

ALCOHOL IN NORTH DAKOTA

How the culture of **alcohol abuse** is impacting our **kids** and **communities**.
And, the promising solutions that are making change.

NORTH DAKOTA
PREVENTION
RESOURCE & MEDIA CENTER





BY KATE GONZALES

Addressing North Dakota's Major Public Health Issue: Alcohol

MOVING UPSTREAM

There's an often-told parable about a person fishing along the banks of a river. Suddenly, he sees a woman drowning in the water. The fisherman acts quickly, jumping into the water and pulling her out to safety. Once ashore, he notices another person in the river in need of help. Again he reacts and jumps in to save this drowning victim. Before long, the river is filled with drowning people and the fisherman is struggling. After several hours, he is exhausted and defeated because he is unable to save everyone.

At that point, the fisherman makes the decision to walk upstream to determine why people are falling into the river in the first place. While walking upstream, the fisherman notices the bridge leading across the river has a large hole through which people are falling. He realizes that fixing the hole in the bridge will prevent many people from ever falling into the river in the first place. This is prevention.

North Dakotans certainly have a lot to be proud of, but when it comes to alcohol, there are some facts we simply cannot ignore. "There are great things about being from North Dakota," says Pamela Sagness, director of the Behavioral Health Division with the North Dakota Department of Human Services and also a North Dakota native. "But there are things that can negatively impact us as well, like our choices around alcohol." Even though it's legal for those over 21, alcohol is the most commonly abused drug in our state.

Believe it or not, alcohol abuse is a serious public health issue impacting all of us. Its effects are seen in countless headlines in almost every newspaper across our state and touch our families and communities every day. There are more deaths from alcohol than from all other illegal drugs combined. It's a major contributing factor to crime and incarceration. And on average, one alcohol related crash occurs nearly every nine hours. But drinking is not just an adult problem; it's a problem for our kids as well. Underage drinking leads to all kinds of harm including traffic crashes, violence, problems in school, property crime, unintentional injuries, and high-risk sex – and it's costing the state nearly 160 million dollars each year.

Knowing this, the need for prevention is now. "As a parent, if I can stop my child from suffering from a disease like addiction, why would I not try to prevent it?" Sagness asks.

In an environment saturated with alcohol, there is no doubt that substance abuse prevention matters. Prevention is creating

an environment that promotes health and well-being, which prevents problems before they occur. It isn't treating an already existing problem and it isn't many of the things we tend to think of as prevention, like one-time speaking events and scare tactics. These activities may raise awareness but they often don't change behavior.

Effective prevention is rooted directly in science, with input from many systems including health, education, justice, and social services. And, it makes economic sense, saving 64 dollars for every one dollar invested, according to "The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health" released in 2016.

Change can happen, but it's not always easy, especially when trying to shift a cultural norm. It takes time, persistence

and collaboration. "This really is a community problem requiring a community solution," Sagness adds. "This journey will take time, but it is certainly worth it when we look at the lives that can be changed."

North Dakota communities are coming together and recognizing that investing in substance abuse prevention is important. In fact, it is one of the best investments we can make in our state's future – creating safe and healthy individuals, families, businesses and communities.

**PREVENTION MAKES
ECONOMIC SENSE,
SAVING \$64 FOR
EVERY \$1 INVESTED.**

**SOURCE: "The Surgeon General's Report on
Alcohol, Drugs, and Health"**

A LIFE SPARED, A FUTURE UNKNOWN

Parents unsure if daughter will ever be the same after a DUI collision left her severely injured and killed her two friends.

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY



"IT COULD TAKE YEARS
BEFORE SHE GETS BACK
TO A NORMAL STATE."

HARLAN MONSON
FATHER OF DRUNK DRIVING VICTIM

Shayna Monson graduated at the top of her high school class in Dickinson, then maintained a 4.0 GPA at the University of North Dakota on the path to becoming an anesthesiologist. She was elected secretary of Mortar Board, UND's honor society, and attracted many friends.

