

# The Extra Mile

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

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## **MILES TO GO: Aksarben "Entertainment District" Approved Despite Concerns**

The Omaha City Council [voted to approve a second entertainment district](#) in the city, this time in the Aksarben Village area. An entertainment district (ED) allows patrons to carry alcoholic beverages outside of bars and restaurants and into a designated common area.

Council members disregarded testimony from Project Extra Mile Executive Director Chris Wagner urging denial, or at least including mandatory wrist bands for adults over the age of 21 if approved.

Wagner noted that the ED was very close to the University of Nebraska Omaha, which has over 15,000 students, of which at least 1/3 are underage. He also pointed to the inherent unworkability of placing the burden for enforcement on individual outlets, while promoting a commons area. A mandatory wristband would be a small inconvenience for patrons, but would help to prevent underage drinking and its harms.

The developer assured the council that the "high end" nature of the project would naturally weed out underage drinkers. Of course, the developers several entertainment districts in the U.S. - including the [Power and Light District](#) in Kansas City and [Ybor City](#) in Tampa - have made similar hollow promises.

Public health research has found that many of these entertainment districts are problematic due to the impact of higher alcohol outlet density and the [special risks associated with the nighttime economy](#).

This should be of particular concern to Nebraskans, given that binge drinking rates for adults have been [on the rise](#) -- up from 20.0% in 2016 to 20.6% in 2017. That makes our state the fifth highest in the nation (when the District of Columbia is included) for this deadly health problem. The City of Omaha also rose from the 27th worst to the 25th worst binge drinking city in the country.

Business leaders and elected officials like to tout the economic benefits of these types of projects. Unfortunately, that's only one side of the story. The other side includes alcohol-fueled crime (NE is 2nd worst DUI state in the country), loss of life (NE has 436 alcohol-attributable deaths per year) and economic costs to the tune of \$1.2 billion per year consisting of lost work productivity and increased health care and enforcement costs.

We are certain to continue in that same costly direction if our leaders continue to implement lax alcohol policies.



*A rendering of the proposed "entertainment district" at the base of the new HDR headquarters at 67th and Frances Streets in Aksarben Village, from the Omaha World-Herald.*

## Getting Serious about FASD in Nebraska

### Addressing a devastating yet often hidden public health crisis

The term fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) describes a [range of developmental, structural, neurocognitive, and behavioral problems caused by prenatal alcohol exposure](#). While these conditions do not tend to get the degree of public attention that developmental challenges like autism spectrum disorder do, they are [just as common \(if not more so\)](#) and just as challenging to families. Furthermore, Native American communities are disproportionately affected by FASDs, as seen in [the Whiteclay/Pine Ridge experience](#).

FASD was the topic of the Project Extra Mile November coalition meeting, where Dr. Omar Abdul-Rahman of the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute discussed their work addressing that issue. Dr. Rahman gave an informative overview of fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), including the history of FAS dating back to the 1700s, the physical characteristics associated with FAS, and the threshold of alcohol consumption leading to FAS. He also described the neurocognitive assessment differences between a child with and without FAS. Furthermore, he outlined FASD diagnostic criteria and explained how artificial intelligence is used in the diagnostic evaluation of FASD, PFAS (partial fetal alcohol syndrome) and ARND (alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder).

Dr. Rahman also refuted the myth that certain populations (like European-Americans) are biologically immune to FASD due to generations of consumption. No population is immune from the harmful effects of prenatal alcohol consumption.

