



April 2, 2025
HB 3197 -2 Support

Co-chairs Kropf and Prozanski and members of the committee: my name is Sarah Lochner and I'm the executive director of the Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials, CLHO, representing the local public health directors across Oregon. I also served on the Alcohol Pricing Task Force on behalf of the Association of Oregon Counties and LPH.

First, I want to thank you for taking the time to hear this bill and for keeping an open mind. I also want to thank Rep. Sanchez for bringing this bill and amendment forward. She is not afraid to do hard things, and I want to applaud her leadership.

Like most you, I was raised in a home where alcohol was a regular part of our lives. Because of this, when I entered my adult life, I was also under the impression that moderate drinking was not detrimental to my health and perhaps one glass of red wine per day could even be beneficial.

But since that time, the science and understanding of the impacts of alcohol have evolved. We now know that even small amounts of alcohol consumption increase the risk for developing seven different types of cancer, which is not something the general public knew 5, 10 or even 15 years ago.

Just like not wearing your seatbelt poses a certain increased risk when operating or riding in a vehicle, consuming alcohol carries its own risks and Oregonians need to be informed about the health implications of those risks.

You will hear more from Dr. Bruno, who will talk specifically about the health effects of drinking alcohol.

Oregon's alcohol crisis

Alcohol use is the third leading cause of preventable death in the state, claiming over [2,500 lives](#) each year. That's nearly double the number of people who die from illicit drug use.

The cost to society is also much higher, estimated at [\\$4.8 billion a year](#).





Oregonians drink more than people in most other states—on average, 2.8 gallons of pure ethanol for each person who is 14 or older—that's nearly 600 drinks per person, per year.

And we have [higher rates of disease and deaths directly linked](#) to alcohol use compared to neighboring states, and to other major alcohol producing states like Tennessee.

According to the latest Oregon Health Authority [adult health survey](#), 85% of Oregonians think alcohol is a serious threat to society and nearly half (45%) say drinking has caused trouble in their families.

The problem is that alcohol is everywhere. To me, it's comparable to smoking in the 1950s. It's a part of everyday life for most of us. We use it to relax and to socialize with friends and family. We can get a drink (or two or three) in movie theaters, nail salons, barber shops and in some children's play spaces.

We can order alcohol online and have it delivered or pull up to a restaurant in our car and get a cocktail to go. You can't even watch a "family friendly" network TV show without seeing alcohol consumption. If you don't believe me, I cordially challenge you to do an alcohol-free month. When you're not drinking, you will notice just how many prompts to drink there are in our society.

For the past forty years, the Oregon legislature has expanded public access to alcohol, passing legislation in nearly every single session that made it easier for producers to sell and consumers to buy.

The [Legislative Fiscal Office issued a report in 2021](#) summarizing this which is linked in my written testimony. Take a look at that and you will understand why advocates like me consider Oregon's approach to alcohol to be "death by 1000 cuts." Every expansion as a stand-alone seems harmless, but the cumulative effect is the substance use crisis we find ourselves in today.

We have some of the lowest beer and wine taxes in the country and haven't raised those taxes for over 40 years -- in fact, the beer tax has not been raised in my lifetime. Lower alcohol prices lead to more people drinking excessively, more deaths, and more harms.

Now it's time to begin to address those harms by:

- Curtailing the expansion of easy access to alcohol. One way to do that is to pass this tax measure. In addition, we urge you to:





OREGON COALITION OF LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS

Representing the collective interests
of Oregon's 33 local public health
authorities to improve the health of
all Oregonians.

