



The MICAP RECAP

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The MICAP RECAP is brought to you by the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems (MICAP), an entity of the nonprofit organization American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation (AADIF).

MICAP's Strategy Refresh: 2026

by Michael MacLaren

MICAP's Immediate Past President

With new board members and an administrative officer bringing fresh energy and ideas to the fore, the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems (MICAP) met in May to start strategic planning for a brighter future.

Founded in 1905, MICAP is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to educating our Michigan community about the risks of alcohol misuse. We do this by:

- Advocating with public policy makers
- Informing and educating the people of Michigan
- Partnering and collaborating with like-missioned organizations

As we look towards the future, the MICAP Board drafted a vision of a Michigan where “public policy reflects the true costs of alcohol and substance misuse, where communities are educated and empowered to prevent harm, and where every individual and family has access to the resources and support they need to thrive.” To achieve that, the Board targeted five goals:

- Goal 1: Establish a consistent, visible communications presence to educate the public and inform policymakers about alcohol misuse in Michigan.
- Goal 2: Strengthen and diversify the MICAP board and volunteer base to increase organizational capacity and sustainability.
- Goal 3: Increase and diversify MICAP's funding base to support operations and expand capacity over the next three years.
- Goal 4: Increase MICAP's presence and influence with Michigan policymakers and regulatory bodies to advance alcohol harm prevention policy.
- Goal 5: Ensure MICAP operates with clear direction, shared expectations, and consistent follow-through between Board meetings.

Led by MICAP President Tom O'Connor and Certified Prevention Consultant (and newest MICAP Board member) Louise Montag, the board developed strategies and tasks that were realistic, actionable and sustainable. “We have intentionally kept the goal list focused rather than exhaustive — because follow-through on a few things matters far more than ambition about many things,” Montag said.

What's Next?

Our Board is currently reviewing our most recent draft of the strategic plan. Once finalized, we'll vote to adopt it as the official plan to move forward. Concurrently, we are developing tactics to reach our newly-defined goals. Together, we are identifying:

- New sources for fundraising, such as identifying prospective donors, philanthropic organizations, or grants
- Strategies to attract new collaborators – volunteers, community advocates, potential Board members (more on this below)
- More effective tactics to increase MICAP's outreach. This can include: creating new informational resources for distribution, locating new educational conferences or events for our group to attend, and finessing a brief, marketable “pitch” when introducing MICAP as an organization

MICAP has proudly been a part of the Michigan community for decades. MICAP's historical parent organization, the American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation (AADIF), was founded in 1905 and received its 501(c)(3) status in 1957.

www.micap.org

MICAP

Michigan Council
on Alcohol Problems

How Can I Help?

We'd love to connect with anyone who may be interested in volunteering with our team or on the MICAP Board. We're always looking to welcome a new Board member who can add their expertise to our collective knowledge. Though not a prerequisite to join our Board, we would be particularly interested in talking with someone who had professional experience in fields such as:

- Nonprofit law and policy;
- Fundraising campaigns;
- Grassroots activism or community-building;
- Grant writing

If you are interested in learning more about volunteering with MICAP, we'd love to chat! You can email us at admin@micap.org.

Note: A Board position is volunteer-only; the Board is not compensated.

The New Global Consensus: “No Safe Level of Alcohol”

by **Vernon Smith, PhD**
MICAP Board Member

“Drinking any amount of alcohol is unsafe.”

This is the new consensus of experts around the world. It's a huge shift.

Just twenty years ago, many Americans thought that a daily glass of wine was good for their heart. Today, the evidence is unequivocal. We now know that from the first sip, even small amounts of alcohol increase the risk of cancer, heart disease, and early death.

Over the past five years, major health bodies have looked at this issue carefully. Scientists and doctors conducted gold-standard studies and produced new scientific evidence. They all have come to the same conclusion: “Even low levels of alcohol use increase cancer risk, cardiovascular risk, and all cause mortality.”

The evidence comes not only from U.S. government agencies but also from the World Health Organization, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, the United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers, and multiple other research groups worldwide.

In 2026, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued its revised dietary guidance. The previous guidance said that adult men should limit alcohol to no more than two drinks per day, and for women, one drink. The 2026 guidance now says Americans should “consume less alcohol for better overall health.” (Check out our following article, by Michael MacLaren, which dives into the new U.S. Department of Health's 2026 Dietary Guidelines in more detail.)

Numerous public-health experts raised concerns that the new guidance did not go far enough. For example, Tim Naimi, a physician and former CDC alcohol epidemiologist, told The Washington Post that the new U.S. guidance is “out of step with the science” because it didn't quantify stricter limits.

Defending the new guidelines in an Associated Press story on June 9, Dr. Mehmet Oz, the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, agreed that not drinking is preferred, even though it is “a social lubricant that brings people together, and being social has health benefits.”

Why Limit Alcohol Use: The “Alcohol Death Crisis” in the U.S.

Alcohol-related deaths in the U.S. have more than doubled in the past 20 years. For many experts, this is now a public health crisis that requires strong and swift action to reverse the trend.

The health risks of alcohol use are well known. The U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Addiction (NIAAA) lists alcohol as a “Group 1 carcinogen,” the same as tobacco and asbestos, and notes that even low levels of alcohol use increase the risk of cancer.

- Alcohol increases the risk for dozens of cancers, with especially elevated risk for at least seven, including breast, colorectal, liver, and cancers of the mouth, larynx, esophagus, and stomach.
- Alcohol-related liver deaths have tripled since 2000.
- Alcohol increases the risk for cardiovascular disease because it raises blood pressure, increases the likelihood of atrial fibrillation, and increases the risk of stroke. It is now known to have no protective effect on cardiac health.
- Alcohol has a profound impact on mental health, worsening depression and anxiety, and disrupting sleep even at low levels of use. Alcohol is strongly linked to suicide risk.
- Alcohol is involved in 30% of traffic deaths, 40% of suicides, and 50% of homicides.
- Alcohol is the leading risk factor for death and disability for persons aged 15 – 49.

Why are Alcohol-Related Deaths Increasing?

The key drivers of increasing alcohol-related deaths are easy to point to. Here is a short list:

- Women are drinking more. Reasons include a belief that “a glass of wine couldn’t hurt, and might even be healthy,” made it a socially-acceptable response to stress, plus the fact that women are biologically more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol. Alcohol-related deaths among women have increased 85% in the past 20 years.
- The rise of high-potency alcohol products, like high-alcohol energy drinks, cocktails, seltzers, and even an alcoholic Mountain Dew.
- Alcohol is more available than ever – from gas stations, grocery stores, and delivered to your doorstep.
- An industry marketing shift toward a younger demographic, through social media influencers, a “TikTok cocktail” culture, and alcohol-themed gaming content.

These global findings matter here at home, where Michigan continues to see rising alcohol-related illnesses, deaths, and injuries.

What Can We Do to Reverse This Trend?

Public health experts point to several strategies that would reduce alcohol-related deaths, disabilities, and adverse health consequences.

First, people respond to the information they have and believe, so the first strategy is to be sure that people know the facts about alcohol and how it can affect them and their families. No one is advocating for another era of prohibition, but when people learn that no amount of alcohol is safe, they can make good choices about when and how much they drink.

It’s encouraging that some people have discovered the cultural phenomenon of “Dry January” and “Sober October.” Their success with non-alcoholic alternatives can literally save lives, including their own.

Second, public policy can strongly influence the impacts of alcohol use. For example, at the national level, a move is afoot to require cancer warning labels like those on other products we consume. These labels would simply inform consumers of the cancer risks recognized by the U.S. Surgeon General and major cancer societies.

Another effective approach would restrict advertising, especially social media marketing, which has increased dramatically and increasingly targets younger people.

In Michigan, alcohol taxes are fixed, relatively low, and not indexed to inflation, so these taxes are long overdue for an increase, which would have a small but moderating impact on alcohol sales.

Lowering the Legal BAC from .08 to .05

The most significant and common-sense policy change would change the legal Blood Alcohol Limit (BAC) for operating a vehicle or boat from .08 to .05, as recommended by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

A .05 limit typically corresponds to one drink for most women, and two drinks for most men over two hours – a level at which impairment is already measurable.

A legal limit of .05 BAC would be consistent with the rest of the world. Countries at .05 BAC include France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, and New Zealand, while Norway, Sweden, and Poland are at .02 BAC, and the limit is 0.00 BAC in countries like Hungary and the Czech Republic. In these countries, drinking and driving are simply incompatible.

On average, every week, 20 Michiganders die in traffic crashes, of which six are related to alcohol. In this state, that’s over 1,000 traffic deaths each year, including over 300 deaths due to impaired drivers. Almost 6,000 people suffer serious injuries. When a crash occurs that involves alcohol, the likelihood of a fatality is 9.3 times higher, and the likelihood of serious injury is 5.8 times higher, according to Michigan State Police data.

Adopting a .05 BAC limit would reduce traffic, boating, and pedestrian accidents. It would avoid countless personal tragedies that occur virtually every week on Michigan roads and waterways.

MICAP is working with several traffic safety and health care organizations, advocating for this change in Michigan law, with the slogan “Point Oh Five Saves Lives.”



Some of our Board members at our May Strategic Planning Session in Lansing, Michigan.

L-R: Louise Montag, Mike Tobias, Eileen Ellis, Bill Amundsen, Michael MacLaren, Tom O’Connor



MICAP

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Quote - Unquote: The Experts Get The Last Word

"No level of alcohol consumption is safe for our health." World Health Organization (WHO) Europe, 2023.

"Zero drinks is best for your health." Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction, 2023.

"No amount of alcohol is good for your heart." World Heart Federation, 2022.

"Alcohol causes cancer. The safest choice is not to drink." U.S. Surgeon General, 2023.

"Even light drinking increases the risk of several leading cancers." American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), 2017.

"The level of alcohol consumption that minimizes health loss is zero." The Lancet, 2018.

"Alcohol impairment begins at very low alcohol concentrations, as low as 0.015. Each drink of alcohol consumed increases the risk of crashing, beginning with the first drink." National Safety Council, 2020.

"Lowering the legal BAC to .05 is one of the most effective steps we can take to save lives on our roads." National Transportation Safety Board.

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