

WHY ALCOHOL SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE A FOCUS OF PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS

COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT IN ACTION

Many local AODA coalitions in Wisconsin are addressing the alarming rates of heroin or meth use in their communities, and rightly so: the use of these drugs has skyrocketed in recent years, with devastating effects on users, families, and communities. With the spotlight on heroin or meth, many coalitions find it difficult to

keep a dual focus on excessive alcohol use. However, alcohol continues to be one of the most harmful drugs in our communities. Across the United States, alcohol deaths in 2015 were at a 35-year high. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 90,000 Americans die each year from an alcohol-

attributable cause,ⁱ and excessive drinking is responsible for 1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults.ⁱⁱ Aggressively targeting risky and unhealthy alcohol use is an important part of an effective overall prevention strategy and is key to saving lives, improving quality of life, and helping communities thrive.

THE HEALTH RISKS OF EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE
from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Short-Term Health Risks: [In Wisconsin, alcohol-related injuries kill more people than alcohol-related diseases. See Figure 1 on page 3.] Excessive alcohol use has immediate effects that increase the risk of many harmful health conditions. These are most often the result of binge drinking and include the following:

- **Injuries**, such as motor vehicle crashes, falls, drownings, and burns.
- **Violence**, including homicide, suicide, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence.
- **Alcohol poisoning**, a medical emergency that results from high blood alcohol levels.
- **Risky sexual behaviors**, including unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners. These behaviors can result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.
- **Miscarriage and stillbirth or fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs)** among pregnant women.

Long-Term Health Risks:

Over time, excessive alcohol use can lead to the development of chronic diseases and other serious problems including:

- **High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, and digestive problems.**
- **Cancer** of the breast, mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, and colon.
- **Learning and memory problems**, including dementia and poor school performance.
- **Mental health problems**, including depression and anxiety.
- **Social problems**, including lost productivity, family problems, and unemployment.
- **Alcohol dependence**, or alcoholism.

ALCOHOL MISUSE HURTS COMMUNITIES

The impact of excessive drinking on communities is evident in alcohol-related rates of injury to others, crime, and family adversities. Society pays the price: the annual economic cost of excessive alcohol use in Wisconsin was estimated at 6.8 billion dollars in 2012.ⁱⁱⁱ

Alcohol, more than any illegal drug, is closely associated with crime:

- Alcohol is a factor in 40% of all violent crimes, including murder, rape, assault, child and spousal abuse.
- 95% of all violent crime on college campuses involves the use of alcohol by the assailant, victim or both.
- Among victims of domestic violence, alcohol played a role in 55% of the cases, while illicit drugs played a role in just 9% of the cases.
- Almost 40% of all traffic fatalities are alcohol related.^{iv}

Examine your local data, including alcohol-related deaths, injuries, falls, poisoning, crime, OWI, motor vehicle crashes, self-harm, detox admissions, and calls to service for law enforcement. This may help to accurately judge the toll of risky and dangerous drinking in your area.

In Wisconsin in 2012, for every death from illicit drugs or prescription drug abuse, nearly 3 people died from alcohol-attributable causes.

Source: Wisconsin Epidemiological Profile on Alcohol and Other Drug Use, 2014

REDUCING UNDERAGE DRINKING IS KEY TO PREVENTING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

What do we know about how substance use disorder develops?

- Most people with a substance use disorder started with alcohol. Alcohol is the substance that is used earliest and is the most widely used drug among youth.^v
- The younger a person begins to use a drug, the more likely they are to develop a substance use disorder. People who start drinking at age 14 or younger are four times more likely to develop a substance use disorder at some point in their lives, compared with individuals who delay onset of alcohol use to age 21.^{vi}
- In the progression of substance use, alcohol is usually the first drug used, followed by nicotine, marijuana, and harder drugs.^{vii}

DESPITE THE DATA, WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO KEEP A DUAL FOCUS ON ALCOHOL?

Drinking -- even underage and excessive drinking-- is still widely accepted in our culture, making its risk more difficult to perceive. Alcohol advertisements are designed to increase the positive feelings associated with drinking and decrease the perception of risk. Furthermore, while alcohol-related injury and death can be acute, such as with alcohol poisoning or a fall, death due to alcohol-related chronic diseases, such as cirrhosis or cancer, are more difficult to see as attributable to alcohol. The risk of death, injury, dependence, and psychological trauma is more immediately seen with heroin, meth, and other hard drugs.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LOCAL ALCOHOL ENVIRONMENT

In most states, alcohol licensing and control are the responsibility of state governments. In Wisconsin, this power is local. That means that local coalitions can have a big impact on excessive alcohol use. Your coalition can help make alcohol less available, acceptable, affordable, and attractive. See [Alcohol-Related Objectives with Focus](#) for an overview of effective strategies.

Alcohol abuse prevention **IS** heroin/meth/prescription drug abuse prevention.

