

THE ALPENA NEWS

State must do more on alcohol

Michigan is the best state in the country, and we know that Michigan can do more to keep our residents healthier in 2024.

The economic costs of excessive alcohol consumption for Michigan in 2010, according to the most recent data available, was over \$800 billion, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. That equates to more than \$800 per person.

In 2022, of the 1,053 fatal crashes that occurred in Michigan, 301 (28.6%) were alcohol-involved, with at least one drinking operator, bicyclist, or pedestrian, according to the state's Office of Highway Safety Planning.

According to TEDS data, primary alcohol admissions in Michigan for people age 12 and older was 24,768 in 2010 and in 2020 that increased nearly 7% to 26,422. And more people were in treatment for alcohol use disorder than for any other drug, according to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

In 1980, there were 666 total deaths attributed to alcohol. In 2021, total deaths were 1,742. That is an increase of over 160%, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Michigan's response to increased alcohol-related harms has been to increase access and availability of alcohol. In July, Michigan passed Public Act 96, which allows public universities to sell alcohol in sports stadiums, and passed Public Act 95, which made cocktails to go permanent, despite the sunset allowing cocktails to go until 2026.

In October, the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) granted a liquor license to a laundromat.

Then, in November, Public Act 183 was passed. That allows a manufacturer or supplier to offer electronic rebate coupons directly to a retail customer after the

retail customer purchases alcoholic liquor from a retailer, thereby reducing the price of alcohol.

Those are just a few examples of increasing the availability of alcohol.

Who knows what is next? Will the MLCC start licensing hardware stores, pet stores, and ice cream shops?

By allowing more and more places to sell alcohol, an expectation is created that alcohol is appropriate everywhere and goes with every activity. That is the wrong message to send to our children.

Recently, Matt Statman, manager of the University of Michigan's Collegiate Recovery Program, commented in a news article that "it's important to have recovery-friendly spaces and spaces where fun can be had without alcohol."

We agree with that 100%.

Two evidence-based policies that support a reduction in alcohol-related harm and death are:

- * Increase alcohol taxes, according to the Community Preventive Services Task Force.

Alcohol taxes have been frozen for decades in Michigan and are not indexed to inflation. Raising alcohol taxes would reduce alcohol-related deaths and injuries and could raise revenue for prevention, treatment, or recovery support services.

- * Lower Michigan's BAC (blood alcohol content) limit to .05.

More than 100 countries have a BAC limit of .05 or lower. Utah was the first state in the country to lower its BAC limit and, as a result, they have seen a 20% reduction in alcohol-related crashes and fatalities, according to the U.S. Office of Behavioral Safety Research.

Too many people are needlessly dying from alcohol misuse.

In 2024, we would like to work with the Michigan Liquor Control Commission and the Legislature to turn those sobering statistics around and protect our residents from alcohol-related harm.

Mike Tobias sits on the board of the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems.