

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, August 14, 2024
9 a.m.

Please use to sign-in:



A G E N D A

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the June 12, 2024 Meeting Minutes
(please contact PEM staff with corrections)
- III. City Efforts to Prevent Alcohol-Related Harms
Matt Kuhse, Omaha City Attorney
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Mega Saver
 - ii. L St. Lounge
 - b. Enforcement
 - i. 19 Douglas County & 3 Cass County CC's at LCC
 - ii. Outreach to State re: Sales to Intoxicate and CC deliveries
 - c. Policy
 - i. Special Session
 - ii. Alcohol Taxation Interim Study Hearing: August 17th, 9am @ Metro Community College South Omaha campus
 - d. Youth
 - i. Youth Leadership Retreat Recap
 - ii. Leadership Network – Next meeting: Sept. 16th @ 7:00 p.m.
 - e. Awareness
 - i. July & August Research Summaries available at www.projectextramile.org
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **September 11th @ 9 a.m.**
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 209

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS

LR 353 Hearing – August 17, 2024 at 9 a.m.

PROJECT EXTRA MILE
OMAHA METRO AREA
COALITION MEETING MINUTES
June 12, 2024

- I. Call to Order: Chris Wagner called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members and speakers in attendance: Sharona Ernst, Ashley Pick, Toby Czapla, Mike Jones, Palistene Gray-Moore, Derek Schwartz, Cole Williby, Ashley Meyers, Carey Pomykata, Jolene Rohde, and Ryan Wiesen. Youth Leadership Network students present (online & in person) included: Janine Fell, Andrew Adomako, Gibson Williby, Caleb Vaughan, and Saral Sapkota. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Whitney Abbott, Brian Ortner, Lanette Richards, Jayna Schaaf, Jim Boucher, Kirk van Pelt, and Elizabeth Woods. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Beatha Kliewer, and Liene Topko.
- III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the May 8th meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.
- IV. How the Price of Alcohol Impacts our Communities: Liene Topko described the health, economic, and social costs of excessive alcohol consumption nationally and in Nebraska. She discussed the research that has been done on increasing the price of alcohol and its impact on public health and safety impacts. Chris Wagner then described recent national events to increase alcohol taxes and the positive impacts it had in Alaska, Illinois, and Maryland. Lastly, alcohol taxes in Nebraska were discussed – current rates, the history, and attempts to increase and decrease rates. Thanks to efforts by the Youth Leadership Network, an interim study has been introduced to examine alcohol taxation in the state. PEM is also arranging a meeting between youth and the Governor’s office to discuss this issue.
- V. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Wagner invited coalition members who plan to attend the College World Series to take note of what they see regarding blatant alcohol regulation violations and share the information with law enforcement and PEM.
 - ii. Topko informed the coalition that the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission’s online system has been updated therefore less information is available to the public. Staff will work with the LCC on a needs basis when more information is required for citizens that would like to protest licenses.
 - b. Policy
 - i. Wagner shared that the alcohol taxation interim study is in the process of being scheduled. It will occur prior to the end of the calendar year and hopefully in Omaha.
 - ii. A policy work group meeting will be scheduled after the interim study has been scheduled.

- c. Enforcement
 - i. Topko shared that Douglas County compliance check operations resulted in 12 (17%) of 72 businesses selling alcohol to minors, with 4 (25%) of the 12 checking the identification and proceeding to sell.
 - d. Youth
 - i. The Youth Leadership Network students will be meeting at Spare Time for an end of year celebratory meeting on June 12th.
 - ii. The Youth Leadership Retreat will be held in Omaha on June 25-27, 2024. Coalition members were encouraged to spread the word and invite youth they know who may be interested as registration closes June 12th.
 - e. Awareness
 - i. The June Research Summaries are available at www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary
- VI. Additional Discussion/Announcements: none
- VII. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.



RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: August 2024

Key takeaways from included research:

- Researchers examined adult hospitalizations with alcohol-related cirrhosis, mortality and demographic data of these individuals. They determined that there was a high percentage (72.6%) of male admissions as well as those 50 years old and above (80.4%). Females to be admitted with ARC were significantly younger than men, however they had significantly lower mortality. Overall researchers determined that hospital admissions with ACR have risen substantially in Australia over the last decade.
- A new study was conducted to examine the relationship between lifestyle behaviors and mental illness in college women. The researchers found overall poor diet quality, no significant differences in sleep or tobacco use, however alcohol use was significantly associated with mental illness. Those with fewer concurrent unhealthy lifestyle choices and behaviors had less severe symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is present in nearly half the people with bipolar disorder (BD), therefore researchers wanted to examine alcohol use patterns, mood, anxiety, and functioning over time in this population. They found more problematic alcohol use was associated with worse depressive and manic or hypomanic symptoms as well as lower workplace functioning. Researchers also concluded that alcohol use, regardless of diagnostic status, was associated with mood instability and poorer work functioning in those with BD.
- Researchers wanted to evaluate the relationship between average amount of alcohol consumed per day and death by suicide. During a systematic literature search, they found that as consumption of alcohol increased, so did the risk of suicide, particularly among females.

RISING HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS FOR ALCOHOL-RELATED CIRRHOSIS AND THE IMPACT OF SEX AND COMORBIDITY – A DATA LINKAGE STUDY

July 2024

Objectives: International studies have shown shifting demographic data and rising hospitalizations for alcohol-related cirrhosis (ARC), with a paucity of data from Australia. We examined hospitalizations, mortality and demographic data for people admitted with ARC over the last decade in Queensland, Australia.

Study design: Data linkage study.

