



Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems

MICAP / RECAP

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AADIF / MICAP

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Michigan Gets a “C-” on its Public Alcohol Policy

by Rev. W. J. (Bill) Amundsen, Retired
Board Member and Treasurer, MICAP

On the surface, Michigan’s public alcohol policy, as established with laws enacted by our state legislature, has helped us to reach goals that many other states envy. Our current average annual per person consumption rate is 2.38 gallons* of ethanol. The spread among all 50 states in the United States runs from a high of 4.74 gallons (NH) to a low of 1.33 gallons (UT). The 50-state average consumption rate is 2.35 gallons per person per year. Michigan’s current usage is 0.03 of a gallon above that. The 0.03 gallon above the 2.35 average is misleading however, because approximately 31% of the U.S. population doesn’t drink at all. So, the total number of drinks sold are consumed by only 69% of the population. While there is no way to calculate that number accurately, it does elevate the 2.38 gallons average ethanol used per person annually.

To make matters worse, representatives from the 50 states met in 2016 and agreed to a goal of “2.1 gallons of ethanol or less” per person, per year, per state. Michigan has not reached that goal nor has our state legislature shifted policy to help us reach that goal. I give us a grade of “C-” because of our legislature’s reluctance to amend any policy that would help move us toward that goal.

What’s wrong with a grade of “C-?” We have known for a long time that beverage alcohol is a harmful drug, and we must do much better to reduce the many harms associated with excessive drinking and improve these statistics.

Excessive drinking costs our nation over \$235 billion annually. That’s more than a quarter of \$1 trillion dollars, of which Michigan’s share is over \$8.2 billion. That cost, divided among the men, women, and children in the state, cost each person \$826.00 annually. Apart from the personal pain, suffering, and child and family abuse associated with alcohol abuse, the monetary and other costs are spread out as follows in Michigan:

- An increase (2020 over 2019) of 41 alcohol-related auto fatalities (from 295 deaths to 236 deaths) in Michigan alone.

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- 72% of the expenditures associated with alcohol misuse in Michigan (\$5.9 billion) are related to lost productivity in the workforce.
- 11% (ca. \$902 million) funds healthcare costs.
- 10% (ca. \$820 million) funds the Criminal Justice System.
- 5% (ca. \$410 million) funds losses in motor vehicle crashes.
- 2% (ca. \$164 million) picks up other incidental costs.

There are some who are content with the status quo and just getting by. MICAP is not. In order to raise the grade of “C-” and lower our consumption as outlined above, there must be change. MICAP is working to make that happen.

MICAP continues to testify before the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) at their public hearings, through our writings on individual issues, with this newsletter, and by conversations with our senators and representatives about “sales density” in some areas of our state. Data shows that a high density of points of sale (either on-premises or off-premises) not only diminishes property values in those areas, but also contributes to excessive drinking. In addition to this, a “new norm” is established which encourages youth to experiment with beverage alcohol while they are underage. That, in turn often leads to the types of harmful consequences associated with alcohol misuse and abuse.

MICAP has had a goal for some time of raising the tax on alcoholic drinks by 5 cents per drink. \$.05 doesn't sound like much when every drink costs the taxpayer \$2.10 to clean up the problem. But data shows that raising taxes on every glass of beer, wine, or liquor cuts down consumption and therefore cuts the cost to the state and cuts cost to those areas outlined above. A study¹ for the *Community Guide* regarding the effectiveness of tax policy intervention for reducing excessive consumption and harm proved that raising taxes not only reduced consumption, but lessened traffic fa-

talities, family violence, and even had an effect on under-age drinking and its consequences.

During the past four legislative sessions as well as the present session, the liquor and hospitality industries have sought out senators and/or representatives to write bills which would increase “Sale Hours” from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. daily. But MICAP stands firm. More “Sale Hours” equates to more excessive consumption, and therefore, more harm. MICAP is calling on all its members and friends to contact your state senator and representative and tell them to vote NO on the extension of “Sale Hours” for the sake of harm reduction regarding beverage alcohol. As one representative said to me: “My Father always told me that nothing good happens in a bar after midnight.”

In conclusion, it is MICAP's goal to move the excessive consumption of alcohol downward — here in Michigan and in all other states. A final suggestion to you our readers, is to remind you and ask you to tell your friends that the new normal for drinking in our time is binge drinking. It's NOT a good idea. Of the \$235 billion dollars mentioned above, over 77% of the \$235 billion comes from bingeing. So, pass it along to everyone you know. No Bingeing! If we all step up and remind one another, as well as our family and friends, the excessive drinking patterns which are in play at this time will be lessened. Will you join me? Thanks for reading. And thanks for your support of MICAP.

* While the United States uses gallons, many countries and international bodies measure per person use of ethanol in liters. We have provided this conversion table for your use.