On June 27, 2015, Shayna picked up two of these friends, Taylor Goven and Abby Renschler, at a softball tournament in Bismarck. While driving on Interstate 94 in Mandan, her Jetta was hit by a pickup truck heading the wrong direction. Highway Patrol troopers determined the driver was under the influence of alcohol.

The collision killed Taylor, 21, and Abby, 22. Shayna, 21, suffered traumatic injuries, requiring emergency brain surgery. Doctors gave her a 1-in-10 chance of surviving. Friends flocked

to the hospital to comfort her parents, Harlan and Connie, and older sister, Kari.

"So often when I think about the accident and the three women that have been impacted by the crash — this has affected them, but the domino effect of this has played on their friends and their family members," Connie says.

Shayna battled through her critical condition. She spent time at Craig Hospital in Denver, a world-renowned critical care rehabilitation facility for traumatic brain and spinal-cord injuries, followed by five months at Quality Living, Inc. in Omaha to continue her treatment. She returned home in April 2016 and continues to work through her recovery. While she has made incredible progress, she still has a long road ahead.

"It could take years before she gets back to a normal state, and we don't even know how far she will recover," Harlan says.

In August 2015, driver Jordan Morsette pleaded not guilty to three felony charges. Morsette has two previous substance-related convictions in North Dakota and had previously pleaded guilty to driving under the influence back in 2009. During the trial on April 4, 2016, Morsette changed his plea to guilty and was offered no plea bargain. He was sentenced on May 24, 2016 to two counts of criminal vehicular homicide and one count of criminal vehicular injury, totaling 25 consecutive years in prison.

"Opening the public's eyes to the dangers of drinking and driving could possibly save lives," says Shayna's sister Kari. "If one life is saved due to being educated about the risks of drinking and driving with this accident as an example, that is one less life lost too soon."



Connie Monson and her daughter Shayna Monson are pictured before the drunk driving collision.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF
THE MONSON FAMILY

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION: PENALTIES AND ENFORCEMENT

Drinking and driving occurs all too often in North Dakota and the consequences are devastating. **On average, nearly half of all fatal crashes in the state are alcohol-related, making alcohol responsible for over 60 deaths per year.** And, on average, there are over 6,500 DUI arrests each year, which is comparable to the entire population of Valley City.

Evidence shows that by strengthening policies, penalties, and enforcement, driving under the influence and its related consequences can be prevented. Sobriety checkpoints, saturation patrols, and SCRAM bracelets are a few examples of effective prevention strategies. When implemented consistently, these effective strategies can produce widespread changes in behavior at the community level and create long-term changes — saving lives.



Sobriety Checkpoints (also known as DUI Checkpoints) are advertised locations where law enforcement officers are stationed to check drivers for signs of intoxication and impairment. This strategy is occurring across the state and is supported by a large majority of North Dakota citizens.



Saturation Patrols are concentrated enforcement efforts where officers look specifically for signs of intoxication in motorists, especially during high-risk times.



SCRAM bracelets are court-ordered blood alcohol content testing systems for use with high-risk or repeat DUI alcohol offenders. They are worn around the ankle and can include optional house arrest monitoring.

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION: PARENTS LEAD

Parents are the number one influence in the lives of their children. Be the champion of prevention in your home by following these strategies:

- ✓ **Ongoing conversations:** It is never too early to talk honestly with your child about substance abuse. By establishing open communication, it will be easier to discuss difficult topics down the line.
- ✓ **Monitor your child:** Know where your child is and who they are with. Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Make it a rule to notify you when plans change and upon their safe arrival.
- ✓ **Role modeling:** Your child will absorb your attitudes and behaviors toward alcohol. Be a good example.
- ✓ **Support and Engagement:** Be a part of your child's life. Regularly discuss their interests and take time to learn about them.



Find more tips and resources at

PARENTS LEAD.ORG  



**"THEY WATCH YOU MORE
THAN THEY WATCH
ANYBODY ELSE."**

MARCIA HELLANDSAAS
EXTENSION AGENT, NORTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERVICE

Marcia Hellandsaas has worked to prevent underage drinking for 28 years with the North Dakota State University Extension Service. She uses her professional knowledge at home when talking to her son, Eric, about the dangers of drinking.

PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH FOX

A PARENT'S ROLE IN PREVENTION

How one mother's career guides her message to her teen.

BY KATE GONZALES

When Marcia Hellandsaas sends her son, Eric, off to college, she will have to trust him to make good decisions.

She knows college students are likely exposed to alcohol, especially in North Dakota, where around half (46%) of college students report binge drinking within the previous two weeks, according to the 2014 North Dakota University System CORE survey.

"I think as a parent we always have that concern," Hellandsaas says. "We've done the best we can to prepare him."

That's because she has raised him with a clear and consistent message: Underage drinking is illegal, unsafe and is simply the wrong decision.

For 28 years, Hellandsaas has worked to prevent underage drinking in her career as an extension agent with the North Dakota State University Extension Service in McKenzie County. The extension service gives residents in each county access to the university's resources and research-based information in a range of categories.

In her position, she has led parenting classes that cover, among other topics, underage drinking. She has also worked with police departments, community coalitions, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and other organizations with the shared goal of preventing youth drinking. Hellandsaas tells parents to establish open communication about difficult topics early on, adding that ages 5 and 6 are a good time to start.

"It's important that families have ongoing conversations with their children beginning at an early age," she says.

Introducing these topics early is important, she says, because teenagers don't necessarily think things through.

"Sometimes their decisions aren't the best," she says, citing research that reveals a teenager's brain is not fully developed until age 25. Because their reasoning skills are affected, getting the message across early is key.

She often refers parents to parentslead.org, which has tools for parents to address the underage drinking problem in North Dakota — including talking points for conversations with kids of all ages.

The points she covers with her son? Underage drinking has negative health impacts on a growing brain and body and can result in a criminal record and even death.

She emphasizes the importance of parents being involved, both through monitoring their child's friendships and activities, and modeling good behavior themselves.

"Having good character is the most important thing because parents are the number one role models for their kids," she says. "They watch you more than they watch anybody else."

She says she's been lucky that her son has good friends with parents who reinforce her message.

"You have to really know where your kids are, what they're doing and have that bond with them," she says. "It's important to connect with them whenever you can."

“THE FACT IT WAS
THAT EASY (TO
GET ALCOHOL),
IT’S SICKENING.”

ASHLEY*
RECOVERING FROM ALCOHOLISM

ADDICTION, TREATMENT & RECOVERY

BY KATE GONZALES

How one person found help and hope.

It took many lies, arguments and hangovers for Ashley* to recognize she had a problem.

One night in 2013, she realized the toll alcohol had taken on her life when she saw her friends’ happiness displayed on social media. She compared herself to them, and was upset about how her grades and relationships suffered because of her drinking.

“I couldn’t stop,” says Ashley, “I will never forget the relief in my parents’ eyes when I sat them down and said, ‘I need help,’” she recalls. “They could only do so much.”

Although Ashley grew up in an alcohol-free household, she first got drunk in ninth grade on New Year’s Eve. A star track runner, she focused on sports and school and did not drink again until her senior year. As an outgoing, fun-loving teen, the party atmosphere pulled her back in. Throughout high school, Ashley says drinking was common during special occasions like prom, but she found herself drinking more frequently.

Her parents tried to prevent her drinking, leading to lots of anger and fighting. These habits worsened when she moved into the University of North Dakota dorms — where her parents had less oversight.

For Ashley, finding older buyers was never hard. She recalls driving around with friends her freshman year looking for an older adult to

buy alcohol. That night, she exchanged a car ride for an alcohol purchase.

“The fact it was that easy, it’s sickening,” she says.

In college, she initially perceived drinking as a normal activity. But her drinking behaviors were extreme, including shots before class or track practice.

“I guess I just really didn’t have that off switch,” she says.