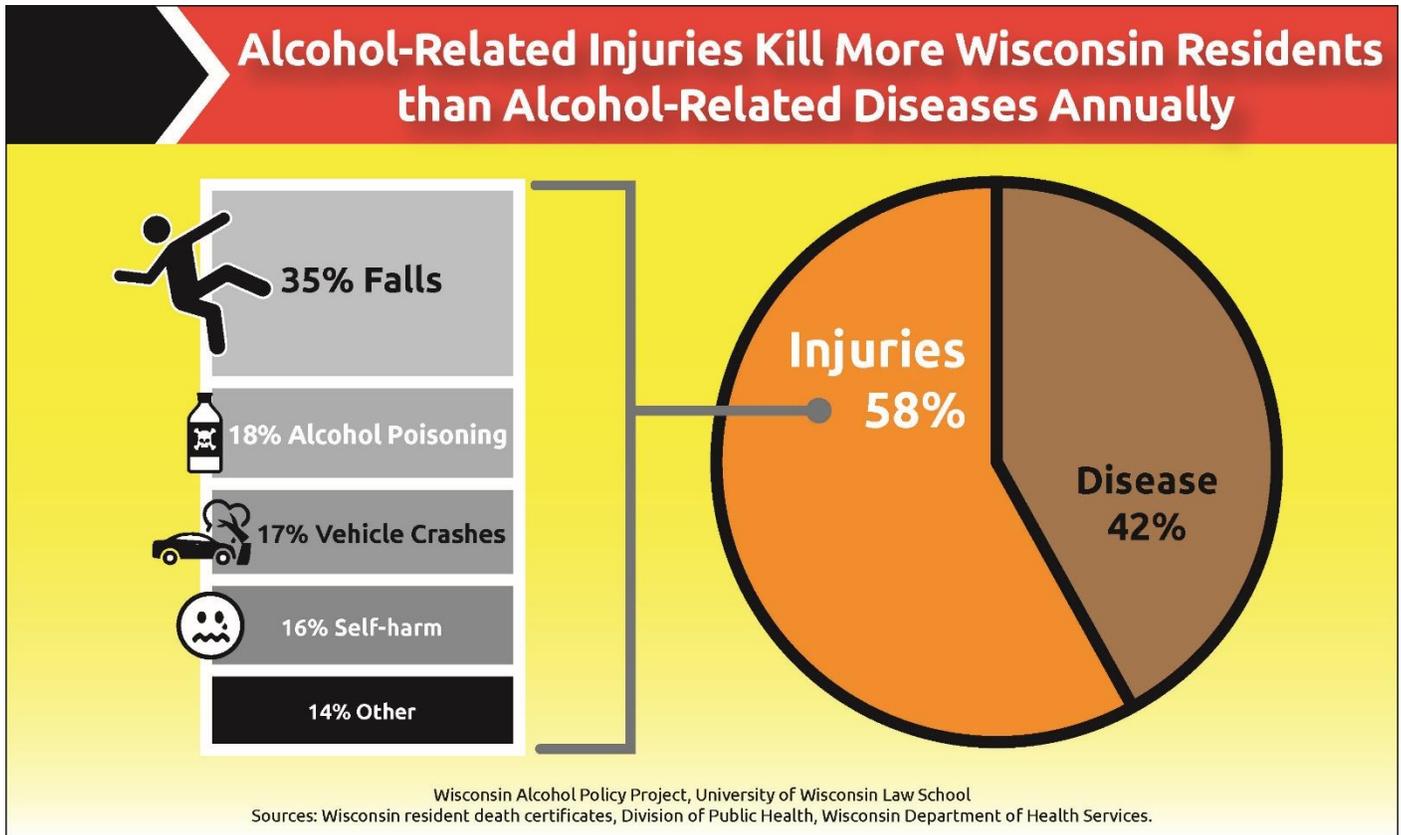


FIGURE 1: ALCOHOL-RELATED INJURIES KILL MORE WISCONSIN RESIDENTS THAN ALCOHOL-RELATED DISEASES ANNUALLY

ⁱ Ingraham, Christopher. Americans are drinking themselves to death at record rates. The Washington Post. December 22, 2015.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/12/22/americans-are-drinking-themselves-to-death-at-record-rates/>

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Fact Sheets: Alcohol and Your Health. <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Black PD, Paltzer J. The Burden of Excessive Alcohol Use in Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, March 2013.

^{iv} National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. Alcohol, Drugs, and Crime: <https://ncadd.org/about-addiction/alcohol-drugs-and-crime>

^v Barry, A. E., King, J., Sears, C., Harville, C., Bondoc, I. and Joseph, K. (2016), Prioritizing Alcohol Prevention: Establishing Alcohol as the Gateway Drug and Linking Age of First Drink With Illicit Drug Use. Journal of School Health, 86: 31–38. doi: 10.1111/josh.12351

^{vi} Grant BF, Dawson DA. Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. J Subst Abuse. 1997;9:103-10. 40% of those who started drinking at age 14 or younger developed a substance abuse disorder at some point in their lives, compared to 10% of those who started drinking at age 21.

^{vii} Barry, A. et al.