Methods: A retrospective analysis of adults hospitalized with ARC during 2008–2019 was performed using state-wide admissions data. International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision, codes identified admissions with the principal diagnosis of ARC based on validated algorithms. Comorbidity was assessed using the Charlson Comorbidity Index.

Results: A total of 7152 individuals had 24,342 hospital admissions with ARC (16,388 were for ARC). There was a predominance of males (72.6%) and age ≥ 50 years (80.4%) at index admission. Females were admitted at a significantly younger age than men (59% of women and 43% of men were aged < 60 years, $P < 0.001$). Comorbidities were common, with 45.1% of people having at least one comorbidity. More than half (54.6%) of the patients died over the study period (median follow-up time was 5.1 years; interquartile range 2.4–8.6). Women had significantly lower mortality, with 47.6% (95% confidence interval [CI] 45.0–50.2) probability of 5-year survival, compared with 40.1% (95% CI 38.5–41.6) in men. In multivariable analysis, this was attributable to significantly lower age and comorbidity burden in women. Significantly lower survival was seen in people with higher comorbidity burden. Overall, the number of admissions for ARC increased 2.2-fold from 869 admissions in 2008 to 1932 in 2019.

Conclusions: Hospital admissions for ARC have risen substantially in the last decade. Females were admitted at a younger age, with fewer comorbidities and had lower mortality compared with males. The association between greater comorbidity burden and higher mortality has important clinical implications, as comorbidity-directed interventions may reduce mortality.

Source: Sarraf, B., Skoien, R., Hartel, G., O'Beirne, J., Clark, P. J., Collins, L., ... & Valery, P. C. (2024). Rising hospital admissions for alcohol-related cirrhosis and the impact of sex and comorbidity—a data linkage study. *Public Health*, 232, 178-187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2024.04.030>

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFESTYLE BEHAVIORS AND MENTAL ILLNESS IN WOMEN IN COLLEGE

June 2024

Abstract

Women, particularly those in college, have the highest prevalence of any mental illness (MI), which negatively impacts social connection, academic performance, and health. Research into alternative treatment methods suggests that lifestyle behaviors are safer and more effective than medication at reducing MI symptoms. This study explores the relationship between lifestyle behaviors and MI in college women through an online survey. The survey included a food frequency questionnaire (Diet History Questionnaire II) and questions about lifestyle behaviors, symptoms of MI, and sociodemographic information. Diet quality was calculated using the Healthy Eating Index (HEI), and MI was assessed using the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21. Independent sample t-tests, ANOVA, and chi-square analyses were conducted. A total of 222 women completed the survey. Overall, diet quality was poor, with a mean HEI of 62.6 ± 10.4 . No significant differences or

associations were found between MI groups for total HEI score, sleep, or tobacco use. However, alcohol use was significantly associated with MI ($p = 0.049$). Individuals with fewer concurrent unhealthy lifestyle behaviors had less severe symptoms of depression ($p = 0.009$) and anxiety ($p < 0.001$) compared to those with more unhealthy lifestyle behaviors. In this study, alcohol use was the only independent lifestyle behavior associated with symptoms of MI. We also found an association between the number of concurrent unhealthy lifestyle behaviors and depression and anxiety symptoms. Future research should explore the benefits of a healthy lifestyle on MI in a more diverse sample of women.

Source: Armstrong, N., Fu, Z., & Woolf, K. (2024). The Relationship between Lifestyle Behaviors and Mental Illness in Women in College. *Nutrients*, 16(14), 2211. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu16142211>

LONGITUDINAL INTERPLAY BETWEEN ALCOHOL USE, MOOD, AND FUNCTIONING IN BIPOLAR SPECTRUM DISORDERS

June 2024

Importance: Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is present in nearly half of individuals with bipolar disorder (BD) and is associated with markedly worsening outcomes. Yet, the concurrent treatment of BD and AUD remains neglected in both research and clinical care; characterizing their dynamic interplay is crucial in improving outcomes.

Objective: To characterize the longitudinal alcohol use patterns in BD and examine the temporal associations among alcohol use, mood, anxiety, and functioning over time.

Design, Setting, and Participants: This cohort study selected participants and analyzed data from the Prechter Longitudinal Study of Bipolar Disorder (PLS-BD), an ongoing cohort study that recruits through psychiatric clinics, mental health centers, and community outreach events across Michigan and collects repeated phenotypic data. Participants selected for the present study were those with a diagnosis of BD type I (BDI) or type II (BDII) who had been in the study for at least 5 years. Data used were extracted from February 2006 to April 2022, and follow-up ranged from 5 to 16 years.

Main Outcomes and Measures: Alcohol use was measured using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test. Depression, mania or hypomania, anxiety, and functioning were measured using the 9-Item Patient Health Questionnaire, the Altman Self-Rating Mania Scale, the 7-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder assessment scale, and the Life Functioning Questionnaire, respectively.

Results: A total of 584 individuals (386 females (66.1%); mean [SD] age, 40 [13.6] years) were included. These participants had a BDI (445 [76.2%]) or BDII (139 [23.8%]) diagnosis, with or without a lifetime diagnosis of AUD, and a median (IQR) follow-up of 9 (0-16) years. More problematic alcohol use was associated with worse depressive ($\beta = 0.04$; 95% credibility interval [CrI], 0.01-0.07) and manic or hypomanic symptoms ($\beta = 0.04$; 95% CrI, 0.01-0.07) as well as lower workplace functioning ($\beta = 0.03$; 95% CrI, 0.00-0.06) over the next 6 months, but increased depressive and manic or hypomanic symptoms were not associated with greater subsequent alcohol use. These latter 2 associations were more pronounced in BDII than BDI (mania or hypomania: $\beta = 0.16$ [95% CrI, 0.02-0.30]; workplace functioning: $\beta = 0.26$ [95% CrI, 0.06-0.45]). Alcohol use was not associated with anxiety over time.

