



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

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, September 10, 2025
9 a.m.

Please use to sign-in:



A G E N D A

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the August 13, 2025 Meeting Minutes
(*please contact PEM staff with corrections*)
- III. Community Alcohol Enforcement
Chiefs Jeremy Kinsey (Blair) & Mike Schofield (La Vista)
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Policy
 - i. Alcohol Intake Study
 - ii. Dietary Guidelines
 - iii. Federal Funding
 - b. Enforcement
 - i. Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Executive Director
 - ii. Saturation Patrols & Compliance Checks
 - iii. Law Enforcement Workgroup Meeting October 8th at 10:00 a.m.
 - c. Youth
 - i. August Youth Meeting Recap
 - ii. Next meeting September 15th at 7:00 p.m.
 - d. Awareness
 - i. September Research Summary available at www.projectextramile.org
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **October 8th, 9 a.m.** with *David Berrigan, National Cancer Institute Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences*
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 209

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – November 4-5, 2025
Youth Leadership Network meeting – September 15, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.
Law Enforcement Workgroup meeting – October 8, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.

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PROJECT EXTRA MILE

OMAHA METRO AREA COALITION MEETING MINUTES August 13, 2025

- I. Call to Order: Chris Wagner called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members and speakers in attendance: Sharona Ernst, Derek Schwartz, Jason Sharp, Russ Zeeb, Brian Ortner, Todd Reeson, Joe Martinec, Ed Kaiser, Nicholas Sauma, Kipp McKenzie, Maggie Ballard, Lorelle Muetting, Palistene Gray-Moore, and Alvin McCruel. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Erin Bone, Jeanne Bietz, and Courtney Zimbelman-Burt. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Beatha Kliewer, and Cecelia Fuller.
- III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the May 14th meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.
- IV. 100 Deadliest Days of Summer: Brian Ortner with AAA Nebraska quizzed coalition members on their traffic safety knowledge. He discussed the “Crashes Hit Different” campaign and how the most common causes of automobile crash fatalities are drunk driving, texting & driving, speeding, and lack of seatbelt use. Ortner also discussed teen driver crashes and distracted driving.
- V. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Chris Wagner discussed a recent high-profile case involving alcohol-impaired driving and emphasized that work must focus on the environment, rather than the individual, to achieve decreased harms.
 - ii. Wagner also discussed the resignation of the executive director of the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission following a joint investigation by the FBI and Nebraska Attorney General’s Office. He also shared that the alcohol industry is being consulted in the hiring of the new director.
 - b. Policy
 - i. Wagner discussed federal government reductions in force (employees are being laid off or fired) and how it is impacting the agencies that support the coalition’s work. Wagner also highlighted some substance abuse prevention grants that coalitions across the state receive and detailed how some have been targeted for elimination in the president’s budget. Nevertheless, Congress will have the final say on how federal grant dollars are spent. Some good news he shared was that a Senate subcommittee included continued funding for the PFS grant, but the process is far from over.
 - ii. The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) is accepting comments regarding alcohol labeling until this Friday. Coalition members are encouraged to submit comments online that would require alcohol labels include basic information such as ingredients, number of standard drinks, and a cancer warning.

- iii. Wagner shared that the upcoming U.S. Dietary guidelines are expected to worsen pertaining to alcohol. Currently the guidelines are no more than 2 drinks per day for a male, 1 drink for a female, and if you don't drink to not start for health reasons. Canadian guidelines recommend drinking no more than 2 drinks per week to increase the likelihood of avoiding alcohol-related consequences for oneself and others.
- iv. Finally, Lorelle Mueting shared a recent news story about High Noon seltzers being packed in Celsius energy drink cans.

c. Enforcement

- i. Staff provided a summary of the two 2025 Law Enforcement Trainings that took place in Kearney and Omaha and covered many aspects of alcohol enforcement and how it can improve the safety of communities. During the Kearney training, officers had an opportunity to conduct a premise inspection at a business to apply what they learned in the classroom.

d. Youth

- i. The 2025 Youth Leadership Retreat took place on June 3-5 at Haven 150 with 11 attendees. Youth trainer Nigel Wrangham helped youth better understand the harms of alcohol and their role in advocating for policies that will prevent underage and binge drinking. Youth Leadership Network meetings will resume on August 25th at 7:00 p.m. at the UNO Community Engagement Center. New youth are welcome to join.

VI. Awareness:

- a. The June – August Research Summaries are available at www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary

VII. Additional Discussion/Announcements:

- a. Russ Zeeb shared that preparations have begun for the 2025 Wet Law for DWI awareness around the winter holidays. Tentatively organizers are looking at December 10th to kick off the holiday campaign.
- b. Lorelle Mueting discussed the Nebraska Medical Cannabis Commission and the challenges that the Commission is facing.