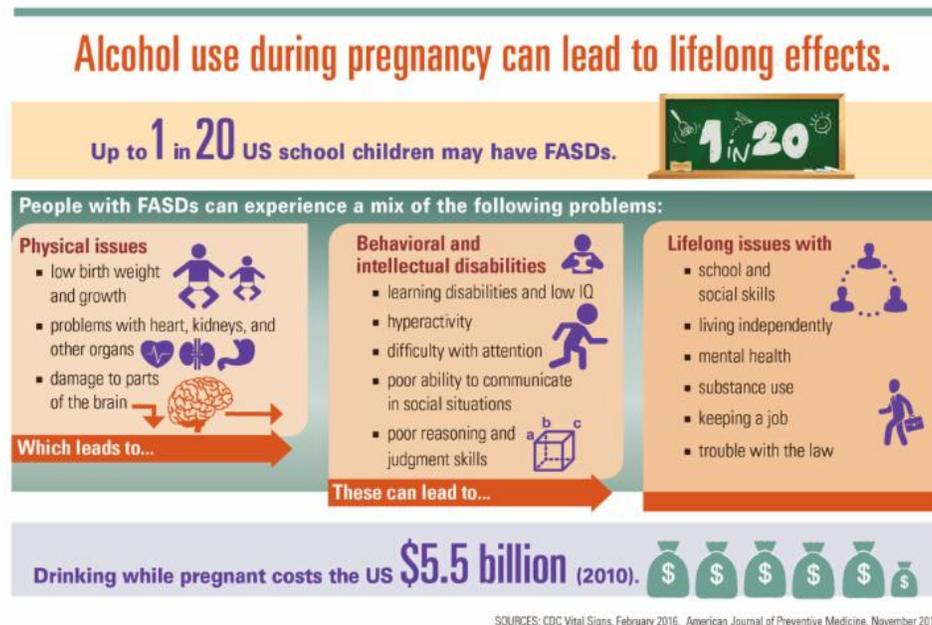
It should also be noted that the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) stresses that there is [no "safe" amount of alcohol consumption for pregnant women](#): No known safe amount. No safe time. No safe type. Unfortunately, not all health care professionals communicate this message consistently.

As with other alcohol-related health and public safety consequences, the best strategies to prevent and control FASDs involve reducing overall levels of excessive drinking through population-level alcohol policies - like increased alcohol taxes and reducing the physical availability of alcohol - supplemented with a range of targeted policies, programs and services.

In the case of FASD, these targeted efforts include:

- Universal screening of pregnant women for alcohol use (see news brief, below)
- [CHOICES counseling program](#)
- Expanded diagnostic and support services for individuals and families living with FASDs
- No [punitive or stigmatizing measures aimed at women who use alcohol during pregnancy](#)

For more information about this critical and public health issue, please contact Project Extra Mile at **402-963-9047**.



## Setting the Record Straight on Alcohol Taxes, Part 4

Are alcohol taxes already "way too high"? Not by a long shot.

One of the more brazen mischaracterizations that the alcohol industry likes to throw around is the claim that alcohol taxes already account for a big portion of the retail costs of alcohol for the typical drinker.

A typical example is [this article in the National Journal](#) which claims that "on average, 40 percent of the price you paid for that beer is going straight to Uncle Sam and the state."

Since claims of this nature are rarely fact-checked by independent experts, and tend to be echoed by the alcohol supply chain and their allies, they take on the air of "common wisdom." Instead, when examined critically, we see that they are simply wrong.

To start with, some of the calculations confuse the issue by including a range of taxes (like those associated with the workforce) that have nothing to do with the alcohol itself.

Let's look at the example of a typical bottle of vodka, in the standard 750ml size, retailing at \$14.99.

The Nebraska alcohol excise tax on distilled spirits is \$3.75/gallon. The Federal alcohol excise tax used to be a straightforward \$10.80/gallon, but that was before the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (signed into law on December 2017 and effective on

1/1/2018) slashed federal alcohol taxes. Although these cuts are somewhat complicated to figure, a good estimate is that the taxes on a typical bottle of distilled spirits were lowered by about \$1.00.

As a result, the alcohol tax burden (federal and state) on that bottle amounts to **\$1.88 total, or just 12.6% of the retail price.**



Keep in mind that the social costs of alcohol (health care expenditures, lost workforce productivity, etc.) in Nebraska amount to \$1.61 *per drink*, [according to CDC research](#). Since that 750ml bottle contains about 17 standard drinks of liquor, the social costs amount to \$27.22 - almost twice the retail price! Furthermore, the CDC analysis uses a conservative estimate of social costs, since it doesn't take into account costs related to pain and suffering, etc.

Our current alcohol taxes don't even begin to cover the costs that are borne by Nebraska citizens, no matter what the alcohol industry says.