- 3.78541 liters = one U. S. Gallon.
- 1 gallon of ethanol weighs 6.53 Lbs. or 104.48 ounces.
- A standard drink in the United States contains 0.06 ounces of ethanol.
- Whether wine, beer, or liquor, 1 gallon of ethanol is the equivalent of 174.13 standard drinks.

1. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2010, Vol. 38(2); pages 217-229.

Even Light Alcohol Use Causes Cancer and Cancer Deaths: Latest Study

A major new study provides the latest evidence on alcohol and its link to cancer and cancer deaths worldwide.

This study, published in the medical journal *Lancet Oncology* on July 13, 2021, was conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC.) The IARC study is especially significant because it looked at alcohol consumption in 2010 and cancers that developed ten years later in 2020.

One key finding: Even light to moderate alcohol consumption results in an elevated risk for cancer.

The greatest risk is for breast, colon, liver and oral cancers. Alcohol use is associated with nearly one-in-four new cases of breast cancer, one-in-five new cases of colon cancer, and one-in-seven new cases of oral and liver cancers.

The authors note that alcohol is associated with “a vast range of injuries and diseases, including cancer.” They note that alcohol is “causally linked” to cancers of the upper digestive tract (oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, and esophagus) and to cancers of the colon, rectum, liver and breast. Globally in 2020, these cancers together totaled 6.3 million cases and 3.3 million deaths.

Alcohol causes cancer in several ways. Scientists now know that alcohol damages DNA, impairs DNA repair, causes liver cirrhosis, and affects hormones leading to breast cancer. Smokers face a higher risk of head and neck cancer because alcohol increases absorption of carcinogens from tobacco.

The IARC classifies alcohol as a Class 1 carcinogen.

“All drinking involves risk,” said co-author Dr. Jurgen Rehm, adding that the risk increases with consumption. “For example, each standard-sized glass of wine per day is associated with a 6 percent higher risk for developing female breast cancer.”

Concern about the risks of alcohol use has risen during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to patterns of increased use, particularly among women. Researchers expect an increase in future cancer rates due to the increase in consumption.

The link between light to moderate drinking and cancer has not been well known and is currently under-appreciated, according to Dr. Rehm. He noted that current public policy does not yet reflect the degree of cancer risk for this level of drinking.

“As an epidemiologist, I would recommend higher taxes to fully reflect the burden of disease from alcohol. Along with limiting the physical availability and marketing of alcohol, price controls are recognized as high-impact, cost-effective measures to reduce alcohol-related harm.” Dr. Rehm also suggests that policy makers consider requirements for manufacturers to include statements on alcoholic beverage labels relating to the health and safety risks associated with consuming alcohol.

The authors conclude: “In summary, we found that alcohol use causes a substantial burden of cancer, a burden that could potentially be avoided through cost-effective policy and interventions to increase awareness of the risk of alcohol and decrease overall alcohol consumption.”

This article was written by MICAP Board member Vernon Smith based on: Harriet Rungay, et al., “Global Burden of Cancer in 2020 Attributable to Alcohol Consumption: A Population-Based Study,” *Lancet Oncology*, July 13, 2021.

Alcohol Policy Updates

(as of July 15, 2021)

- **HB4115**_(Rep. Berman) which would give local units of government the authority to extend alcohol sales until 4:00 a.m. passed the House 61-47. The bill has been sitting in the Senate Regulatory Reform Committee since March 23, 2021.
- There is a package of bills (**HB4219, 4220, 4308, 4309**) that would keep the BAC limit at .08 (and not revert to .10) and that would allow some people who get a first time drinking and driving offense, to expunge this from their record if certain conditions were met. Both the House and Senate

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have passed different versions of these bills so an agreement will have to be made. It appears likely that these bills will ultimately become law.

- **SB230** (Sen. McBroom) would primarily do two things: 1) extend the waiver of liquor license fees and 2) extend the 23% discount to on-premises licensees (normally the discount is 17%). As written, the extension of the sunset would be until December 31, 2023. According to the fiscal analysis this would result in a reduction in revenue to the state of \$55 million. This bill passed the Senate 19-15 and has been sitting in the House Regulatory Reform Committee since April 28, 2021.
- **HB4232** (Rep. Hoitenga) would allow an individual that is 17 years old to sell or serve alcoholic liquor. Currently an individual would have to be 18 years of age. This bill has been sitting in the

House Regulatory Reform Committee since February 11, 2021. Testimony was taken on June 15, 2021, but no vote has occurred.

- **SB559** became Public Act 64 of 2021 and was signed by Governor Whitmer on July 13, 2021. This law will make the social drinking districts and cocktails-to-go permanent. These were originally intended to be temporary and to help bars and restaurants during the pandemic.

From MICAP's perspective, the legislature as a whole is not considering the negative outcomes of increasing access and availability of alcohol. More efforts are needed to educate lawmakers. If you are willing to talk with your lawmaker about any alcohol or other drug issues, please let MICAP know by calling our office line 517.999.0013 or emailing us at info@micap.org. Someone from MICAP will follow up with you.