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



RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: September 2025

Key takeaways from included research:

- An Australian study analyzed 1,848 Instagram and TikTok posts to examine alcohol-related user-generated content (UGC). Results showed that over half of posts featured alcohol—often branded—and most expressed positive drinking experiences or pro-alcohol sentiment, with only 2% showing negative consequences. Many posts appeared to involve undisclosed marketing, highlighting the need for stronger regulations and transparency to reduce young people’s exposure to covert alcohol promotion.
- A study examined alcohol advertising on popular television channels among children and adolescents in Beijing, China. Of 13,864 total ads, 321 (6.0%) were alcohol-related, with significantly higher exposure during peak viewing times, especially between 9:00 and 9:59 pm. All alcohol ads used at least one marketing strategy, most commonly brand benefit claims. Findings show that alcohol advertising exceeded regulatory limits, suggesting stronger regulations are needed to reduce youth exposure.
- In 63 patients with alcohol use disorder, gut microbiome changes were tracked during withdrawal. Researchers found that bacterial load and butyrate production capacity increased, while inflammation markers and alcohol craving decreased. The microbiome shifted closer to that of healthy controls, suggesting recovery toward a healthier state. Specific microbial changes were linked to craving, supporting the gut–brain connection in alcohol dependence.

Raise the price of alcohol and lower drink-drive limits, Caritas says

Written by Times of Malta staff

The government was urged on Wednesday to raise the price of alcoholic drinks, lower the drink-drive limit and intensify educational campaigns on alcoholism.

A set of recommendations was made by Caritas Malta in a submission as part of the government's consultation on the draft National Alcohol Policy.

The church organisation, which is active in the rehabilitation of alcoholics, issued a number of recommendations.

Health warnings

It said the public should be informed about the health and social risks associated with alcohol. There should be mandatory, visible and up-to-date warnings on all alcoholic products, sales points and advertisements. The warnings should also provide details for support services and/or helplines.

Warnings should also include information on the legal drinking age, the risks of drink-driving, the risks to pregnancy/breastfeeding and the impact of alcohol on the body.

Advertising and marketing

The NGO said alcohol advertisements should be banned in public spaces (such as billboards & buses). Advertisements on TV and radio should be limited to after 10pm and before 5am.

Drink-driving regulations

As for drink-driving, Caritas said that while zero tolerance was the ideal, at a minimum, the Blood Alcohol Concentration limit should be reduced to 20mg/100ml to better protect public safety.

Malta's current limit is of 50mg/100ml for most drivers, though a 20mg/100ml limit applies to drivers of motorcycles, taxis, trucks and novice drivers.

Caritas also argued there should be mandatory intoxication tests in all accidents involving bodily harm, and random breathalyser testing should be allowed, even without suspicion.

There should also be national awareness campaigns on drink-driving dangers.

Higher minimum unit pricing

Caritas said the minimum price of alcohol should be raised to €0.75 per unit (in line with Scotland). "The aim is to reduce the affordability of binge drinking," it said. This would not be a tax as revenue would remain with the industry.

Pregnancy and alcohol

The NGO noted that alcohol use among women is rising, and it said there is a need for targeted interventions. Public campaigns should promote zero alcohol use for women trying to conceive, during pregnancy and while breastfeeding, it said.

Raise legal drinking age to 21 years

Caritas suggested that the legal drinking age should be raised to 21 years (from the current 17) and there should be increased support for early, school-based education on alcohol risks.

It also called for a cultural shift towards informed and contained consumption, like the change seen in the public attitude towards smoking.

Law enforcement

Caritas called for strict law enforcement on the sale of alcohol, with checks of IDs in grocery stores, supermarkets and restaurants and events such as St Patrick's Day and beer/wine festivals.

There should also be court-mandated AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) sessions or services provided by Caritas, Sedqa and Oasi for alcohol-related offenders.

The U.S. Alcohol Industry Is Reeling From Canada's Booze Boycott

Written by Laura Cooper and Vipal Monga

Canadian provinces are boycotting American-made alcohol in response to trade battles initiated by President Trump.

U.S. alcohol exports to Canada have plummeted, with distilled spirits down 62% and wine down 67% in the first half of 2025.

While some provinces like Alberta have resumed U.S. alcohol purchases, others maintain the boycott, sometimes replacing U.S. brands with Canadian products.

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Canada's prohibition on U.S. alcohol is creating a headache for American liquor and winemakers.

On the shelves of many Canadian liquor stores, bottles of Jack Daniel's, Maker's Mark and Sailor Jerry Spiced Rum are nowhere to be found. Thousands of bottles of U.S. wine and spirits sit in storage across the country. At tastings, Canadian drinkers are turning their noses up at American alcohol.

After President Trump initiated a series of trade battles with Canada earlier this year, Canadian provinces, which largely handle alcohol imports and distribution in the country, stopped placing orders for American-made spirits, beer and wine. In liquor stores, clerks pulled U.S. brands off shelves, replacing them with Canadian products.

Mike Brisebois, who runs a digital magazine called The Whisky Explorer, held a tasting in June where he served only Canadian, Irish and Scotch whiskies—on the recommendation of his guests. “The general theme was that they were boycotting the U.S.,” he said.

In the roughly six months that have passed since the U.S.-Canada trade spat kicked off, the hit to the U.S. alcohol industry is coming into view.

The Distilled Spirits Council, an industry group, estimated exports of U.S. distilled spirits to Canada at \$43.4 million over the first six months of 2025, down about 62% from the same period in 2024. Exports of American wine were about 67% lower, the group said, citing U.S. trade data.

