alcohol at any age.

Why might parental permission to sip or taste alcohol increase risk? Some scientists have speculated that it may promote the belief that parents approve of underage drinking and shift children's attitudes and beliefs to be more pro-alcohol.

Ongoing and still unpublished work in our lab supports this. Namely, it strengthens their beliefs in the potential positive outcomes of drinking, such as making parties more fun, and weakens their beliefs in the potential negative outcomes, such as getting in trouble.

What still isn't known

Future studies can shed light on whether regularly sipping and tasting alcohol in adolescence is more risky than doing it just once or twice.

Additionally, how harmful the practice is may depend on adolescents' personalities as well as the context in which parents allow it. For example, it may be particularly harmful for children who are inclined to seek out novel and exciting experiences. On the other hand, in highly structured settings such as religious events, it may be less risky.

‘Our community feels like nobody is listening to us’: Neighbors continue to raise concerns after crashes

Written by Greta Goede

After another recent crash near 80th and Q, Ralston neighbors are asking the city to take further actions to keep their community safe.

- Neighbors say more changes need to be made to keep homes safe.
- According to the city, speed bumps can't be added due to the road being an emergency route.
- “The streets are very narrow here, we have lower speed limits to make the streets safe but it's just a basic disregard for the law,” Ashley Cap said.

Ralston neighbor Ashley Cap wants something to be done about this stretch of road that goes into main street Ralston. According to Cap people speed, run stop signs and drunk drivers have crashed through yards, and even homes.

“The streets are very narrow here, we have lower speed limits to make the streets safe but it's just a basic disregard for the law,” she said.

In early April, reporter Greta Goede spoke with Cap and other homeowners after a car hit a guard rail near 80th and Q, driving into a lawn. At the end of May, another vehicle went through multiple backyards at the same intersection after missing the turn. For weeks neighbors have been telling KMTV they are afraid to let their kids play outside.

“How does make you feel seeing this and also seeing kids walking and biking up and down these streets?” “Terrified,” Cap said.

KMTV reached out to the city to ask what more could be done about the speeding and drunk drivers on the street.

A spokesperson told KMTV that since the road into the main street is an emergency route, speed bumps can't be added, and the guard rail near 80th and q can't be extended more due to gas lines. Although the city is adding flashing lights near the intersection to notify drivers of the curves and speed, neighbors still tell KMTV it's not enough.

“We want to make these changes, but our community feels like nobody is listening to us,” Cap said.

After KMTV first reported on the crashes, the city installed a new longer guard rail near 80th and Q. Weeks later, another guard was installed outside Cap's home, but neighbors said they are going to continue to sound the alarm until more changes are made.

According to Ralston, more patrols are being put on the street, but there is not enough manpower to monitor the street frequently. KMTV reached out to the Ralston Police Department but is still waiting for a response.

According to the city, the flashing signs should be installed this month.

Alcohol is killing more Americans today than 20 years ago

Written by Julia Musto

The number of alcohol-related deaths in the U.S. has been rising over the course of the past two decades.

On Wednesday, a group of physicians from across the country said that liver disease deaths had roughly doubled over the course of 20 years, noting significant acceleration during and following the Covid pandemic. Alcohol consumption can damage the liver, with the sharp rise in issues coming at a time when other liver diseases like hepatitis C were falling.

“Mortality from alcohol-associated liver disease has increased significantly across most demographic groups in the US from 1999 to 2022,” they said in their findings.

Looking at 436,814 alcohol-associated liver disease deaths recorded during that period, they found that the mortality rate had surged from 6.7 to 12.5 deaths per 100,000 people.

The annual increase was higher among women than men, and young people showed “concerning trends.”

That was also the case among American Indian or Alaska Native populations, which faced the highest death rates. Those increased from about 25 to nearly 47 per 100,000 between 1999 to 2022.

Among white Americans, the rates also rose. Deaths among Black Americans initially fell, but then spiked in 2019. They rose about 21 percent annually through 2022.

Before and during the pandemic, mortality rates also surged an annual average of 9 percent from 2018 to 2022. Researchers pinned the rise during this period on pandemic-related stressor, such as financial insecurity and social isolation, which led to an increase in drinking.

The research was published in the journal JAMA Network Open.

The news comes after similar research presented last month found the number of annual alcohol deaths due to cancer had doubled in recent years, rising from 11,896 in 1990 to 23,207 by 2021. Those conclusions also noted a spike during the pandemic, and upticks among women.

In both cases, the authors said that these worrying results indicate the “urgent” need for enhanced prevention.

