

The Extra Mile

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

MILES TO GO: Action Needed on Alcohol and Cancer

National expert urges higher alcohol taxes and other evidence-based approaches

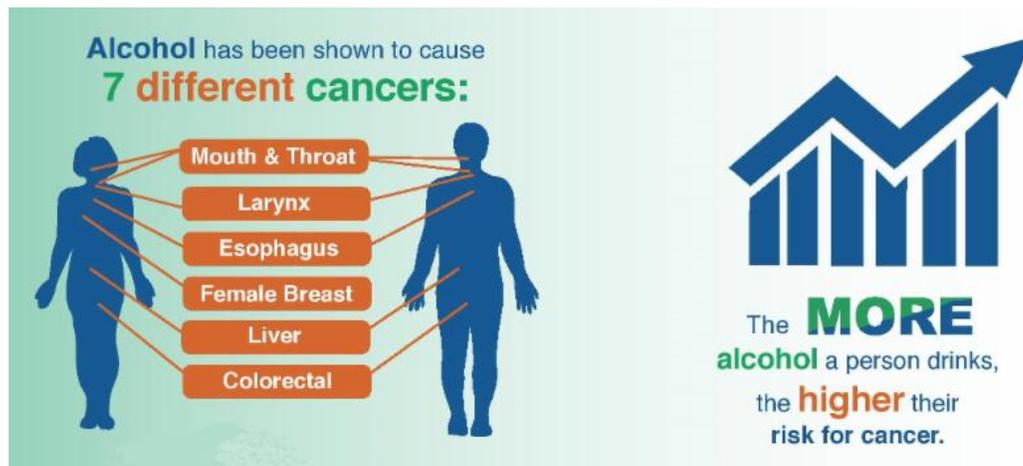
At the March Project Extra Mile coalition meeting, Dr. Noelle LoConte of the University of Wisconsin and UW Carbone Cancer Center presented on alcohol and cancer. Dr. LoConte was the lead author of the groundbreaking report [*Alcohol and Cancer: A Statement of the American Society of Clinical Oncology*](#) (ASCO). Although the link between alcohol and several cancers had already been [well-established in the scientific community](#), that report garnered major media attention and helped spur much-needed public discussion on the topic. ASCO's attention to the issue gives it important credibility, bolstered by the organization's role as the world's largest oncology organization. Dr. LoConte also presented Grand Rounds at the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center on that issue.



Additionally, Dr. LoConte serves as the Principal Investigator for the Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, which has been a leader in communicating the risks of alcohol consumption and cancer.

In her presentations, she also noted that the accumulating research on the effects of alcohol use on gastric (stomach) and pancreatic cancers may soon

lead these cancers to be added to the alcohol-related cancers list. Her slide presentation for the coalition meeting is available [here](#).



Detail from "Addressing High-Risk Drinking to Reduce Cancer Burden in Wisconsin" infographic. Click on the image for the full version.

Moving forward, here are three major areas where Nebraskans can work to save lives from this deadly disease:

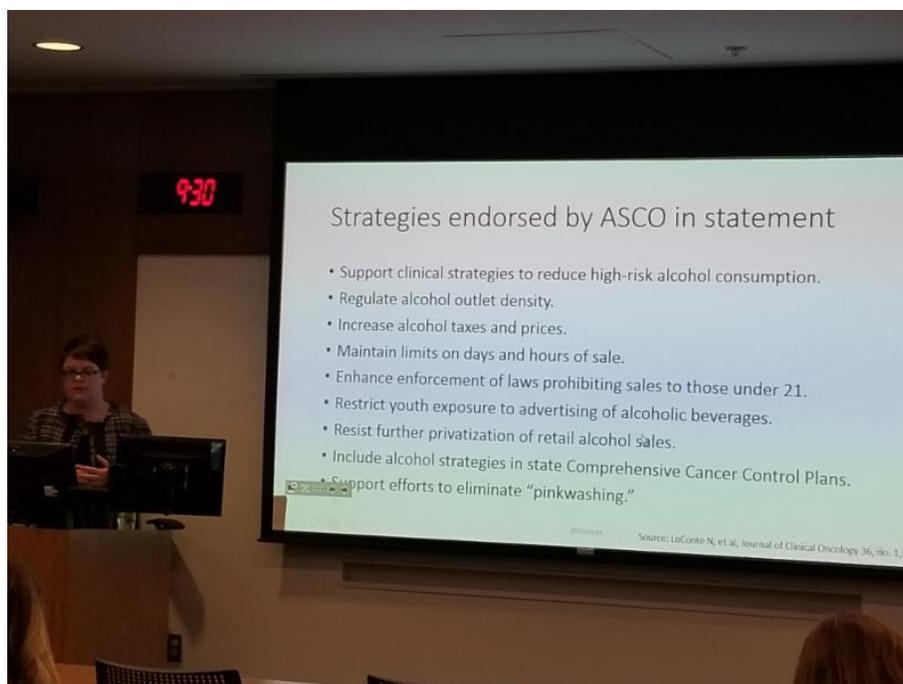
Raising public awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer.