oregonclho.org

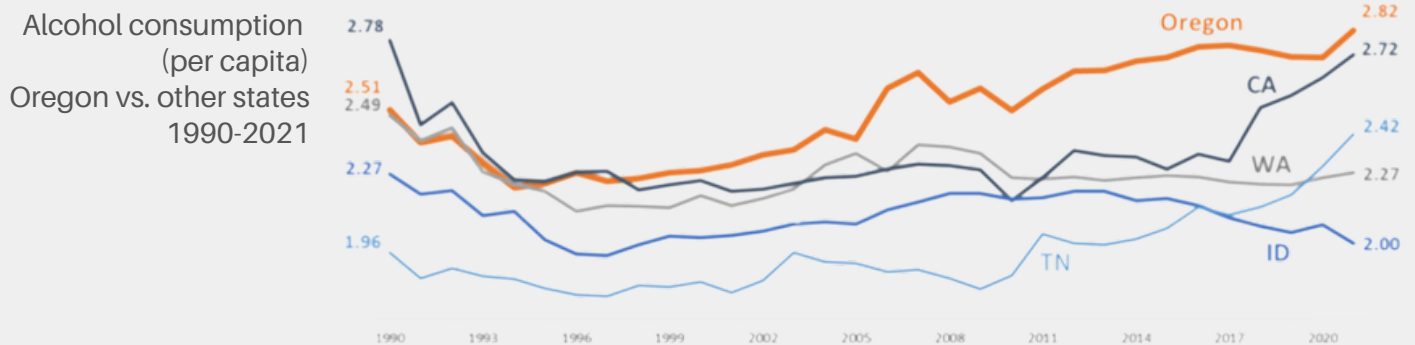
- Fund statewide evidence-based primary prevention programs, ideally through local public health. Our bill for this is HB 2954.
- And learn the facts! And help increase awareness of alcohol's health impacts so Oregonians can make informed choices.

Before I go, I'll just say that we don't love section 14 of the amendment. 85% of the funds going to Oregon Youth Development is a sticking point because they are not prevention experts and schools are not prevention experts. We would prefer the money go to prevention experts like local public health so that they can take the burden off of schools – who already have way too much to do. Also, the Dept of Education does not have any real oversight over schools – it's the ESDs that have the oversight, so we worry that proper accountability would not be present. Third, the amendment does not specify that the prevention programs should be evidence-based. Lastly, if every county LPH got funds, every county in Oregon would receive services. We want to make sure that the entire state gets access to primary prevention, not just those who have the capacity to apply for a grant. The % going to counties needs to be assigned a purpose - like implementing evidence-based primary prevention programs, but I'm pretty sure 15% would not be enough to do so in a meaningful way. So, we need to have more conversations about that.

When we know better, we must do better. It's time to do better. Thank you.



Oregonians drink more than people in most other states – about 2.8 gallons of pure ethanol per person per year. **That's almost 600 drinks a year** for each Oregonian over the age of 14.



And we have higher rates of alcohol-related disease and deaths. Alcohol use is the third-leading cause of preventable death in Oregon, claiming 2,500 lives each year. That's nearly double the number of people who die from illicit drug use.

The cost to society is also much higher, estimated at \$4.8 billion a year.

According to the latest Oregon Health Authority adult health survey, 85% of Oregonians think alcohol is a serious threat to society and nearly half (45%) say drinking has caused trouble in families.



Alcohol is everywhere

Today, we are offered alcohol more frequently than ever - a glass of wine at a haircut, a beer at a board game store, a mixed cocktail at a water park. Alcoholic drinks are served in movie theaters, nail salons, and in some children's play spaces. We can order alcohol online or drive to a restaurant and take cocktails to go.

The alcohol industry spends millions to create enticing ads, many of them targeting young people. Like tobacco ads allowed on radio and television until the 1970s, there are few restrictions on the way alcohol can be promoted. And alcohol companies keep repackaging their products into "hard seltzer," "hard kombucha," and "hard cola," that appeal to young people and seem to count less than a "real" drink.

Forty years of expanding alcohol access

For the past four decades, Oregon has expanded public access to alcohol, passing legislation in nearly every session that made it easier for producers to sell and consumers to buy.

We have some of the lowest beer and wine taxes in the country and haven't raised those taxes for over 40 years. Lower alcohol prices lead to more people drinking, more deaths and more harms.

CLHO acknowledges the economic benefit that alcohol sales have on the state's economy, generating over \$300 million a year in tax revenue and providing thousands of jobs. We don't oppose responsible drinking, but many of us drink too much, increasing the chance of health risks and other harms.

