

Testimony
Senate Bill 2241 – Department of Human Services
House Human Services
Representative Weisz, Chairman
March 11, 2013

Chairman Weisz, members of the Human Services Committee, I am Pamela Sagness, Prevention Administrator with the Department of Human Services (DHS). I oversee the Department's prevention program which provides substance abuse prevention services, training, and technical assistance to communities in North Dakota.

We have all been hearing about North Dakota's need for a cultural change regarding alcohol. I am here today to provide some information about alcohol abuse and consequences in North Dakota. ([Attachment A](#))

Despite declining underage drinking rates in the state, N.D. continues to rank first in underage "binge" drinking nationally (ages 12-20, NSDUH 2011); 68 percent of N.D. high school students have drunk alcohol (YRBS 2011); and in 2011, 8.3 percent of middle school students reported they had their first drink before age 11. In general, North Dakota youth have high rates of alcohol use, and they don't think binge drinking is harmful. However, 88 percent of North Dakota residents believe youth alcohol use is a problem in the state (CRS, 2008).

It is important to note that North Dakota's alcohol issues extend beyond underage drinking. Our adult binge drinking rates are among the highest in the nation. North Dakotans purchase higher volumes of alcohol per person (NIAAA, 2000-2009). In fatal crashes in North Dakota, 93 percent of the impaired drivers were age 21 or older (DOT 2011).

Alcohol abuse impacts us all. Twenty-eight percent of all adult arrests in North Dakota are DUIs (UCR 2011); 65 percent of incarcerated individuals in N.D. have a substance abuse diagnosis (DOCR 2011); and 85 people died on N.D.

roads last year in alcohol-related crashes. In 2011, 6,600 people were arrested for DUIs in N.D. That is more than the total population of Valley City.

What can be done to make a true impact on the culture of alcohol usage in North Dakota? Research shows that prevention efforts are most effective when they are part of a comprehensive, data-driven, multi-faceted approach that targets all ages and includes strategies focusing on policy, media, enforcement, parents, environment, and community-based processes.

Parents are a vital piece of this puzzle. Parents are the number one influence on their children's choices regarding alcohol. Parents LEAD, a collaboration of the Department of Transportation, Department of Human Services, the University System, and NDSU Extension, is an award-winning program in North Dakota currently providing interactive tools and resources to parents and professionals.

It is also important that prevention efforts across the state are based on science. There are strategies that have been proven to reduce alcohol consumption and consequences. Developing and revising laws and policies is an effective substance abuse prevention strategy because laws and policies create change in the environment itself, which affects the entire population, rather than changing one individual's behavior at a time. Enforcement of the laws and policies is an important strategy. Media and advertising also play an important role in culture change. How do we expect youth to say "no" when their environment tells them "yes"? Education programs, such as server training, have also been shown to be effective. This program provides training to those who serve alcohol so they know how to avoid over-serving patrons, to identify minors, and to recognize fake IDs.

Alcohol abuse in North Dakota is a complex issue, which deserves an equally complex, comprehensive, and effective solution.

I am available to answer your questions.

Alcohol in North Dakota: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQdsvIav6WA>