Conclusions and Relevance: This study found that alcohol use, regardless of diagnostic status, was associated with mood instability and poorer work functioning in BD, but increased mood symptoms were not associated with subsequent alcohol use. Given its prevalence and repercussions, dimensional and longitudinal assessment and management of alcohol use are necessary and should be integrated into research and standard treatment of BD.

Source: Sperry, S. H., Stromberg, A. R., Murphy, V. A., Lasagna, C. A., McInnis, M. G., Menkes, M. W., ... & Tso, I. F. (2024). Longitudinal Interplay Between Alcohol Use, Mood, and Functioning in Bipolar Spectrum Disorders. *JAMA Network Open*, 7(6), e2415295-e2415295. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.15295>

A DOSE-RESPONSE META-ANALYSIS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AVERAGE AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL CONSUMED AND DEATH BY SUICIDE

July 2024

Background: To determine whether sub-clinical levels of drinking may contribute to suicide risk, and whether the risk differs by sex, we aimed to evaluate the relationship between average amount of alcohol consumed per day and death by suicide.

Methods: A systematic literature search was performed in Embase, Medline, PsycINFO, PubMed, and Web of Science from database inception up to April 27, 2022. The search strategies incorporated a combination of medical subject headings and keywords for “alcohol use” and “suicide”. One-stage dose-response meta-analyses using a restricted maximum likelihood random-effect estimator were conducted to explore the relationship between average alcohol volume consumed and suicide, by sex. Three different shapes of the dose-response relationship—linear (on the log-scale), quadratic, and restrictive cubic splines—were tested.

Results: A total of eight studies were included (three studies for females (n=781,205), and eight studies for males (n=1,215,772)). A linear dose-response relationship between average alcohol volume consumed and the log-risk of suicide was identified for both males and females. For males and females, a relative risk (RR) of 1.11 (95% CI: 1.05, 1.18) and 1.64 (95% CI: 1.07, 2.51) for suicide when consuming an average of 10 g of pure alcohol per day compared to lifetime abstinence, 1.38 (95% CI: 1.14, 1.66) and 4.39 (95% CI: 1.21, 15.88) for 30 g/day, and 1.71 (95% CI: 1.25, 2.33) and 11.75 (95% CI: 1.38, 100.33) for 50 g/day, respectively.

Conclusions: As consumption increases, the risk of suicide increases proportionally. The risk of suicide associated with average daily alcohol consumption may be elevated for females, compared with males. Albeit, more research is needed, particularly among females.

Source: Lange, S., Llamosas-Falcón, L., Kim, K. V., Lasserre, A. M., Orpana, H., Bagge, C. L., ... & Probst, C. (2024). A dose-response meta-analysis on the relationship between average amount of alcohol consumed and death by suicide. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 111348. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2024.111348>

WHO says 2.6 million alcohol-related deaths globally is ‘unacceptably high’

Written by Gabriela Galvin

There were 2.6 million alcohol-related deaths across the globe in 2019, and Europe had the highest death rate, according to a new report.

People are more likely to die from alcohol-related issues in Europe than anywhere else, according to a new report from the World Health Organization (WHO).

Globally, there were 2.6 million alcohol-related deaths in 2019, a 2.5 per cent decline from 2010 but still “unacceptably high,” Dr Vladimir Poznyak, who heads the alcohol, drugs, and addictive behaviours unit in WHO’s department of mental health and substance use, said during a press conference.

The European region had the highest alcohol-related death rate – 52.9 per 100,000, just above Africa’s 52.2 per 100,000 – as well as the world’s highest rate of alcohol use disorder, at 10.7 per cent, though prevalence has plummeted in recent years.

The alcohol use disorder rate has also decreased in the Americas and Western Pacific countries, while it’s risen in the African, Eastern Mediterranean, and Southeast Asian regions.

Overall, an estimated 400 million people had alcohol use disorder, which increases the risk of digestive and cardiovascular diseases, epilepsy, cancer, injuries, and other health problems.

Europeans also lead the world when it comes to casual drinking, imbibing an average of 9.2 litres per capita compared with 5.5 litres globally. Among the 10 countries with the highest alcohol consumption per capita, seven were European Union member states.

“There is no risk-free level of alcohol consumption,” Poznyak said, though biological, social, and contextual factors play a role in shaping someone’s individual risk.

That’s why, as part of the WHO’s sustainable development goals, the agency aims to curb binge drinking, particularly among teenagers – but it doesn’t set particular data points or criteria for individual countries to meet. By 2030, the WHO wants the “harmful use of alcohol” to drop by 20 per cent compared with 2010.

‘Critical gaps’ in substance use disorder treatment

Drug use and addiction are also major global health challenges.

In 2019, nearly 600,000 people died as a result of psychoactive drug use, the report found. Substance use disorders are closely linked to mental health conditions and can increase the risk of noncommunicable diseases, infections associated with injecting drugs, and accidental deaths.

Access to treatment for substance use problems remains a major barrier in most of the world, the WHO report found. Across the countries surveyed, treatment uptake ranges from less than one per cent to 35 per cent.

Disparities also exist within countries. Most alcohol-related deaths were among men, while substance use disorder disproportionately affects people of lower socioeconomic status.

“Stigma, discrimination, and misconceptions about the efficacy of treatment contribute to these critical gaps in treatment provision, as well as the continued low prioritisation of substance use disorders in health and developmental agencies,” Poznyak said.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted data collection and analysis, which delayed the report’s release by two years.

With 38,795 shots purchased, Tennessee wins the Jell-O shot challenge

Written by Emily Nitcher

Tennessee picked up more than one championship Monday night.