“These findings demand comprehensive public health strategies focused on enhanced screening, improved addiction treatment access, and targeted interventions for high-risk groups. Long-term monitoring and research into intervention effectiveness are crucial for addressing this growing public health crisis,” the doctors said.

Retired judge appointed to Nebraska Liquor Control Commission vacancy

Written by Zach Wendling

A retired Douglas County District Court judge will be the next member of the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission and jointly serve on the Nebraska Medical Cannabis Commission.

Gov. Jim Pillen on Wednesday announced the six-year appointment of former District Judge J. Michael Coffey of Omaha to the Liquor Commission. Coffey retired in June 2023 after nearly 25 years on the 4th Judicial District bench, currently only Douglas County. Coffey must be confirmed by the Legislature in 2026 to stay in his role.

The three Liquor Control Commission members each represent one of the state's three congressional districts. The same three automatically serve on the Medical Cannabis Commission under a law voters approved in November 2024.

Commissioners must draft licensing criteria for medical cannabis establishments by July 1 and begin awarding licenses by Oct. 1. The medical cannabis board's next meeting is 10 a.m. June 26 in Lincoln.

Commissioners will consider a potential memorandum of agreement with the commission, Pillen's Policy Research Office and the Nebraska Department of Health Human Services for the rulemaking process. They will also discuss, and potentially approve, emergency or draft regulations before the July 1 deadline.

Coffey, prior to former Gov. Ben Nelson appointing him to the district court in 1998, was a private attorney in Omaha. He earned his law degree from the Creighton University School of Law in 1974.

He is a Vietnam War veteran, having served in the U.S. Army from 1969-1971.

A judicial oversight board in 2013 cleared Coffey of unethical behavior over a complaint from an ex-wife about how he had handled his daughter receiving a DUI conviction. The commission, in its report, wrote that a judge shouldn't "lose his or her rights and responsibilities as a parent simply because he or she holds judicial office."

The Nebraska State Bar Association, which Coffey served in leadership roles for, consistently recommended Coffey be retained in each of his local elections, in 2002, 2008, 2014 and 2020.

The Governor's Office had no immediate answer about how many Nebraskans applied for the 2nd Congressional District vacancy on the Liquor Control Commission.

Pillen chose not to reappoint former Liquor Commissioner Harry Hoch, Jr., after Hoch's term expired May 24. Pillen told the Nebraska Examiner it was "just time."

Hoch, who had 40 years of liquor industry knowledge, said Pillen's chief of staff told him the governor wanted someone with more "cannabis experience."

Pillen's announcement of Coffey did not mention the Medical Cannabis Commission. Coffey has presided over felony drug conviction cases or other cases involving marijuana, in addition to other legal experience.

Pointing to a phrase from former UCLA basketball Coach John Wooden, Pillen has said regulators must "be quick, but don't hurry," stating: "This is important we get it right."

"We're not going to become recreational [marijuana] as long as I'm your governor, like our state to the west," Pillen said during his monthly call-in show Monday.

US to drop guidance to limit alcohol to one or two drinks per day, sources say

Written by Emma Rumney and Jessica DiNapoli

U.S. Dietary Guidelines are expected to eliminate the long-standing recommendation that adults limit alcohol consumption to one or two drinks per day, according to three sources familiar with the matter, in what could be a major win for an industry threatened by heightened scrutiny of alcohol's health effects.

The updated Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which could be released as early as this month, are expected to include a brief statement encouraging Americans to drink in moderation or limit alcohol intake due to associated health risks, the sources said.

The guidelines are still under development and subject to change, two of the sources and a fourth individual familiar with the process said.

Currently, the recommendations advise limiting drinking to one serving or less per day for women and two or less for men, widely seen as a moderate level.

Similar guidelines exist in countries such as the United Kingdom, which advises limiting drinking to 14 units per week, while Canada, however, has adopted a more cautious stance, warning that health risks begin to increase after just two drinks per week.

Even moderate drinking is linked to some health risks, such as higher risk of breast cancer, though some studies have also found an association with possible health benefits, such as a lower risk of stroke.

The fourth source said that the scientific basis for recommending specific daily limits is limited, and the goal is to ensure the guidelines reflect only the most robust evidence.

The new guidelines, developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are closely watched internationally and influence policies ranging from school lunch programs to medical advice. Neither department responded to requests for comment.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a known teetotaler, has remained largely silent on alcohol but has emphasised a focus on whole foods in the upcoming guidelines.

Some alcohol executives had feared a move towards tighter recommendations on alcohol intake as authorities like the World Health Organization upped their warnings about alcohol's health risks.

Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said alcohol consumption increases the risk of at least seven types of cancer and called for warning labels on alcoholic drinks.

Major industry players, including Diageo (DGE.L), opens new tab and Anheuser-Busch InBev (ABI.BR), opens new tab, have lobbied lawmakers throughout the review process. Senate records show each company spent millions on lobbying efforts related to the guidelines and a range of other issues such as tax and trade in 2024 and 2025. Both companies declined to comment.

The new guidelines are set to move away from suggesting consumers limit alcohol consumption to a specific number of daily servings, according to the three sources, who asked not to be named in order to speak freely.

One person said the new alcohol-related recommendation will probably be limited to a sentence or two. Another said the existing numbers tied to moderate drinking could still appear in a longer appendix.

While industry representatives have lobbied lawmakers on the guidelines or how they should be decided, some officials and researchers advocated for tighter restrictions.

Reports intended to inform the guidelines have meanwhile drawn different conclusions about alcohol's health effects and the science around this.

'UNHELPFUL'

The guidelines, which are reviewed every five years, have advised drinking in moderation and defined that as no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two for men since 1990.

Eva Greenthal, a senior policy scientist at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a non-profit focused on nutrition, health and food safety, said the more general language expected in the guidelines was "so vague as to be unhelpful".

Under such a change, the message that even moderate drinking can increase risks, especially for breast cancer, would get lost, she continued.

Two studies were produced to inform the development of the guidelines. The first found that moderate drinking was associated with increased risk of some cancers, but a decreased risk of dying from any cause and some cardiovascular problems like stroke.

The evidence for some other health impacts was insufficient to draw conclusions, it found. The other report conversely found the risk of dying from alcohol use, including increased risk for seven cancers, begins at any or low levels of alcohol use and increases with higher consumption.

WHO pushes countries to raise prices on sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco by 50%

Written by Jennifer Rigby

The World Health Organization is pushing countries to raise the prices of sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco by 50% over the next 10 years through taxation, its strongest backing yet for taxes to help tackle chronic public health problems.

The United Nations health agency said the move would help cut consumption of the products, which contribute to diseases like diabetes and some cancers, as well as raising money at a time when development aid is shrinking and public debt rising.

"Health taxes are one of the most efficient tools we have," said Jeremy Farrar, WHO assistant-director general of health promotion and disease prevention and control. "It's time to act."

The WHO launched the push, which it called "3 by 35" at the UN Finance for Development conference in Seville.

WHO said that its tax initiative could raise \$1 trillion by 2035 based on evidence from health taxes in countries such as Colombia and South Africa.

The WHO has backed tobacco taxes and price rises for decades and has called for taxes on alcohol and sugary drinks in recent years, but this is the first time it has suggested a target price rise for all three products.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the conference that the taxes could help governments "adjust to the new reality" and bolster their own health systems with the money raised.

Many low and middle-income countries are coping with cuts to aid spending led by the United States, which is not attending the Seville conference. The U.S. is also in the process of withdrawing from the WHO

FROM \$4 to \$10

As an example, the initiative would mean a government in a middle-income country raising taxes on the product to push the price up from \$4 today to \$10 by 2035, taking into account inflation, said WHO health economist Guillermo Sandoval.

Nearly 140 countries had already raised tobacco taxes and therefore prices by over 50% on average between 2012 and 2022, the WHO added.

Sandoval said the WHO was also considering broader taxation recommendations, including on ultra-processed food, after the agency finalises its definition of that type of food in the coming months. But he added that the agency expected pushback from the industries involved.

"It's deeply concerning that the World Health Organization (WHO) continues to disregard over a decade of clear evidence showing that taxing sugar-sweetened beverages has never improved health outcomes or reduced obesity in any country," said Kate Loatman, executive director of the International Council of Beverages Associations, adding that the industry was working on options to support health.

"The World Health Organization's suggestion that raising taxes will prevent alcohol-related harm is misguided," said Amanda Berger, senior vice president of science and research at the Distilled Spirits Council, adding that it would not prevent alcohol abuse.

The International Food and Beverage Alliance's Secretary General, Rocco Renaldi, said in a statement that it welcomed the WHO's drive to strengthen health systems but "warns against grouping sugar-sweetened beverages alongside inherently harmful goods like tobacco."

The tax initiative is backed by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and involves support for countries who want to take action.



Meetings are held at
UNO's Community Engagement Center
6400 University Drive South, Rm 221



2025 - 26 **Meeting Dates**

August 25th
September 15th
October 20th
November 17th
December 8th
January 26th
February 23rd
March 16th
April 20th
(Extra meetings
as needed)