Ontario, Canada's most populous province, sells spirits and wine to residents through 688 stores operated by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. Last year, the LCBO sold more than \$700 million worth of American liquor and wine, sales that have now dwindled to zero.

Wine Institute, a trade group representing California-based wineries, estimated that in six months this year, U.S. wineries have lost more than \$173 million in export value. In 2024, Canada comprised 35% of all U.S. wine export business, making it the industry's largest export destination by far.

“The absence of U.S. wine from Canadian stores is not just a market disruption, it's a breakdown in a trusted relationship built over decades,” said Wine Institute Chief Executive Robert Koch. “This is not just about wine. It's about farming families, rural jobs and businesses that depend on access to international markets.”

At Paso Robles, Calif.-based Hope Family Wines, sales to Canada have fallen by about 10% so far this year. Gretchen Roddick, an executive vice president at the winery, said bottles of its Cabernet Sauvignon and other products have been sitting in storage in Canada since being taken off shelves earlier this year.

"It's definitely going to hurt us personally," she said.

Robert Cullins, CEO of Baltimore-based Sagamore Spirit, said it can take around three years to get Canadian market approval for the rye whiskey made by the distillery on the city's waterfront. Until earlier this year 10% of the company's exports had gone to Canada, but that number has now dropped to zero, Cullins said.

Cullins estimates Sagamore will lose out on roughly \$2 million of sales this year, equivalent to a container of rye comprising roughly 1,200 nine-liter cases. "We're a small craft distillery," he said, "so a couple of million dollars is pretty significant."

Canadian liquor stores these days are heavily stocked with domestically produced brands like Maverick Distillery's Barnburner Whisky and Kavi Reserve Coffee Blended Canadian Whisky. A spokesman for Ontario's finance department said that since the boycott on U.S. alcohol, sales of Canadian-made products have risen 14% in the province.

Ontario removed the alcohol "in the face of President Trump's tariffs taking direct aim at our economy," he said.

U.S. Ambassador to Canada Pete Hoekstra told a conference in Washington state last month that the U.S. booze boycott is one of the reasons Trump and White House officials have called Canada "mean and nasty to deal with."

The booze boycotts fit into a growing anti-American sentiment in Canada. Canadians are angry about Trump's threats of turning Canada into the 51st state. Many have canceled vacations to the U.S., and turned away from other American-made products.

Some Canadian consumers still have a thirst for U.S.-made alcohol. After the province of Alberta halted purchases of American liquor in March, wholesale purchases of U.S. liquor dropped 40% for the three months between April and June, compared with the same period last year, according to a spokeswoman for the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Commission. Sales of American wine fell 55.5%.

Alberta in June resumed U.S. alcohol purchases in a bid to improve the tone of Canada-U.S. trade talks, said Dale Nally, the province's minister of red tape reduction. The American booze carries a 25% tariff, but customers are still buying.

Jasmeen Grewal, who owns Platina Liquor in Calgary, Alberta's largest city, said U.S. wine sales have jumped 30% in recent weeks, while sales of U.S. bourbon have risen 7%. She said Canadians from other provinces are bulk-buying U.S.-produced Bread & Butter Cabernet Sauvignon and wines from California-based Josh Cellars.

"People are scared that maybe they won't be able to get them again," Grewal said.

Beer cans found in pickup after wrong-way I-480 crash that killed 2 people in July

Written by Dan Crisler

Omaha police found alcoholic drinks inside the pickup truck of a 22-year-old Iowa man who allegedly drove the wrong way on Interstate 480 and killed two people near downtown Omaha last month, a police detective testified on Monday.

Det. Joseph Hall told the court during Christian Stephens' preliminary hearing that investigators found an empty can of Busch Light Lime on Stephens' dashboard in his Ford F-150 pickup truck.

Hall also said investigators found, along with unopened cans of vodka seltzer, more cans of the same beer in the pickup's bed and another outside of the vehicle at the scene of the fiery crash that killed Nicholas Humbert and Adrianna Estrada and severely injured three others. A woman in Stephens' pickup was also injured, Hall said.

The crash happened shortly after 2 a.m. on July 11. Hall said Stephens told officers at the scene he made a "wrong turn" by taking the 14th Street off-ramp onto the interstate. Police say Stephens was driving eastbound in the westbound lanes when he collided with a Buick Century sedan. Humbert and Estrada were in the driver's seat and front passenger's seat, respectively in the sedan.

"By the time he had realized it, he had tried to swerve to miss the vehicle," Hall said, adding Stephens initially thought the sedan was driving the wrong way before he realized he was the one driving the wrong way.

First responders had to extract Humbert's and Estrada's bodies pinned inside the crushed sedan. The fire burned both of their bodies beyond recognition. Hall said Stephens told police officers he removed some injured passengers from the vehicle to save them from the fire that engulfed the sedan.

Hall said Stephens also admitted to officers he had been drinking.

A blood draw taken about an hour after the crash showed Stephens' blood alcohol content was just over the legal limit at 0.08, Hall said. A 0.08 blood alcohol content is the legal limit for driving while intoxicated. Another blood draw taken a little more than two hours after the first blood draw showed Stephens' blood alcohol content had dropped below the legal limit to 0.029.