With 38,795 shots purchased, the Volunteers won the 2024 Jell-O Shot Challenge at Rocco's Pizza & Cantina.

The restaurant, across the street from Charles Schwab Field, was busy throughout the College World Series as fans bought shot after shot hoping to clinch the title.

Tennessee's victory means that for four straight years, the winners of the Jell-O shot challenge also have won the title on the baseball field. It started with Mississippi State in 2021, then Ole Miss in 2022 and LSU in 2023.

The only time the CWS winner wasn't the Jell-O shot winner was 2019, when Vanderbilt won the championship series in three games over Michigan. But the Commodores were seventh out of the eight teams in the shot challenge.

Just like this year's outcome on the field, Texas A&M came in second with 32,762 shots.

It was a close battle between Tennessee and Texas A&M to crown this year's Jell-O shot winner.

Kevin Culjat, who owns Rocco's with his wife, Bonnie, said the lead changed four times in the final 24 hours of the Jell-O shot challenge.

"They were really nice people," Culjat said of Tennessee and Texas A&M fans. "They were really kind to my staff, they tipped really well and they had a really really good time."

Only two conferences, the Southeastern Conference and Atlantic Coast Conference, were represented at this year's CWS. But SEC fans bought nearly 85% of the Jell-O shots sold.

The Jell-O Shot Challenge at Rocco's has become a CWS tradition. Part of the proceeds go to a food bank in the winning team's hometown.

Rocco's donates \$1 from each shot sold to each school's respective food bank and 50 cents to food banks in Omaha and Council Bluffs. Last year, Rocco's donated a total of \$142,464.

In a social media post, Rocco's said it sold a record number of shots, which means it will donate more money than ever before in the challenge's history.

"Everybody is going to get a good chunk of change to their food banks, which is really what we hoped for," Culjat said.

Before Culjat writes those checks, he contacts each university to find out the best place to send the money. Some universities have food banks on campus while others use another local agency.

"You want to make sure when you're writing checks for 8, 10, 12 and 30,000, you want to make sure they're going to the right entity," Culjat said.

About \$50,000 also will be headed to food banks in the Omaha and Council Bluffs area, he said.

Another winner in this year's Jell-O shot challenge didn't have a team in the CWS.

Louisiana State University fans kept calling Rocco's this year because they wanted to buy Jell-O shots. Last year the largest check, \$68,888, went to the LSU Student Food Pantry after Tiger fans purchased 68,888 shots and set a record.

Culjat can't sell alcohol over the phone. But Culjat didn't want their food bank to miss an opportunity so he partnered with Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank.

When LSU fans called Rocco's, Culjat and his staff suggested they donate directly to the food bank. Just under \$8,500 was raised, according to a social media post.

Gen Z wants flavorful drinks. Here's how Big Beer is trying to attract them

Written by Jordan Valinsky

Beer and hot dogs are as patriotic as it gets. But cracking open the cooler at your July 4th barbecue, you could be seeing fewer brews, with alternatives like spiked seltzers, canned cocktail and hard teas stealing their real estate.

And you can blame the youngins for that: The youngest cohort of legal-aged drinkers from Gen Z, which encompass the ages from 21 to 26, are “drinking completely different than any other generation we’ve seen before,” according to NIQ’s Kaleigh Theriault.

“They’re relatively new to their drinking and when they are choosing alcohol they are leaning toward those flavor-forward categories,” Theriault, an associate director of beverage alcohol thought leadership at the consumer intelligence company, told CNN.

Beverages created by smaller companies are controlling the landscape. E. & J. Gallo Winery’s High Noon dominates the spirit-based cocktail category; White Claw from Mark Anthony Brands remains the top-selling spiked seltzer; and newer entrants, including punchier drinks that mix liquor with an iced tea or lemonade such as Surfside, a two-year-old brand, are rapidly gaining ground.

That’s a problem for Big Beer, which is dealing with flat sales, declining volume and a fickle generation of younger drinkers who are completely ditching the bottle or preferring anything but a regular beer.

In response, Miller Lite-maker Molson Coors Beverage Company, Modelo-brewer Constellation Brands and heavyweight Anheuser-Busch InBev are among the larger brewers expanding beyond beer and diversifying their portfolio with flavorful concoctions.

Fruit, in particular, has been a focus area because “it’s something that the consumer seems to be drawn to right now and they want to drink something really good,” Theriault said. “Those flavors offer that.”

Inspiration from TikTok

Constellation turned to TikTok for inspiration for its newest beer, which is lightly based on the “Corona Sunrise” cocktail — a mixture of tequila, a Corona, orange juice, grenadine, plus a splash of lime juice. It has taken off on the video-sharing app, with the most-watched tutorial racking up nearly 14 million views.

Since it’s unlawful to sell a beer mixed with a spirit, Corona spun up its own version to hopefully appeal to younger drinkers: the “Sunbrew Citrus Cerveza,” which is brewed with orange and lime peels and blended with the same juices and mixed with a Corona Extra to mirror the sweet flavor of the cocktail counterpart.

“This new brew was created with the flavor-seeking Gen Z audience in mind, a group of drinkers known for their experimentation and mixing,” noted Saúl Trejo, director of brand marketing at Corona, in a press release. For now, the drink is only available in the northeastern US before possibly expanding nationwide depending on sales.

Sunbrew fits into Constellation's portfolio with a few other Gen Z-angled beverages like Fresca Mixed and its malt-based beverages, Corona Refresca and Modelo Spiked Aguas Frescas, both of which also have fruity flavors and are selling well for the company.