Depending on the survey, only between [30%](#) to [39%](#) of Americans are aware that alcohol use can cause several types of cancer. Effective and engaging public health campaigns can elevate those awareness numbers and help Nebraskans avoid excessive alcohol consumption. In order to accomplish this, several partners would need to step up, including news media, government agencies, elected officials, health care leaders, public health practitioners, and allied non-profit organizations, among others.

Engaging the cancer control community. For several reasons (some of which are addressed in the ASCO report), cancer control organizations and many oncologists have paid little attention to alcohol as a risk factor, despite the fact that it is one of the [three leading preventable causes](#) (along with cigarette smoking and excess body weight) for the disease. Clearly, it's time for cancer control advocacy goals to follow the growing evidence. A positive step in that direction has been the inclusion of alcohol-related goals and strategies in the [Nebraska Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan](#).

Support evidence-based alcohol policies. The ASCO report makes clear that evidence-based, population-level alcohol policies can help reduce incidence of and deaths from alcohol-related cancers. The policies identified in the report are:

- Clinical strategies of alcohol screening and brief intervention provided in clinical settings
- Regulate alcohol outlet density
- Increase alcohol taxes and price
- Maintain limits on days and hours of sale
- Enhance enforcement of laws prohibiting sales to minors
- Restrict youth exposure to advertising of alcoholic beverages
- Resist further privatization of retail alcohol sales in communities with current government control
- Include alcohol control strategies in comprehensive cancer control plans



Disasters, Alcohol, and Alcohol Policy

In the wake of the flooding that decimated so many Nebraska communities, it's helpful to consider how alcohol and alcohol policy issues interact with natural (and man-made) disasters.

Alcohol and disaster-related trauma. Traumatic experiences like disasters can often drive people to self-medicate. Sometimes this behavior is even encouraged - especially when the drug being used is one as culturally accepted as alcohol. Nonetheless, it's important to consider that alcohol is a drug which can [make depression worse](#) and has been found to be a factor in [about 1/4 to 1/3 of all completed suicides](#). This is yet another reason why it is important that we have alcohol policy "guardrails" in place to prevent excessive alcohol consumption. These policies prevent alcohol from being too cheap and too available, thus making excessive use that much easier and common - in good times and bad.

Alcohol industry public relations. The aftermath of the flood also highlights how the alcohol industry operates. Once again, Anheuser Busch got a lot of [relatively cheap publicity](#) by providing canned water to flood victims. This allowed them to get their corporate branding into the hands of many traumatized individuals, including children. Smaller brewers and local bars also got in the act, promising relief through sales of alcohol products. Promotions like this can encourage people to drink more in order to "donate" more. These industry activities raise the question: Where is the line between charity and exploitative marketing?



Excessive alcohol consumption is and ongoing disaster for Nebraska taxpayers. [Excessive drinking costs Nebraska \\$1.2 billion](#) every year -- almost what the Governor has estimated

the costs of this year's historic flooding to total at approximately [\\$1.3 billion](#). When you add these costs to an already tight budget year, a fight for property tax relief and increased school funding as well as Medicaid expansion on the horizon, it's clear our policymakers need to find long-term sustainable solutions to address revenue shortages and alcohol-related costs. Research shows one of the best ways of doing both is increasing alcohol taxes.