Stephens' attorney, Glenn Shapiro, believes prosecutors have not acknowledged a margin of error for the initial blood draw.

"Any margin of error would take 0.08 under the legal standard," Shapiro said.

After Hall's testimony and cross-examination, a Douglas County judge bounded Stephens' case over to district court, where Stephens may go to trial to face charges of two counts of motor vehicle homicide and three counts of causing serious bodily injury while driving under the influence.

A Leading Cancer Expert Discusses Why Alcohol Warning Labels Are So Lax

Written by Gary Stern

Dr. Chinmay Jani, the chief fellow in Hematology and Oncology at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center in Miami, FL., is one of the leading experts researching how alcohol contributes to causing cancer. In this Q&A, he discusses why the warning labels on alcohol's contribution to cancer are limited and need to be strengthened compared to stronger warning labels on cigarettes.

In a forthcoming article to be published in a scientific journal, Dr. Jani noted that "Alcohol-associated cancer death in the USA doubled from 1990 from 11,896 people to 2021 affected 23,207, with mortality rates significantly higher in the 55+ age and males." In 2021, he added that liver and breast cancers associated with alcohol-related cancers.

The paper concludes that critical need is urgently required for "targeted prevention efforts and increased awareness to address the rising impact of alcohol consumption on cancer-related mortality."

An August 13, 2025 Gallup Poll revealed that 53% of people, a new high, thinks that moderate alcohol drinking is bad for one's health. Indeed people are drinking less as the poll revealed that drinking alcohol in the U.S. fell to 54% from 60% from 1997 to 2023.

What Current Alcohol Warning Labels Must Include

The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Bureau, part of the U.S. Department of Treasury, declares that bottles with greater than 50% alcohol must include two warning labels: 1) According to the U.S. Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages, during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects, 2) Consumption of alcohol beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery and may cause health problems.

By contrast, the Food and Drug Administration has issued a series of warning labels that cigarettes must contain that include: 1) Tobacco smoke causes fatal lung disease in nonsmokers, 2) Tobacco smoke can harm your children, 3) Smoking causes bladder cancer, 4) Smoking causes COPD, a lung disease that can be fatal, 5) Smoking causes type 2 diabetes, which raises blood sugar.

Indeed on January 3, 2025 the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued a report linking drinking alcoholic beverages with an increased risk of becoming victim to 7 different cancers including breast (in women), colorectal, esophagus, liver, mouth, throat and larynx.

There are some cancer specialists who contend that the evidence linking alcohol use to cancer requires additional research. Here's what Dr. Jani said about alcohol warning labels.

Question: How much proof is there that consumption of alcohol maximizes and increases the chance of coming down with various cancers?

Dr. Jani: In the recent time there's more and more research and proof coming out that alcohol is associated with several types of cancers. Proportionately, it's increasing the risk of causing cancer overall.

Question: Currently, two warning labels are mandated for alcohol, one stating that alcohol can lead to birth defects when consumed by women who are pregnant and secondly, a label that declares that drinking impairs one's ability to drive a car. Your view on these warning labels?

Dr. Jani: These labels have been in place since 1988 and since then, they haven't been changed or updated. These labels are helpful for the general population, but as we gather more data regarding various different health risks, there should be some changes and updates to these labels.

Question: What specifically should be added to these warning labels?

Dr. Jani: I did some research on other countries and found that Ireland updated its warning in summer 2025 with a sentence there is a direct link between alcohol and fatal cancers. In the U.S. based on the current evidence coming out, there should be some warning about the link between alcohol and cancer, stating that alcohol is a risk factor for several different cancers.

Question: What effect would stronger warning labels have on people who drink?

Dr. Jani: It would create awareness that alcohol has different health risks including cancer, and based on my experience, whenever people hear the word cancer, it increases their attention exponentially.

Question: So would you advise stopping drinking alcohol?

Dr. Jani: Try to cut down as much as possible until we have complete information about what proportion of drinking alcohol is healthy and who is at a higher risk. It is still difficult to say eliminate, but I'd advise cutting down as much as possible.

Question: Why are the people who drink 5 drinks or more a week living dangerously and curtailing their longevity?

Dr. Jani: Our research shows that people who have a daily consumption of more than 2 drinks increase the risk of coming down with colon cancer and rectal cancer. The people who drink more than 3 drinks per day have almost 4 times higher risk of esophagus (food pipe) cancer,

Question: Bottom-line, why shouldn't people drink alcohol?

Dr. Jani: Because as data is evolving constantly, we have more evidence that alcohol has many direct, adverse effects on health including cancer.

Question: Anything we left out?

Dr. Jani: I would ask one question to a general population that drinks to ask themselves one question: am I aware that alcohol increases my risk of cancer, and if so, why am I not cutting down or reducing my intake despite knowing this?

Bond conditions eased for man convicted of killing 6-year-old in Nebraska City

Written by 1011 NOW Staff

NEBRASKA CITY, Neb. (KOLN) - A man convicted of fatally hitting a 6-year-old boy at a farmers market in Nebraska City is awaiting sentencing while out on bond and no longer required to wear an alcohol monitoring device.