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## NEWS BRIEFS

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### Omaha Area Compliance Check Results Show Progress

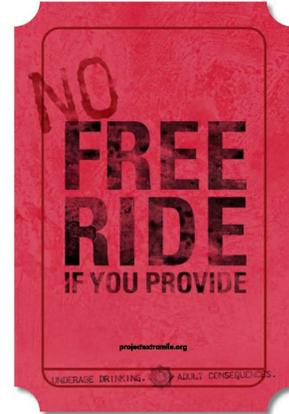
More frequent checks result in lower rates of non-compliance

Seven businesses were cited for selling alcohol to a minor following compliance checks of 147 on- and off-sale alcohol retailers in Douglas and Sarpy counties on November 30th and December 1st.

While, as Omaha PD Sgt. Alan Reyes stated, "seven sales are seven too many," the overall percentage of businesses cited for selling illegally to minors fell to 7% for 2018 from 10% in 2017. This improvement can be attributed to the additional waves of compliance checks, as there were four waves of compliance checks (with 1,033 businesses checked) in 2018, compared with two waves of compliance checks (with 280 businesses checked) in 2017.

These results are consistent with public health research, as the Community Preventive Services Task Force has identified the [enhanced enforcement of laws prohibiting sales to minors](#) as being a highly effective strategy to prevent and reduce underage drinking and its consequences.

**NP Mart** (5608 Ames Ave., Omaha) was the only business among the seven cited which had been previously cited for illegal sales to minors (within the last four years). In fact, that business has been licensed for less than one year.



Click [here](#) for a summary sheet of the compliance check results and a full list of the businesses checked.

Be sure to call the statewide tip line at **1-866-Must-B-21 (687-8221)** to report underage drinking or adults providing alcohol to minors. **It's anonymous and it's the right call.**

Heightened enforcement efforts and the tip line are supported by the Nebraska Department of Transportation - Highway Safety Office, with Project Extra Mile helping to coordinate the enforcement efforts.

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## A Call for Universal Screening of Unhealthy Alcohol Use

### Engaging the health care community to get serious about excessive consumption

The U.S. Task Force for Preventive Services (USTFPS) - which makes evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medication - [has recommended that all adults be screened for excessive alcohol consumption at the primary care level.](#)

As [CNN reported](#), only about one in six U.S. physicians discusses unhealthy alcohol use with patients. Physicians in Europe do not fare much better.



Importantly, the recommendation also included screening of all pregnant women. While prenatal alcohol exposure is rarely discussed because of associated stigma, [as the CDC notes](#), "Providing alcohol SBI to all individuals- men, women, and adolescents-might normalize discussion of alcohol use and begin to reduce the stigma associated with getting help."

Project Extra Mile has been actively involved in promoting screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment (SBIRT) in Nebraska, including convening trainings and reaching out to health care organizations and other community partners to encourage enhanced alcohol screening practices.

We wholeheartedly agree with [the conclusion offered by Bazzi and Saitz in JAMA](#):

*"The societal context must change, as recommended by the World Health Organization, to limit the influence of the alcohol industry and make the message unequivocal that less use of a toxin and carcinogen (even at very low levels) is better for health. Patients expect a drinking checkup, and it is time for clinicians, with support, to provide it."*

Contact Project Extra Mile at **402-963-9047** if you or your organization is interested in learning about how to initiate or expand alcohol screening practices.

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## PEM @ APHA

**Project Extra Mile staff participated in the American Public Health Association annual meeting in San Diego**

Project Extra Mile Executive Director Chris Wagner and Policy and Research Coordinator Liene Topko attended the American Public Health Association's Annual Meeting in November to keep abreast of the latest research around alcohol policy and related public health topics. Sessions they attended addressed key alcohol policy topics, including alcohol-impaired driving, alcohol advertising, FASD, alcohol-related suicide, alcohol taxes, and work-related alcohol problems.

Please attend our December 12 coalition meeting and annual potluck holiday celebration to learn more.





**Omaha Metro  
Coalition  
Meeting**

Wednesday  
December 12, 2018  
9:00 a.m.

For more information:  
(402) 963-9047  
[www.projectextramile.org](http://www.projectextramile.org)  
[info@projectextramile.org](mailto:info@projectextramile.org)



**Please join us for our  
Annual Potluck Holiday Celebration!**

We will share accomplishments  
from 2018 while we look forward to  
successes in 2019!



**Thank you for your involvement!**

*Jennifer Pollock*

Jennifer Pollock, Coalition Chair

**MEETING LOCATION:**  
National Safety Council  
Lower Level  
11620 M Circle, Omaha NE  
Use Lower Level, West Entrance