TikTok has also influenced Molson Coors for one of its newest boozy beverages called "Happy Thursday." The shtick? It's a non-carbonated drink because "bloating that may come from carbonation is considered a top barrier" for younger drinkers and the trend of "decarbonizing" drinks is blowing up on the app.

The "smooth, bubble-free" drink comes in four fruit flavors, including strawberry and black cherry, and also meets another need for Gen Z since it's low in alcohol content at 4.4% by volume. It also has bright packaging designed to "pop on social media," the brewer notes.

Launched less than three months ago, sales and distribution are both growing and feedback has been "extremely positive" for Happy Thursday, the company said on its blog. The company could shed more light on its sales during its next earnings report in August.

Happy Thursday fits into the company's strategy that began in 2019 when Molson Coors tweaked its name to encompass its growing portfolio of beverages besides beer. That now includes hard iced tea, energy drinks and its Simply Spiked lineup. Last year, it acquired Blue Run Spirits, a cult favorite high-end bourbon and rye whiskey brand, in light of US spirit sales surpassing beer sales.

"Suppliers, in order to stay relevant, have to evolve and follow where the consumer is trending — and right now the consumer wants flavor," NIQ's Theriault said about their pivots. "Innovation is really important in the alcohol industry and ensuring that innovation is tied to the consumer trends is what's right for business."

Building 'beyond beer'

Canned cocktails and spirits-based beverages have also helped Anheuser-Busch's bottom line in the US, especially in light of the collapsing sales of Bud Light. Its aptly titled "Beyond Beer" category is currently a \$1.5 billion part of its global business and is helping attract younger, legally aged drinkers.

NÜTRL, a flavorful lineup of vodka seltzers, and Cutwater Spirits canned cocktails are two standouts. An Anheuser-Busch spokesperson told CNN that Cutwater, which has a collection of canned rum mai tais, vodka mules and tequila palomas, has "steadily grown dollar sales double digits for five consecutive years" and jumped an additional 23% in sales this year.

Still, it's not all rosy for Anheuser-Busch, especially if a drink has the Bud Light name attached. Bud Light Seltzer sales are down 50%, according to trade publication Brewbound, outpacing a larger decline in malt-based seltzers as drinkers shift toward spirit-based drinks. The company launched a new advertising campaign in 2023 just a few weeks before the Dylan Mulvaney controversy derailed its parent brand's sales.

Despite younger drinkers' hesitance with buying beer and flat sales, Big Beer companies aren't facing an existential threat. In fact, it's the exact opposite, according to one expert.

"Young drinkers can now find just about any kind of drink in just about any kind of flavor practically whenever they want, and they get to choose from the most diverse collection of beverages that

has ever existed — with and without alcohol,” Bryan Roth, an analyst for Feel Goods Company and editor of the alcohol beverage newsletter, Sightlines+, told CNN.

“These long-tenured and often historic companies are adapting to the market. What makes it particularly exciting is that consumers are more often leading the way,” he added.

Omaha grocery store in 'food desert' causes controversy over liquor license application

Written by Christopher Burbach

A proposal to replace a failed small, healthy-food-focused grocery store near 24th and Lake Streets with a new one that sells alcohol has sparked a debate in the neighborhood, at City Hall and soon at the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission.

Does such a store have to sell alcohol — and specifically single-serve containers of beer and liquor — to survive? Should a business be allowed to do so for the sake of making healthy food available in the neighborhood?

The Omaha City Council said no to the second question. The council recently recommended against granting a liquor license application for the proposed store after the owner said he would not agree to prohibiting sales of single beers and miniature bottles of liquor commonly called shooters. The application is now headed for a Nebraska Liquor Control Commission public hearing, possibly in August. The commission has the final say, but takes City Council recommendations and citizen protests into account.

The debate involves a vacant, 1,800-square-foot retail space at 2118 N. 24th St. in the Fair Deal Village MarketPlace development. The original concept for the development included a grocery store with fresh fruits and vegetables adjacent to a restaurant and small, locally owned businesses in refurbished shipping containers. Creating such a grocery in an area described as a “food desert” was one of the selling points for an \$800,000 federal grant and \$195,000 in tax-increment financing that helped pay for the \$2.5 million project. The project was developed and is owned by the Omaha Economic Development Corp.

The development is part of larger efforts to revitalize North 24th Street with businesses and housing, especially around the historic 24th and Lake Streets intersection.

A grocery opened shortly after Fair Deal Village MarketPlace was built in 2016. But the store went out of business during the COVID-19 pandemic. The original store did not sell alcohol or tobacco products.

Is a grocery store that sells liquor better than no grocery at all?

Now, the owner of Super Convenience Store in Council Bluffs proposes opening a new grocery store, Weini's Mart, at Fair Deal Village MarketPlace. Merhawi Kahsay, who formerly owned Afoma Corner Store in South Omaha, would rent the space from OEDC. He is applying for a Class D liquor license, which would allow the sale of beer, wine and spirits. The lease is contingent on obtaining a liquor license, Kahsay's attorney told the City Council.

Kahsay said in an interview he needs to be able to sell alcohol to make the business profitable. But he said he intends for it to be primarily a grocery store and will offer fresh produce along with other healthy food. He said he would model the North 24th Street store after his Council Bluffs business.

“I want to make it 85% groceries and 15% alcohol,” Kahsay said. “It will be a clean, well-organized grocery store ... I'm not trying to make money for myself only. I'm trying to provide for the community.”

The proposal has run into community opposition. Pastors of two neighborhood churches are against the liquor license application.

“Our neighborhood needs a grocery store,” the Rev. Stan Rone, senior pastor at the Worship Center North 24th Street Church of God, wrote the council. “However, the addition of another business with a Class D liquor license along the North 24th Street corridor, and within 500 feet of our location, is not in the best interest of our community and hampers efforts to aid individuals who are struggling with alcohol addiction and their families.”