She was not alone. Youth ages 12 to 20 make up nearly 10 percent of treatment admission for alcohol abuse in North Dakota. Consequences of underage drinking include violence, traffic crashes and high-risk sex. Looking back, Ashley says her extreme drinking made her mean and selfish.

“All I really cared about literally was drinking,” she says. “Everyone I loved and cared about, I lied to.”

In spring 2013, Ashley got help. She went into an outpatient treatment program and now says her relationship with her parents is strong and she surrounds herself with supportive friends. Looking back, she wishes she knew that addiction could happen to her — to anybody.

Ashley is currently seeking her master’s degree to become an addiction counselor.

**Name and photo have been changed*

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION: REDUCING ACCESS

Underage youth can illegally obtain alcohol two ways: purchasing it themselves at liquor stores, bars, or restaurants (retail access) or obtaining it from other sources like someone older or their own home (social access).

Reducing the likelihood that underage youth can access alcohol is one way to prevent underage drinking and the related consequences. If youth can’t get alcohol, they can’t consume it. So, how can communities reduce access?

Responsible Beverage Service Training and Social Host laws are two effective ways to prevent underage drinking.

Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) Training educates establishment owners, managers, servers and sellers about effective strategies to avoid illegally selling alcohol to underage youth. These programs have been found to reduce the likelihood of sales to minors and decrease the number of alcohol-related vehicle crashes. Visit www.ndsc.org/rbs for more information.

Social Host laws allow for individuals to be held responsible for providing an environment where underage drinking occurs. As of January 2016, 31 states had social host liability laws in place, according to the Alcohol Policy Information System. North Dakota’s Dram Shop law addresses some of this social host liability but has limitations, because injury must occur in order to pursue damages.

ALCOHOL'S EFFECTS on the **BODY**

BY JOHN FLYNN

"PEOPLE ARE AT A HIGHER RISK FOR HEART DISEASE, HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, LIVER DISEASE AND LOTS OF CANCERS BECAUSE OF DRINKING."

DR. VANESSA NELSON
PEDIATRICIAN AT SANFORD HEALTH CENTER
IN BISMARCK

Because alcohol is legal for adults, it is often thought to be harmless, but this drug is as dangerous as any other, impacting the health and safety of individuals and communities. The short and long-term consequences of alcohol abuse must be taken seriously when in North Dakota nearly a third of all high school students report having recently consumed alcohol and nearly a third of adults over age 26 report recently binge drinking*.

