

The Extra Mile

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

Going the Distance: Utah Marks Anniversary of Pivotal Drunk Driving Law

Colonel Michael Rapich reflects on state's adoption of .05 BAC

A significant amount of progress has been made to prevent alcohol-impaired driving in the United States, yet it remains one of the deadliest problems plaguing our communities. In many areas across the country, progress to reduce drunk driving deaths has stalled. Nebraska ranks 2nd worst among all states for self-reported drunk driving, and alcohol-related crashes represent 30% of all fatal crashes in the state.



Research has shown that [more stringent state regulations for purchasing and consuming alcohol are associated with fewer motor vehicle crash fatalities](#) involving drunk drivers. Additionally, laws that limit the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of drivers play an essential role in reducing alcohol-impaired driving and subsequent crashes, injuries, and fatalities. Drivers ages 21 and older are prohibited from driving with a BAC exceeding 0.08% under these laws. Based on a large body of research, a 2018 report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine ([NASEM](#)) [recommends that all states lower the BAC limit set by state law from 0.08% to 0.05%](#). The U.S. lags far behind, as laws limiting a driver's BAC to 0.05% or lower have already been adopted in 34 countries around the world.

Jim Fell, a research scientist with the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, noted: "In all my years of research, I am not aware of a better rationale for a law than [that which exists] to lower the BAC limit for driving to 0.05 grams per deciliter. It has solid laboratory science behind it, the public supports it, evaluation studies in other countries show it to be effective in reducing impaired driving fatalities, it has a general deterrent effect on impaired driving, and it is cost-effective."

In February, Colonel Michael Rapich of the Utah Highway Patrol (UHP) addressed Project Extra Mile's coalition to share insights about enforcing the

state's .05 law. Effective December 30, 2018, Utah became the first state in the nation to lower its BAC for drunk driving to .05%. Several factors influenced support for the legislation, including backing from key legislators, fatal crash data, studies from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) on alcohol impairment, and stakeholder engagement.

Lt. Nick Street, public information officer for UHP, noted that the agency makes approximately 10,000 arrests each year for drunk driving. Following the implementation of the law in late 2018, drunk driving crashes and fatalities decreased most notably in the first quarter of 2019; however, the agency is still evaluating data trends for the entire year. Overall, fewer drunk drivers with BACs of .05-.079 were arrested in 2019 as compared to prior years. State officials focused on providing a clear and consistent message around the new law: "If you drink, don't drive." The goal was not to increase DUI arrests, it was to keep people safe on the roads. Accordingly, the agency did not see an increase in DUI arrests following implementation.

The 2018 NASEM report, [Getting to Zero Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities](#), includes several recommendations in addition to lowering the BAC for drunk driving to .05. Specific guidance includes increasing alcohol taxes significantly, strengthening policies to prevent illegal alcohol sales to people under 21 and already-intoxicated adults, and enacting all-offender ignition interlock laws, among others.

"Each alcohol-impaired driving crash represents a failure of the system, whether that is excessive alcohol service, lack of safe and affordable transportation alternatives, lack of adequate clinical services, or lack of effective policies or enforcement," concluded the authors. "A systems approach - coordinated, systematic, multi-level, and spanning multiple sectors - is needed to accelerate change."

Key facts from *Getting to Zero Alcohol-Impaired Driving Fatalities*:

- Impairment from alcohol consumption begins at BAC levels well below 0.08%.
- If the BAC limit across the U.S. were lowered to 0.05%, it is estimated that more than 1,500 lives could be saved annually.
- Strong scientific evidence shows that lowering the BAC limit to 0.05% is an effective strategy to accelerate progress on reducing alcohol-impaired driving fatalities in the United States.
- A change in the BAC law to 0.05 would be most effective if implemented along with high-visibility enforcement, such as frequent and widely publicized sobriety checkpoints.

Miles to Go: Alcohol Sales Increasingly Common at Collegiate Sporting Events

More colleges and universities prioritize profits over student safety

Over the past six months, several headlines point to an increasing number of colleges and universities that are now selling alcohol at collegiate sporting events. According to a December 2019 [Newsweek](#) article, Louisiana State University racked up \$2 million from the sale of nearly 300,000 alcoholic beverages during its first year of sales at football games, and a recent [Wall](#)

[Street Journal](#) article touted the school as a top performer in both football and drinking beer.

Other schools that have been reported to add or expand alcohol sales at sporting events include [Texas A&M University](#), the [University of Florida](#), [Arkansas](#), [Missouri](#), [Tennessee](#), [Vanderbilt](#), and [Northwestern University](#), to name just a few. In January, Texas Tech promoted [free beer](#) to students before a basketball game against Kentucky, more specifically a "blackout and tailgate with free food and free beer to students of age beginning Saturday morning at 10 am."

This trend corresponds with the timing of recent discussions by the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska (ASUN) regarding its code of conduct. Students have expressed support for decreased accountability for alcohol-related violations involving students at off-campus events. In a [letter](#) to the university, Project Extra Mile stressed the negative impact of off-campus alcohol-related incidents on neighborhoods and the community as a whole.

"We desperately need colleges and universities to be partners in preventing alcohol-related harms on and off campuses. Allowing alcohol at collegiate sporting events for extra revenue ignores the harms that come from increased consumption, sends the wrong message to students, and ultimately puts the entire community at risk," said Project Extra Mile Executive Director Chris Wagner.