Alcohol Impact Zones

Trying to replicate successes in the Northwest

In the early 2000s, the cities of Seattle and Tacoma, Washington were struggling with chronic public inebriation in certain neighborhoods.

The targeted policy solution which was developed to reduce this problem was the designation of urban core areas in these cities as *Alcohol Impact Areas* (AIAs), where brands of high-alcohol content, low price beer and wine products would be banned for sale by liquor retailers.

[An evaluation of the AIAs](#) found that many problems related to excessive alcohol consumption (EMS calls, "Drinking in Public" and "Person Down" police calls, etc.) did decrease - or at least slow in growth relative to other neighborhoods. Furthermore, the policy did not just relocate the problem as some critics of the policy predicted it would. Finally, qualitative interviews found that citizens and many retailers saw the measure as effective and wanted it to continue.

In the same vein, [LB 591](#) allows for the creation of *Alcohol Impact Zones*, which would allow the Liquor Control Commission to place "special conditions or restrictions on a licensee under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act having an establishment or otherwise conducting business within an alcohol impact zone to discourage chronic public inebriation or illegal activity associated with sales or consumption of alcoholic liquor." With "such conditions or restrictions imposed ... reasonably linked to the problems associated with the described chronic public inebriation or illegal activity."

Reverend Portia Cavitt of Clair Memorial United Methodist Church testified in support of LB 591, stressing how underserved communities are disproportionately harmed by alcohol-related businesses.

Unfortunately, the bill received a cold reception by the General Affairs Committee. Opponents felt that local governing bodies and the Liquor Control Commission already had the authority to establish said zones. Establishing these zones would unfairly target all businesses within the zone regardless of whether they were the source of the problem.

LB 591 is currently stuck in committee.

NEWS BRIEFS

Detox services in Douglas County

The PEM April coalition meeting featured Shantel Hoelscher of the Douglas County CMHC Detoxification Services Program who discussed detox and substance abuse treatment services in the Region 6 area.

Detox services are a critical part of the continuum of care for people with substance use problems, especially those from underserved communities and at high risk for co-occurring health problems. The majority of the clients served by the program are in poverty and are homeless or housing vulnerable.

You can learn more about these services by viewing Ms. Hoelscher's full presentation [here](#).



Liability and the burden of harm: Is alcohol next?

Corporate liability for public health harms has been in the news lately. As [the New York Times reported](#), a judicial ruling has allowed a corporate liability suit against firearms manufacturers whose products were used in the Sandy Hook massacre to move forward. Of course, tobacco companies have also faced increasing levels of liability, with the [Supreme Court refusing to block smokers' lawsuits against big tobacco companies](#).

For those who are aware of the massive amount of harm wrought by the practices of multi-national alcohol corporations, these developments raise this question: Could - and should - alcohol companies be the next target of major

public health litigation?

Consider that excessive alcohol consumption kills over twice the number of Americans every year than gun violence does (about 88,000 vs. about 39,000), according to [the most recent CDC data](#). Consider also the evidence that alcohol companies are trying to [underplay](#) - or even [suppress](#) - public knowledge about the link between alcohol and several forms of cancer. Factor in, also, the [huge economic costs borne by state budgets](#) to clean up the excessive drinking fueled by aggressive alcohol industry marketing practices.



All in all, this makes it likely that - sooner or later - alcohol companies will face lawsuits related to the public health harms of their products.

CHILDREN OF WHITECLAY

TWO YEARS AFTER THE
BEER STORE CLOSURES

WEDNESDAY,
APRIL 24, 2019
7 P.M.

NEBRASKA WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY | OLIN HALL
5000 ST. PAUL AVENUE, LINCOLN, NE



FEATURING:

NORA BOESEM & DEB EVENSEN - FASD CLINICIANS
BRYAN BREWER - PAST PRESIDENT OF OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE
FRANK LAMERE - ACTIVIST

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