Vernon Christiansen, 59, of Percival, Iowa, pled no contest and was found guilty of motor vehicle homicide, possessing an open alcohol container, bald or improper use of tires, and first offense obstructed view of driver.

The charges include one misdemeanor and three infractions, meaning Christiansen faces up to one year in jail and/or a fine of up to \$1,300.

Christiansen was released from jail after posting 10% of his \$50,000 bond.

At a recent hearing, a judge ruled his Continuous Alcohol Monitoring (CAM) device could be removed. However, Christiansen is still barred from drinking alcohol, must submit to testing as directed, and is prohibited from driving while awaiting sentencing.

The case stems from a July 17 crash behind the Veterans Memorial Building near 8th Street and First Corso. Police said Christiansen's pickup struck a 6-year-old boy about an hour after the weekly farmers market had opened. The child was killed at the scene.

According to an arrest affidavit, Christiansen remained on site but smelled of alcohol. Inside his pickup, officers found an open container of alcohol, unopened drinks, a radar detector obstructing his windshield, and a tire below safety standards.

He will be sentenced Sept. 8 at 11 a.m. in Otoe County Court.

Exclusive: RFK Jr. and the White House buried a major study on alcohol and cancer. Here's what it shows.

Written by Dylan Scott

Most Americans still don't know that alcohol can cause cancer — and the alcohol industry is working hard to make sure it stays that way.

For the past three years, the industry, aided by its allies in Congress and later the Trump administration, has sought to discredit and eventually bury a major analysis that offers new evidence of the link between drinking alcohol and getting sick and dying from various causes, including cancer.

It appears their campaign has succeeded. Three co-authors on the Alcohol Intake and Health Study, which was commissioned in early 2022 by the US Department of Health and Human Services under President Joe Biden, told Vox that they were informed last month that the Trump administration did not intend to publish the final draft of the study or its findings.

"The thing that the alcohol industry fears more than increased taxes is increased knowledge about the risks associated with drinking alcohol, particularly around cancer," Mike Marshall, CEO of a group dedicated to reducing alcohol's harms called the Alcohol Policy Alliance, who was not involved with the study, told me. "Like the tobacco industry, like the opioid industry, they are working hard to prevent the American people from gaining the knowledge that they need to make the best decisions for themselves."

Why assert so much pressure? It makes sense if you look at the headwinds the alcohol industry faces. Americans today are drinking less. This year, Gallup recorded a historic low in the percentage of US adults who drink: 54 percent, down from 67 percent in 2022.

Though the vibes around alcohol are shifting, a lot of people still don't fully understand alcohol's health consequences. Surveys have found that while the percentage of Americans who know that alcohol is a carcinogen has been rising, it is still below 50 percent.

By the end of the year, the federal government will issue new dietary guidelines — something that happens every five years — which include recommended limits on alcohol consumption. The alcohol study's results were intended to inform those guidelines.

"I was hopeful. ... Look at all this evidence we have," Priscilla Martinez, deputy scientific director of the Alcohol Research Group at the Public Health Institute and one of the co-authors, told me in an interview. "This is when the change is going to happen."

But after the authors submitted their final report to Trump's health department in March and never saw it again, Reuters reported in June, citing anonymous sources, that the new dietary guidelines would eliminate any specific recommended limits on alcohol consumption.

"I think it's a shame," said Katherine Keyes, an epidemiologist at Columbia University and another co-author. "Anyone who is a decision-making authority, you want them to have all of the information."

It is another example of the Trump administration seeming to work against the best interest of public health — despite allying itself closely with Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his Make America Healthy Again movement.

Kennedy and MAHA are fixated on harmful toxins and the corrupting influence of corporate interests. But neither Kennedy, who has been in addiction recovery himself for decades, nor the broader movement has seemed to make reducing alcohol consumption a priority. Instead, the Trump administration will not release a report that would actually show just how harmful to people's health drinking alcohol can be, the latest in a series of decisions that could actually leave Americans less healthy.

Vox reached out to the White House and HHS to ask why the administration hasn't published the study, but a spokesperson for the Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration, the HHS subagency that oversaw the Alcohol Intake and Health Report, declined to address our questions directly.

"People are going to get sick who might have avoided getting sick, because they might have decreased their drinking," Martinez said.

The Alcohol Intake and Health Study's conclusions, explained

For this story, I spoke with three of the six authors of the study: Martinez, Keyes, and co-author Tim Naimi, an alcohol researcher affiliated with the University of Victoria and Boston University. They all emphasized that they had sought to conduct a study that would fairly represent America's alcohol consumption. They not only reviewed a wide range of observational studies, but they also ran data through a statistical model based on the US population, specifically to estimate the mortality effects of alcohol for Americans.

Martinez said the thinking was: "We've got to make this relevant to Americans."

They broke out their findings by different drinking levels — from one drink per day to three — and focused on health outcomes that have been proven to be associated with alcohol use. Their big-picture conclusion: Among the US population, the negative health effects of drinking alcohol start at low levels of consumption and begin to increase sharply the more a person drinks. A man drinking one drink per day has roughly a one in 1,000 chance of dying from any alcohol-related cause, whether an alcohol-associated cancer or liver disease or a drunk driving accident. Increase that to two drinks per day, and the odds increase to one in 25.