Rone noted there are three businesses nearby where people can buy alcohol.

The Rev. Alvin McCruel, pastor at St. John Missionary Baptist Church and first vice president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, also opposes the liquor license.

“We have a concern that it appears that businesses that keep coming into the North Omaha community always want to get a liquor license,” McCruel said. “And it’s often stated that the reason for that is to be competitive in the business.”

What North Omaha needs, he said, “is a real grocery store, as opposed to several little small convenient marts that say they have to offer liquor in order to stay in business.”

Kahsay’s attorney, Lindsey Schuler, told the council the former grocery store at Fair Deal Village was not able to make it with just food items.

“And while the opponents raised adding a full grocery store in North Omaha, while that is admirable, those also have liquor licenses, they sell beer, they sell alcohol, they sell tobacco,” Schuler said.

It’s unclear why the previous grocery store at Fair Deal Village went out of business. Michael Maroney, CEO and president of OEDC, attended the June 25 council meeting but did not speak. A call to his office seeking comment was not returned.

‘Would it really be that bad? I don’t know’

Given the opposition, council Vice President Aimee Melton asked Kahsay if would accept a restriction on the liquor license that prohibited the sale of single cans of beer and mini-liquor bottles. It’s a compromise the council frequently seeks in similar situations, when neighbors oppose liquor licenses.

“One of the biggest problems we have sometimes when we have these little convenience stores is people will use these stores as like their refrigerator,” Melton said. “They’ll come in and buy the one can of beer, the airplane shots, and that’s what tends to cause most of the problems.”

The council appeared amenable to supporting the liquor license with that restriction as a compromise.

“I want a business to open here,” Melton said. “It’s just sitting empty, and it would provide ... an opportunity for people to get fresh food and produce, which is very much needed.”

Kahsay said he couldn't accept the compromise. The council voted 5-1 to recommend that the state liquor commission deny the license. Council members Pete Festersen, Danny Begley, Ron Hug and Don Rowe joined Melton in voting to deny. Council member Brinker Harding voted against the motion.

Juanita Johnson, whose council district includes North Omaha, was absent from the meeting. She said Wednesday she opposes the liquor license application, but not because Kahsay wouldn't accept the compromise. Johnson said she has received messages from area neighbors and pastors opposing the liquor license. She said the council should be consistent with its decision to recommend denial of a liquor license for a nearby Family Dollar store based on neighborhood opposition.

Passing the vacant store on an exercise walk Tuesday, 73-year-old Gene Moore said the neighborhood where he grew up definitely needs a grocery store. But not another liquor license.

"What makes you think somebody's going to buy liquor and not come out here and drink," Moore said. "They're going to start congregating out here, drinking and littering, and it'll affect the other businesses around here."

But younger people involved with North 24th Street's recent redevelopment aren't so sure some alcohol sales at the location would be a bad idea. Manne Cook, an urban planner who worked on North 24th Street plans when he worked for the city, said he can understand opposition, but believes it is a nuanced situation.

Cook said if sales of singles were such a source of problems, the city would ban them citywide. If a full grocery store, like a Hy-Vee or Baker's, were to build in the area, the city wouldn't oppose a liquor license for them. And people who live in the area might want to buy alcohol along with their groceries.

"I get the reason why people wouldn't want to necessarily have a liquor store; if that's all it ended up being, I can see why folks wouldn't want that," Cook said. "But would it really be that bad? I don't know."

People can weigh in on the issue with the State Liquor Control Commission via the commission's website. The file number for the application is 11967. The deadline is July 11.

Omaha City Council votes against Mega Saver liquor license

Written by Christopher Burbach

The Omaha City Council granted neighbors' wishes Tuesday and voted against a liquor license for a controversial planned Mega Saver convenience store near 72nd and Dodge Streets.

But the vote won't stop the business altogether, which is neighborhood opponents' deeper desire. And it may not prevent Mega Saver from winning a license to sell off-sale alcohol in the former Fuddrucker's restaurant space at 7059 Dodge St.

The Nebraska State Liquor Control Commission makes the final decision and does not have to concur with the city. The City Council only makes recommendations. Council members voted 4-3 against a motion to approve the license. But they stopped short of recommending the state commission deny the license. The council voted 4-3 against a motion to recommend denial.

Which means the application goes to the Liquor Control Commission with no recommendation from the City Council. Had the council recommended denial, it would have had more weight.

Council member Ron Hug had joined Danny Begley, Pete Festersen and Juanita Johnson in voting against approving the liquor license. But Hug joined council members Aimee Melton, Brinker Harding and Don Rowe in voting against sending a denial recommendation to Lincoln.

Hug later said he voted no on the second motion because he considered it redundant and unnecessary.

Melton opined that the City's Law Department wouldn't be able to justify a denial based on state statutes.

"If (we) recommend denial, we're going to have to send our lawyer down in front of the liquor commission to have to defend our denial," said Melton, an attorney herself. "This is what I can tell you, from what I see, he doesn't have any defense."

The votes came after nearly two hours of public testimony and council discussion about Mega Saver and its plans for a store and gas station in an existing strip mall at the southeast corner of one of Omaha's prime intersections, 72nd and Dodge Streets.

The company owns the corner. It shares the intersection with Omaha's new main public library, under construction to the west, and with Crossroads, site of a planned major redevelopment.

The 11 neighborhood opponents who spoke Wednesday contended the planned store does not fit with the library, and it does not belong beside the residential area.

"Our historic neighborhood is concerned about having liquor sales available at this iconic intersection of Omaha," said Susan Howard, who said her home is within 500 feet of the planned store. "We welcome the new library, which we hope will be a beautiful, family-friendly and wholesome gathering spot."

