

New federal guidelines downplay the harm of alcohol

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

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

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

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