The general finding that the health risks from alcohol start at low levels of drinking and increase significantly for people who drink more is consistent with previous research, as I covered in a story earlier this year. Public health experts broadly agree that heavy drinking is bad for your health; the debate has been over moderate amounts of drinking. There is another issue that continues to complicate the debate: Lay people may have an inflated definition of what "moderate" drinking means compared to their doctor or a scientist, which could lead to people putting their health at risk even if they don't think of themselves as heavy drinkers.

In that context, the report is a harrowing read: Alcohol use is associated with increased mortality for seven types of cancer — colorectal, breast cancer in women, liver, oral, pharynx, larynx, and esophagus. Risk for these cancers increases with any alcohol use and continues to grow with higher levels of use, the study's authors concluded. Women experience a higher risk of an

alcohol-attributable cancer per drink consumed than men. Men and women who die from an alcohol-attributable cause die 15 years earlier on average.

Amid all of the public discourse about alcohol and its health effects, here was a clear and authoritative summary of the evidence that would be most relevant to Americans. It was, its authors told me, consistent with the scientific consensus at this time.

“Nothing we’re saying is all that surprising or controversial to those of us who know the field,” Keyes said.

So, why has the US government buried the final draft of that report for the past six months? And why does it appear that the Trump administration will instead push the country’s dietary guidelines in the opposite direction?

A tale of two studies

Every five years, the federal government reviews the nation’s dietary guidelines and issues new ones that reflect the current best consensus among scientists about what we should eat, how much of it we should eat, and what we should avoid eating and drinking to lead a healthy life.

US officials always solicit expert opinion as they prepare a fresh set of dietary guidelines. The input is usually compiled into one massive report from a group of experts called the US Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee and then submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture, the two agencies that produce the guidelines.

That was how the process went in 2020, and at that time, the subcommittee of researchers dedicated to alcohol (including Naimi) advised the government to reduce the recommended limit down to one drink per day for men, from two. The Trump administration ultimately decided not to follow the recommendation.

Ahead of drafting the new guidance for 2025, the Biden administration began considering in February 2022 whether to take a different approach to more thoroughly review alcohol’s health effects ahead of the 2025 dietary guidelines being developed and released. By April 2022, HHS had decided to launch a new review of the science on alcohol and health, called the Alcohol Intake and Health Study — the research Trump’s administration has yet to release — to be conducted by an outside expert panel. That analysis would be submitted to Congress as part of an annual report on underage drinking, and it would be shared with USDA and HHS to consider for the 2025 dietary guidelines.

It makes sense why the federal government would launch an effort like this. The negative health effects of alcohol have been getting more and more attention, and research continues to link drinking even in moderate amounts to cancer, liver disease, and mental health problems. The World Health Organization declared in 2023 that no amount of drinking could be considered safe. It was time to take a hard look at American drinking.

The dueling government alcohol reports, briefly explained

With their mouthful titles and tangle of acronyms, it’s easy to lose track of which government report is which. To keep them straight, here are the key ways the Biden-commissioned Alcohol Intake and Health Study differs from the more recent National Academies report:

- The Alcohol Intake and Health Study reviewed the effects of different levels of drinking; it reported on mortality directly linked to alcohol use, and included original modeling based on the US population.
- The National Academies report reviewed the differences between moderate drinking and no drinking; it reported on all-cause mortality rather than deaths from specific causes, and it did not include any original modeling.
- The Alcohol Intake and Health Study found the negative health effects of alcohol started at relatively low levels of drinking and increased exponentially with more drinks per day. Drinking was linked to higher overall mortality rates and increased cancer rates.
- The National Academies report, on the other hand, found modestly positive benefits from alcohol at low levels of drinking and a weak association with most kinds of cancer except for breast cancer among women.

But almost immediately, controversy was already brewing around the Alcohol Intake and Health Study.

In December 2022, several months after HHS had decided to launch the Alcohol Intake and Health Study, Congress included a provision in a routine government spending bill: The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine should undertake its own study of alcohol's health effects and submit that as the basis for the 2025 dietary guidelines. Two of the initial co-authors for that report were removed after objections over their reported connections to the alcohol industry. But at least one of the scholars who replaced them has also had their work supported by the industry.

When the experts who would produce the Alcohol Intake and Health Study were named in 2023, the alcohol industry began to circulate documents to lawmakers and other government officials claiming authors of the study were prejudiced against alcohol (all of the researchers had submitted conflict-of-interest paperwork ahead of joining the project). Naimi, in particular, has been labeled a “new prohibitionist” by Reason, a libertarian publication.

Keyes told me that she believed she had been criticized for, in effect, describing the findings of various alcohol-related studies.

“When I read criticism of my involvement in the committee, and it was described as a conflict of interest, the conflict was that I had accurately described scientific research in the media,” Keyes said.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill waded into the fight. In March 2024, Congress tucked a provision into another omnibus spending bill that instructed HHS and USDA to consider the National Academies report when writing the alcohol guidelines. Representatives from states including Kentucky and California — where whiskey and wine are important cultural exports, respectively — sent letters to HHS in April 2024 and again that September, criticizing the Alcohol Intake and Health Study for being duplicative of the National Academies report — even though the former was commissioned by the government first. (HHS said at the time that it would not be duplicative but complementary.) The House Oversight Committee even sought to subpoena documents from the agency on the HHS report and the process that was producing it.