She noted the University of Nebraska at Omaha is a few blocks away, and Lewis and Clark Middle School and St. Margaret Mary School are in the area.

“We are worried about easy access to liquor by so many young and impressionable students, as well as the increased danger of intoxication at an extremely busy intersection,” Howard said. “It’s likely we will experience increased noise, loitering, traffic and safety concerns due to easy access to alcohol.”

She asked the council to oppose the liquor license, or “at the very least” prohibit sales of containers smaller than 32 ounces, which would eliminate sales of single beers and miniature, 100- or 50-milliliter bottles of liquor called “shooters.”

Mega Saver has had 30 sale-to-minor violations at its stores, said Liene Topko, policy and research coordinator for Project Extra Mile, an organization that works to reduce alcohol-related harms. The violations were at 17 different Mega Saver stores, she said.

Topko called it “a blatant disregard for the liquor laws.”

Jim Carson, an attorney for Mega Saver, said none of its stores has ever been closed down or had its liquor license revoked.

He said he lives near a Mega Saver store. His kids go there to buy Gatorade and he buys gas there, he said. He doesn’t see any litter or loitering.

“I’m hearing all this stuff like the world is going to come to an end if Mega Saver gets a gas station across from the library,” Carson said. “Mega Saver owns this property. This is the United States of America ... They’re compliant with the zoning. We’ve been through all of these hoops. And what we’re talking about is the liquor license that we meet all the criteria (for).”

Begley, whose district includes the site, asked Carson if Mega Saver would agree to sell no liquor bottles smaller than 375 milliliters, and no cans or bottles of beer under 32 ounces. Carson said no. He noted competing stores in the area don’t have those restrictions.

Begley said without that compromise, he would oppose the license based on the concerns raised by neighbors.

“I’m not anti-Mega Saver,” Begley said. “This is unique to this neighborhood and 72nd and Dodge.”

The debate over the planned store could return to the City Council on July 30. Mega Saver has applied for a rezoning of the site. It would allow the store and gas station, regardless of the liquor license status. The City Planning Department suggested the rezoning, and the Planning Board has approved it.

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission goes live with new software

Written by Brian Neben

LINCOLN — New software is getting strong reviews and is streamlining user processes following a 16-month implementation by the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (NLCC).

The software, known as POSSE ABC, went live back in May. The same program is utilized in nine other states for alcohol industry regulation. POSSE ABC stands for Public One-Stop Service Engine Alcohol Beverage Control. The NLCC refers to the software as POSSE.

NLCC Executive Director Hobert Rupe said the IT modernization project came in under budget and on schedule.

“This modernization is a great example of effective state procurement, as we worked with industry partners, other state agencies and local governing bodies to make a unified system that works for all stakeholders. I am very proud of our agency and our staff for the hard work and commitment to providing great service to the State of Nebraska and its citizens.”

The project was funded in 2018, when the NLCC was appropriated \$3.8 million to replace mainframe infrastructure from the 1980’s, which required a great deal of manual data entry and workflow. Following a competitive bidding process, the project was awarded to Computronix in July of 2022. Upon completion, the cost came in at under \$3.2 million.

One of the features of POSSE includes Brand Registration functionality, which is a new requirement in Nebraska July 1, 2024. This law requires all alcoholic liquor, prior to the sale or shipment in the State of Nebraska, be registered. Products registered are posted publicly on the NLCC website: <https://lcc.nebraska.gov/brand-registration>. This is the first-time alcoholic beverage products in Nebraska can be identified by their source supplier, product type, and distributor.

Applications include an interactive map that allows users to view beverage territories and the brands sold within those territories. It also displays all active liquor licenses in the state. This is the first geospatial interface by NLCC that includes that information.

“The NLCC has received overall positive responses from the liquor industry about POSSE, for its accessibility and straightforward online services for liquor license applications, liquor license renewals, industry complaints, brand registration, and excise tax reporting,” said Rupe. “POSSE also features a robust Education and Certification module which allows NLCC to move forward with improved education and training opportunities for the Nebraska liquor industry.”

Users who wish to view the interactive map can log onto: <https://lcc.nebraska.gov/>; navigate to the “Revenue” tab, “Beer Territory Map” OR log onto the Nebraska Spatial clearinghouse website: <https://www.nebraskamap.gov/>; navigate to the “Economy” data categories and select “NLCC Distribution Boundaries”

Pillen pivots from his own property tax plan to embrace emerging legislative plan

Written by Aaron Sanderford and Zach Wendling

LINCOLN — Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen pivoted Monday from his own property tax relief proposal to embrace a hodgepodge plan emerging from a broad swath of special session bills.

Pillen acknowledged the shift during a news conference with law enforcement leaders and firefighters announcing that the new plan would not cap local spending on public safety.

The plan, cobbled together by State Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Omaha and the Revenue Committee she chairs, seeks to offset about \$1.8 billion in school-related property tax revenue. The committee plans to use Legislative Bill 9 to outline the compromise elements instead of Pillen-backed LB 1. LB 9 was introduced by State Sen. Jana Hughes of Seward.

As in Pillen's proposals, much of the plan would be paid for by applying the state sales tax to items and services not taxed today. More than 70 goods and services would be added to the state tax rolls, including personal services such as lawn care or swimming pool maintenance.

The new plan would raise taxes on alcohol and would begin taxing candy, gambling and soft drinks – as Pillen's plan did — but the new plan wouldn't add quite as much to the cost of such goods as the governor proposed.

A big shift from Pillen's proposal: which items and services would keep their sales tax exemptions. Pillen, for example, would have taxed home and auto repairs and legal and accounting services. The new proposal wouldn't.