Expanded alcohol sales in conjunction with these events are incredibly troubling, given the negative impact of alcohol on student health and the need for participation from educational institutions in changing the culture of college drinking. According to the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#), the annual estimated consequences of drinking among students include the following:

- 1,519 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor-vehicle crashes.
- 696,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.
- 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report experiencing alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.
- About 9.6 percent of full-time college students ages 18 to 22 meet the criteria for alcohol use disorder, according to the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

In a 2018 opinion piece published in [Forbes](#), former university president Michael T. Nietzel noted, ". . . the decision to allow beer sales has been driven by attempts to pay for athletic programs that run larger and larger financial deficits. Trying to prop up programs that they cannot afford, administrators desperately look for new revenue sources, even when they involve lines of business - like peddling alcohol - about which these same administrators privately agonize. The solution for overextended athletics budgets is not to be found at stadium beer lines; it requires cutting the costs of bloated athletic departments."

State-Level Action Needed to Prevent Excessive Alcohol Use and Related Harms

"Substantial room for improvement in every state"

In 2014, researchers at Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) developed the Alcohol Policy Scale (APS), consulting with experts in the field who nominated and rated the efficacy of 29 state-level alcohol policies. Each state was subsequently assigned a score based on its alcohol policy environment.

In a new study, Jason Blanchette and colleagues updated the APS and scores for each state and the District of Columbia from 1999 to 2018. While the recent (BUSPH) [study](#) found an increase in the number and strength of state laws to reduce impaired driving over the last 20 years, laws to reduce excessive drinking have remained relatively unchanged. Excessive alcohol use includes [binge drinking](#), [heavy drinking](#), and any alcohol use by pregnant women as well as those younger than 21.

"Approximately 85% of alcohol-related death is attributable to causes other than impaired driving," said Blanchette. Other alcohol-related deaths include unintentional injuries, violence, liver disease, stroke, hypertension, and several types of cancer. Excessive alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of death in the U.S., responsible for approximately 88,000 deaths annually.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends the following [strategies](#) to prevent excessive alcohol use and related harms:

- Increase alcohol excise taxes.
- Regulate alcohol outlet density.
- Hold retailers accountable for harms that result from illegally serving or selling alcohol.
- Maintain existing government controls over alcohol sales (avoiding privatization).
- Maintain limits on the days and hours when alcohol can be sold.
- Use electronic devices - such as computers, telephones, and mobile devices - to screen people for excessive alcohol use and deliver a brief intervention.
- Enforce laws that prohibit alcohol sales to minors.

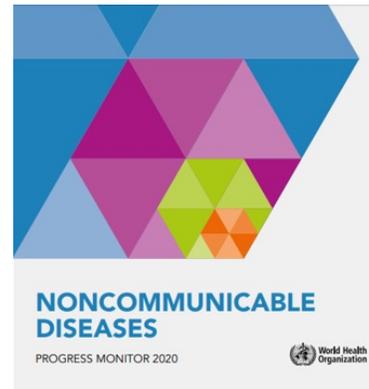


SOURCE: CDC Vital Signs. January 2014. www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2011; Volume 41.

New Report from World Health Organization Highlights Current State of Non-Communicable Diseases

Alcohol policy "best buys" needed to reduce disease burden

The World Health Organization (WHO) has published a new [NCDs Progress Monitor](#) to provide an overview of the current state of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) prevention and control. [World leaders have committed to reducing premature deaths from non-communicable diseases \(NCDs\) by one-third by the year 2030](#). NCDs cause over 70% of global deaths and alcohol use is one of five primary risk factors for NCDs.



The new report highlights the importance of implementing the 16 WHO best buys, which are practical and cost-effective measures to reduce NCDs. The alcohol policy best buys are estimated to [yield a return of more than \\$9 for every \\$1 invested](#) and include the following recommendations:

- Increase alcohol beverage excise taxes.
- Restrict access to retailed alcohol beverages.
- Adopt comprehensive advertising, promotion and sponsorship bans.

Project Extra Mile, Highway Safety Office, and Law Enforcement Agencies Host Statewide Training

60 officers from 25 agencies statewide participated

The Nebraska Department of Transportation - Highway Safety Office and Project Extra Mile are collaborating to hold two law enforcement trainings, both in the Omaha Metro area and in Kearney. Enforcement is the cornerstone of any community's efforts to prevent alcohol-related harms. Enhanced enforcement efforts are paramount to reducing not only drunk driving but excessive alcohol use as well. The Buffalo County Attorney's Office, Nebraska Attorney General's Office, Nebraska State Patrol, and Omaha City Prosecutor are providing the training content. Highlights from the Omaha training include the following topics:

- Assistant Attorney General Milissa Johnson-Wiles discussed administrative citations of liquor establishments and specific elements of cases involving liquor law violations.
- Sgt. Shane Flynn of the Nebraska State Patrol shared tips for identifying fake IDs. Training participants had the opportunity for hands-on ID examination.
- Inv. Paul Smoot of the Nebraska State Patrol discussed the role of law enforcement in conducting licensed premise inspections. He also shared examples of unique situations encountered during inspections.

All of the trainers expressed the need for liquor law enforcement to be proactive. Many community harms can be prevented if resources are devoted

to this important area which, on the surface, may not be prioritized like violent crimes. However, many violent crimes involve alcohol. This is why it's important to be proactive rather than waiting for tragedy to occur.

Strong public support for alcohol enforcement is an additional component to the success of these efforts. Sgt. Neal Bonacci of Omaha Police Department concurs that collaboration among stakeholders is important:

"The training provided up-to-date content regarding local and state liquor laws. The knowledge gained provided a better understanding of how local law enforcement agencies and other community stakeholders can work together to ensure the successful enforcement of liquor laws for the overall safety and betterment of our communities."

Law enforcement representatives, prosecutors, and community coalition members in western and central Nebraska are encouraged to attend the upcoming training in Kearney on March 12. For more information and to register, visit Project Extra Mile's [website](#).



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