Both groups of researchers continued to assemble their reports as the public relations war raged. But when it came time to publish their findings, they had very different experiences.

Why hasn't the final Alcohol Intake and Health Study been released?

A draft version of the Alcohol Intake and Health Study was posted on January 15, just days before Trump's second inauguration and around the same time that then-Surgeon General Vivek Murthy recommended that alcohol come with cancer warning labels; you can still find it online here. This is the process for most government reports: The authors put together a draft, the initial findings are released for public comment, stakeholders submit their takes, and then the authors will take those comments into consideration and revise their report for its final publication.

But that didn't happen with the Alcohol Intake and Health Study. After the public comment period, the authors made minor revisions — not to the findings themselves but to help translate its takeaways for non-experts. They sent that final report to the Trump administration in March.

And after that...nothing. The report never surfaced, and, according to the three co-authors I spoke with, they received no explanation for the radio silence.

Vox contacted HHS with a detailed list of questions about the Alcohol Intake and Health Study and why it hasn't been released, as well as Kennedy's general perspective on alcohol and health. The agency sent a brief comment in response:

"This information has been provided to HHS and USDA for consideration during the development of the 2025-2030 Guidelines," an HHS spokesperson said.

Some of the authors still held out hope that the study would be included in the annual report on underage drinking that is required by federal law to be submitted to Congress and is expected later this year.

But then in August, those hopes were shattered: According to all three co-authors, they were told that the Trump administration did not intend to publish the study in any form and would not include it in the upcoming congressional report on underage drinking. (The authors are currently working, as they always planned to do, on publishing their findings in an independent academic journal.)

Then, at the beginning of September, Congress introduced a new government spending bill that would, among many other things, defund the interagency group responsible for launching the Alcohol Intake and Health Study in the first place during the Biden administration.

The National Academies report, on the other hand, has been released on time. Its findings, however, were controversial: It indicated that moderate levels of drinking could actually be beneficial to people, and even the links to cancer, despite ethanol being widely classified as a carcinogen, were limited. Some unaffiliated alcohol researchers have called their findings and their methodology into question.

Critics said the National Academies report was based on observational studies that can show a correlation between, for example, moderate drinking and cardiovascular health, but don't prove a cause; the National Academies report's authors acknowledged that limitation. As Naimi told me earlier this year, many moderate drinkers may have other attributes — such as higher incomes — that could explain their better health without accounting for alcohol. Critics of the National Academies report also said the authors had used overly restrictive criteria for which research to include, excluding many studies that have found harmful effects from alcohol use.

The Alcohol Intake and Health Study, on the other hand, focused on health outcomes for which there is a substantiated link to alcohol, included more studies, and modeled the available data to the US population.

The ball is now in the Trump administration's court. Will it change the dietary guidelines as rumored and eliminate a specific recommended limit on alcohol consumption? The National Academies report would appear to set the stage for such a change, with its industry-preferred messaging that low levels of drinking could make people healthier.

And all the while, the Alcohol Intake and Health Study and a very different perspective on alcohol's health effects remains locked in the administration's proverbial basement.

New amenities, events aim to add to Husker football gameday experience

Written by Chris Dunker

It isn't going to be your granddaddy's Husker gameday experience.

This Saturday, as the Big Red get ready to take on the Akron Zips in their 2025 home opener, Memorial Stadium will look and feel different than it did even a year ago to Husker fans.

Changes to re-entry policies will mean the Sea of Red may not flow out of the stadium at halftime.

New concession amenities — including the sale of alcohol for the first time — will be waiting.

The 100-plus-year-old venue will feel more high-tech from improved Wi-Fi and cellphone connections to modern checkout systems at concession stands.

And Husker fans will find more to do around Memorial Stadium before the game with live entertainment and appearances from athletes and coaches alike.

While things may feel different in and around the stadium this season, Seth Dorsey, deputy athletic director for internal operations, said the focus will still be on what's happening on the Tom Osborne Field.

"This is still Nebraska Athletics, it's still Memorial Stadium, it's still Husker football," Dorsey said. "But we've enhanced the experience in the building wherever we can."

Here is what's new at Memorial Stadium for 2025:

No re-entry

Husker fans who want to sneak out to their tailgate spot for a bite to eat and a quick drink will no longer be able to return for the second half this year.

Once fans leave the stadium, their ticket will become invalid, Dorsey said.

The change was made to ensure security for fans, athletes and others — not to keep Husker fans hemmed in to buying food and drink at the stadium, he said.

"It was a gap in security that we needed to address to make sure the building was safe and secure," Dorsey said. "Security checks going back into the stadium after halftime were not as thorough."

Other stadiums across the country, including NCAA venues, have similar policies, he added, and a no re-entry policy has become best practice.

Alcohol sales

Memorial Stadium is no longer in a club of one when it comes to the sale of beer and spirits during football games.

Last fall, the NU Board of Regents approved a policy change that opened the door for alcohol sales at all Husker athletic contests.

