

April is Alcohol Awareness Month in Nebraska

(KLZA)-- The Division of Behavioral Health in the Department of Health and Human Services recognizes April as Alcohol Awareness Month.

For those struggling with alcohol use and/or any other addiction -- help is available and recovery is possible.

Alcohol misuse heavily impacts individuals, families and communities. Alcohol is the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States. In 2020-2021, there were more than 178,000 alcohol related deaths in the United States and more than 1,000 deaths in Nebraska making it the leading preventable cause of death.

“During April we recognize the importance of spreading information about the signs and effects of substance and alcohol misuse,” said Tony Green, Interim Director of the Division of Behavioral Health. “Having discussions with our communities, friends and family about the severity and reality of substance use and alcohol helps to spread information on how to talk to a loved one at risk and resources to find help. We want to emphasize that no one is alone in their journey, there is help, and there is hope no matter the complexity of the situation.”

Nationally, and in Nebraska, alcohol is the most misused substance. Results of the 2021-2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, demonstrated that about 11% of adults have an alcohol use disorder. Among Nebraskans aged 18 or older, 27% engaged in binge drinking in the past month. Binge drinking is defined as five or more drinks for a man and four drinks or more for a woman in two hours.

Young adults are especially at risk. In Nebraska in 2022, 8% of young adults reported driving under the influence of alcohol during the past year. Prevention efforts have reduced young adult binge drinking throughout Nebraska. Data shows binge drinking has decreased among both genders from 2013 (46% males, 44% females) to 2022 (31% males, 28% females).

Are you concerned about a loved one's alcohol use?

Friends and family may be uncomfortable talking or acknowledging the severity and reality of what they are experiencing. A few suggestions for starting a meaningful conversation:

- **Let your loved one know they're being heard. Use active listening and reflect on what you are hearing. For example, you can say, “I am hearing you use drinking as a way to calm your nerves. Is that right?”**

- **Discuss the negative effects of alcohol, and what that means in terms of mental and physical health, safety, impact on others, and making good decisions. For example you could say, “I am worried about your drinking because I have noticed you have been missing work.”**
- **Keep it positive. Reassure your loved one they are not alone and focus on the benefits of making a change. Try saying, “It would be great to spend more time together as a family.” or “Lots of people have struggles with alcohol. You are not alone. You can have courage. It can get better.”**
- **Try to be objective, open, and supportive. Do your best to keep an open mind and remain curious. Listen without judging or problem solving for the individual or their situation. Instead, offer your support by saying, “I am hearing drinking less is hard for you. How can I support you?” or “Whenever you feel the urge to drink, you can call or text me instead.”**
- **Ask open-ended questions. These are questions that elicit more than just a “yes” or “no” response and will lead to a more engaging conversation. For instance, you might say, “Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?” or “Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?”**

In talking with a young adult about alcohol, look for opportunities to raise the topic naturally. For instance for a teen starting college, discussions about majors and course selection can easily lead to a conversation about how alcohol use can disrupt academic success and career options. Emphasize that any decisions about alcohol need to be made following the law and their health. Other tips:

- **Discuss reasons not to drink. If you have a family history of alcohol use disorder or drinking problems, be honest. Explain that your teen might be more vulnerable to developing a drinking problem.**
- **Teach your college student to never leave any drink unattended—whether or not the beverage contains alcohol. And do not accept a drink from someone you do not know, especially if you did not see where it came from.**
- **Realize that a college-bound student will most likely be in a social situation where drinking is happening, and some of the people they are with could be of legal drinking age. Discuss how they should decide whether or not to refuse a drink, and talk about the various reasons to avoid alcohol and how and when to say no.**
- **Be prepared for questions. A teen might ask if you drank alcohol when you were underage. If you chose to drink, share an example of a negative**

consequence of your drinking.

- **Remind students that drinking to cope with stress, forget problems, or try to feel comfortable in a situation that feels unsafe or threatening is never a good idea.**

Are you concerned about your alcohol use? The National Institutes of Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends asking yourself the following questions:

- **Have you had times when you ended up drinking more, or longer than you intended?**
- **Have you more than once wanted to cut down or stop drinking, or tried to, but could not?**
- **More than once, have you gotten into situations while or after drinking that increased your chances of getting hurt (such as driving, swimming, or using machinery)?**
- **Had to drink much more than you once did to get the effect you want? Or found that your usual number of drinks had much less effect than before?**
- **Have you continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Or after having had a memory blackout?**
- **Have you spent a lot of time drinking? Or being sick or getting over other aftereffects?**
- **Have you continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends?**
- **Have you found that drinking, or being sick from drinking, often interfered with taking care of your home or family? Or caused job troubles? Or school problems?**
- **Have you found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you had withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, restlessness, nausea, sweating, a racing heart, or a seizure? Or sensed things that were not there?**
- **Have you more than once gotten arrested, been held at a police station, or had other legal problems because of your drinking?**

Need to talk or get immediate help in a crisis? Help is available. If you or a loved one need assistance, please reach out to:

- **Call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org**
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Find Treatment Website: <https://findtreatment.gov/>**
- **Your faith-based leader, your healthcare professional, or your student health center on campus**
- **Nebraska Family Helpline - Any question, any time. 1-888-866-8660**
- **Rural Response Hotline, 1-800-464-0258**
- **Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 (oprime dos para Español) or text TalkWithUs to 66746**
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522**
- **National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4AChild (1-800-422-4453) or text 1-800-422-4453**
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)**

Many Signals Communications