Now it's time to address those harms by:

- **Curtailing the expansion of easy access to alcohol**
- **Funding statewide evidence-based primary prevention programs**
- **Increasing awareness of alcohol's health impacts so Oregonians can make informed choices**

Excessive drinking in Oregon

One in eight Oregonians has an alcohol-use disorder. One in five drinks excessively, which means having four or five drinks on one occasion or drinking eight or more drinks a week for women, and 15 or more for men. Twenty-seven percent of adults (ages 18-34) in Oregon binge drink.

1 in 8 Oregonians has an alcohol use disorder

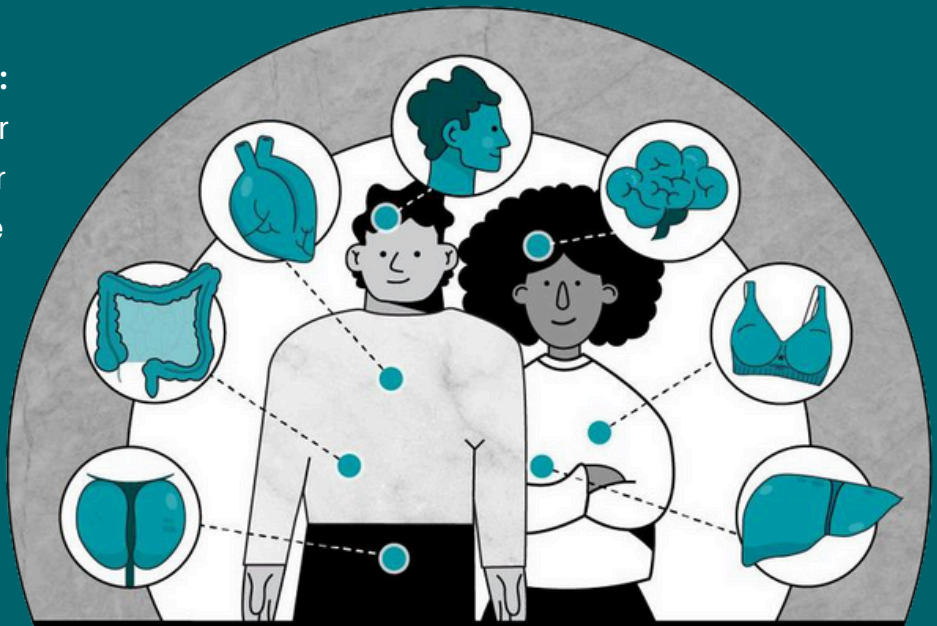
1 in 5 Oregonians drinks alcohol excessively

Bummer Alert: alcohol isn't healthy

Alcohol has been classified as a carcinogen since the late 1980s. It contains ethanol, a toxic chemical which damages DNA and prevents the body from repairing itself. Last year, the World Health Organization declared that no level of alcohol consumption is safe for health. We used to hear that low or moderate amounts of alcohol may reduce the risk of heart disease, but more recently researchers have found that drinking more than one drink a day actually raises risk. New research also shows that even moderate amounts of **alcohol can raise your risk of dying from any cause**.

Excessive drinking can cause:

- prostate cancer
- colon cancer
- high blood pressure
- strokes and heart disease
- cancers of the head and neck
- depression
- anxiety and memory loss
- breast cancer
- three types of liver disease



Source: Rethink the Drink

This 2023 evidence review examined over 100 studies including nearly 5 million people and found an increased risk of death for women who drank 25 or more grams a day and men who drank 45 or more grams a day. (This translates to a little less than two drinks a day for women and a little less than three drinks a day for men.)

Alcohol use is linked with seven types of cancer, including oral, head and neck, colon, liver and breast cancer. Yet few people know about this connection: only one in four women said they knew that alcohol can cause breast cancer.

Alcohol use also increases the risk for domestic violence, suicide, injuries and car crashes, risky sexual behavior and lower educational attainment.

It's time to acknowledge these risks, to stop expanding access to alcohol and to start addressing the harms of excessive use.