The choice of Aramark Sports and Entertainment to be the next concession vendor at Memorial Stadium (as well as the Devaney Sports Center and Hibner Stadium) will put that policy into practice for the first time this year.

Dorsey said there will be 121,000 cans of beer available for sale Saturday, which Husker Athletics said will be enough based on the size of the stadium and its average attendance compared with schools in both the Big Ten and SEC that already sell beer.

"We don't think we'll be running out," Dorsey said.

But don't forget to bring your government-issued ID with you.

Buying a beer (or two, which is the maximum allowed per person), whether at a traditional concession stand or one of the new "Walk Thru Bru" stations, will require fans to present an ID card to an Aramark employee first.

"You'll get ID'd every single time whether you are 25 or 55," he said.

Alcohol sales will end at the conclusion of the third quarter, or at the discretion of management, the Athletic Department said.

And, to ensure Husker fans who do imbibe are able to get home safely, Aramark, Nebraska Athletics and UNL Campus Recreation will offer a designated driver program that can be found in either the east or west concourse.

Not interested in drinking but interested in driving? Adults can receive a coupon for a small soft drink or water if they sign up.

New eats, old treats

With the new concession partner comes new food concepts and a way of doing business.

Dorsey said Nebraska Athletics has aimed to give fans a new experience with foods like the Tunnel Walk Tacos, Blackshirt BBQ and Herbie's Burgers.

Here's where you can find the various concessions offerings:

- Blackshirt BBQ: Sections 7, 16, 26, 38.
- Tunnel Walk Tacos: Sections 2, 34, 339, 604.
- Herbie's Burger Co.: Sections 23, 39.
- Chick N Coop: Section 17.
- Cornhuskers Crunch Nachos: Sections 32, 34.
- 1923 Cheesesteak: Section 28.
- 402 Snacks: Section 601.
- Cob Co.: Section 5.

But old favorites for the Greatest Fans in College Football will remain on the menu as well: Runzas, Valentino's pizza and Wimmer's Fairbury Red hot dogs.

But only individuals 18 and older are allowed to sell concessions at the stadium this year, although there will still be hawkers in the stands.

"GBR Classics," as they are now called, will be located throughout the stadium. If you want a commemorative cup to take home, be on the lookout.

Dorsey said the new food concepts were developed with a Nebraska identity in mind and in keeping the Husker fan base front and center, while also giving fans a chance to try something new.

"We wanted a nice blend of new and modern and being proud of what got us to this point," Dorsey said.

Any food or drink purchased outside the stadium, including samples or giveaways from outside vendors, cannot be brought inside the gates, the Athletic Department said.

If the temperatures crank back up to what Nebraskans are used to in late summer, exceptions may be made. Nebraska Athletics will issue communication if those conditions arise.

High-tech Huskers

Also new to the stadium this fall is a system designed to speed up concessions.

Technology will be used at the Walk Thru Bru locations to allow patrons to place their items on a scanner, where the total cost will be tallied and displayed.

Once a valid ID is shown, an Aramark employee will crack the beers and fans can pay with a tap of their card and return to the action on the field.

Verizon customers will notice improved connectivity inside the stadium after the carrier recently doubled the number of antennas in the stadium and installed 5G Ultra Wideband service throughout.

Nebraska Athletics also plans once again to use walk-through gate-screening technology, which speeds up the process for fans to get inside.

Finally, as was the case last year, Memorial Stadium will once again be a fully cashless venue, so remember to bring your credit or debit card. There are no ATMs in or around the stadium. And paper tickets are a thing of the past after the university moved to mobile tickets exclusively starting with the 2024-25 winter sports seasons.

Gameday destination

Beginning Saturday, the Hawks Championship Center, just to the north of the stadium, will open its doors for the Cornhusker Kickoff presented by Bud Light.

The Hawks Championship Center will open for free four hours prior to kickoff (or at 8 a.m. for an 11 a.m. kickoff) to fans on a first-come, first-served basis.

Inside, Husker fans will find live entertainment, including music this week from country artists Maddie and Tae, as well as kids' activities, food and drink, merchandise and appearances and autographs from current athletes and coaches as well as Husker legends.

The football team will arrive about two hours and 15 minutes before kickoff in the East Stadium Loop for the "Husker Legacy Walk."

Players will get off the bus near 14th and Vine streets, walk past the Nebraska Coliseum and through the Nebraska Athletics Hall of Fame to enter the main lobby of the Osborne Legacy Complex.

If you wish to get a peek inside the Hall of Champions presented by Crete Carrier Corporation, you'll be out of luck on Saturday.

The main entrance of the Osborne Legacy Complex is closed on gamedays, but open to the public from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays.

Nebraska Athletics is also planning several special events this football campaign:

- Sept. 6 (Akron): Drone show.
- Sept. 13 (Houston Christian): Ag Day, Nebraska Football Hall of Fame Recognition.
- Sept. 20 (Michigan): 1995 National Championship reunion.
- Oct. 4 (Michigan State): Homecoming.
- Oct. 25 (Northwestern): Military Appreciation Game.
- Nov. 1 (USC): Memorial Stadium Black Out, Nebraska Athletics Hall of Fame Recognition.
- Nov. 28 (Iowa): Pioneer Heroes Game.