The new plan would get rid of a proposed tax on advertising and cloud or data services.

It would, however, extend a 2% sales tax to new agricultural or manufacturing machinery and equipment, instead of Pillen's push to tax all machinery or equipment. The 2% sales tax would replace the personal property tax paid on any new versions of those items.

Much like the Legislature did recently with community colleges, the new plan would use state tax dollars to take the state's 23 natural resources districts off the property tax rolls.

It would have the state take over \$181 million in funding for county jails. And it would protect the homestead exemption, which Linehan said would cost less than the homestead program does currently because of state education funding.

Pillen didn't respond directly when asked whether he was still pushing to reduce property taxes by a specific percentage. He said he wants structural relief and spending caps that create lasting relief. He also still wants spending cuts.

"This is not the governor's plan," he said about the ideas being combined. "This will be a plan of the peoples, and the Unicameral working together to fix the problem."

Another change Pillen embraced Monday was based on feedback from police, firefighters, prosecutors, sheriffs, city councils, county boards and mayors that his previous proposal set too hard a cap on vital local spending.

Pillen's original LB 1 and the new version of LB 9 include hard caps on local government property tax collections, with few exceptions. The original proposal sought to carve out funding for new public safety services and vacant positions.

Kearney Police Chief Bryan Waugh, Lancaster County Attorney Pat Condon, Douglas County Sheriff Aaron Hanson and other firefighter and police union leaders backed the new plan, which would remove state caps on public safety personnel, equipment and training.

Waugh said he feared that under the original proposal, the state could backslide from recent efforts to increase funding to help local law enforcement agencies recruit and retain talent. Hanson agreed.

"The original language — very well-intentioned," Hanson said. "But it was more narrow ... in terms of the pathway to achieve or exceed spending when needed."

Pillen had no direct answer for why city councils and county boards could be trusted to handle spending on public safety, which makes up half or more of many local budgets, yet school boards and NRD boards wouldn't be given the same latitude.

He said people have been clear that property taxes need to be reduced so they can stay in their homes, but they also need to feel safe.

The governor has staked his political reputation and future on steering the Legislature toward addressing rising property taxes. He held months of town halls across the state, pitching his own proposal.

Pillen started the conversation in December by arguing that Nebraska might need to increase the sales tax rate and broaden the sales tax base, a big-picture plan that lawmakers shot down.

He has pointed to research by Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who concluded that the states growing the fastest have higher sales tax rates and lower property tax burdens.

Pillen has faced resistance from the left and right, with Democrats concerned about local government and school needs and Republicans worried about raising sales taxes to offset property taxes.

But his willingness to shift again, shown Monday, reinforces that he was more interested in swift action by lawmakers to make changes than in the specific shifts from property taxes to other revenue sources.

Linehan introduced LB 1 at the beginning of the special session on behalf of Pillen. It will be one of several property tax relief bills that are expected to be combined into LB 9 on Tuesday afternoon.

That measure, as proposed by Hughes, sought to phase in the maximum amount a school district could tax for its operational expenses to 25 cents per \$100 of property valuation over a decade.

The current state cap on school levies is \$1.05 per \$100 of valuation. Hughes' original proposal and the revised version would have the state replace those local funds with state tax dollars.

The Revenue Committee's new version of LB 9 would reduce the levy lid much quicker, in year two instead of year 10. And property taxpayers would feel the relief in year one.

Linehan said the bill would include a proposed property tax relief credit that would use state funds to buy down the effective cost to property taxpayers in the first year.

Pillen had earlier floated capping the school district tax rate authority at 15 cents in the first year, followed by 7.5 cents in year two, before having the state take over all school operational expenses in year three.

Linehan said Hughes and others were right when they cautioned that schools needed to "have some skin in the game." Linehan sought an acceptable tax rate during multiple public hearings on various proposals.

Hughes, reached Monday by text, said she was "happy that the Revenue Committee chose LB 9" for a way forward and called it "the right way to push state funding toward our schools."

A bipartisan group of senators helped her craft LB 9: State Sens. Tom Brandt of Plymouth, Danielle Conrad of Lincoln, Myron Dorn of Adams and Lynne Walz of Fremont.

At least one of those crafting LB 9 opposes the new plan.

Conrad, in a text, criticized "procedural shenanigans" that she said Pillen's supporters have engaged in to "hijack other bills and cobble together a Frankenstein version of the same reverse Robin Hood scheme." She said Nebraskans "will not be fooled."

Conrad said she looks forward to stopping "one of the largest tax increases in history" while fighting to expand other relief programs, such as homestead exemptions.

She said she would also advocate for legalizing and taxing online gambling and recreational marijuana.

Taxes on online sports betting, proposed by Sens. Justin Wayne of Omaha and Eliot Bostar of Lincoln, in two constitutional amendments, are estimated to generate about \$30 million in tax revenue annually if approved by voters at the ballot box, while taxing recreational marijuana, proposed by Wayne and Sen. Terrell McKinney in Omaha in two bills, could generate more than \$100 million each year.

Linehan said the committee's new plan would not include expanding gambling for tax revenue or legalizing and taxing marijuana.

She said the committee amendment to LB 9 is based on feedback during dozens of Revenue Committee hearings hosted last week on 67 bills or constitutional amendments.

She said she would not call the overall plan a "tax shift."

Consumers, she said, have control over how much they pay in sales taxes, based on what they choose to purchase, unlike with property taxes.

"We're taking a tax off people's backs that they have no choice but to pay or they lose their home," Linehan said Monday night.

People would prove the plan's critics were wrong, she said.

"By the time we get to Friday," she said, "I'm pretty sure a lot of Nebraska is going to think it's a very good idea."