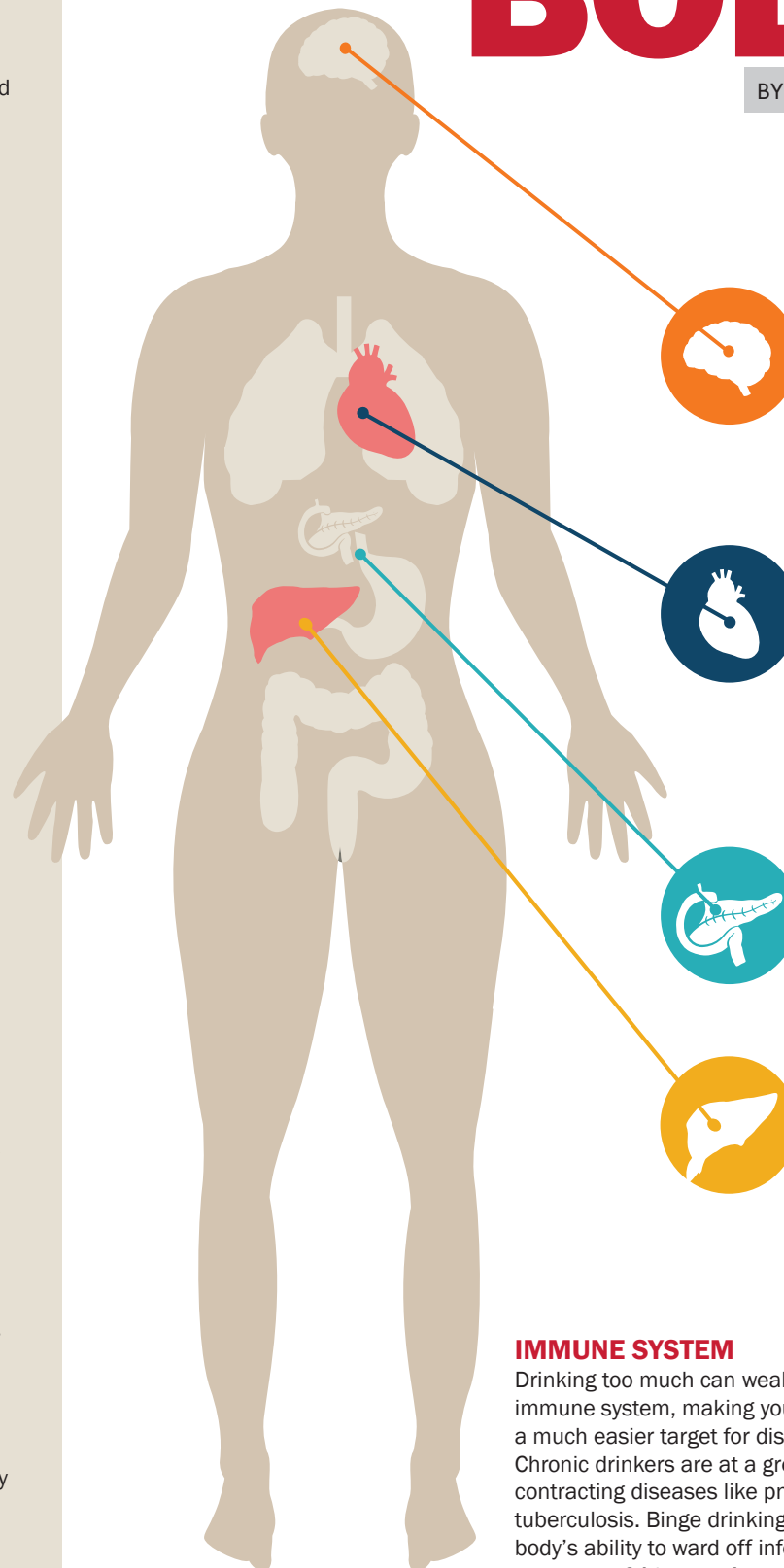
"It's more accepted here than in other states," says Dr. Vanessa Nelson, a pediatrician. "It's more culturally accepted. It's just been that way as long as I can remember. It starts younger here." And, when drinking is started at a younger age, more consequences come with it. "People who start drinking younger are more likely to try other drugs in their life," Dr. Nelson says, "and they're also more likely to become dependent on alcohol when they get older."

The use of alcohol can also hinder brain development. "The brain isn't fully developed until you're in your mid-20s. So alcohol use or abuse can have permanent effects on your brain development," says Dr. Nelson. Drinking underage can cause severe changes in the parts of the brain that affect impulse control, judgment, learning, and memory, and that plays an important role in forming adult personality and behavior, according to the United States Department of Health and Human Services. This damage from alcohol can be long-term and irreversible, potentially impacting a person's ability to function successfully in school or the workplace.

Not only can alcohol impact development, it can also impact your health. Three of the five leading causes of death are alcohol-related, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"In adolescence, injuries, homicides and suicides are all increased with the use of alcohol. Later in life, people are at a higher risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, liver disease and lots of cancers because of drinking," says Dr. Nelson. The health consequences of alcohol can significantly impact a person's quality of life, their ability to succeed, and their health overall.

* Binge drinking, which is considered risky drinking, is when men drink five drinks or women drink four drinks in under two hours.



BRAIN

Alcohol interferes with the brain's development and communication pathways. It can affect the way the brain looks and works, even causing permanent damage. These disruptions can change mood and behavior, and make it harder to think clearly and move with coordination.

HEART

Drinking excessively can damage the heart, causing problems including:

- Cardiomyopathy – Stretching and drooping of heart muscle
- Arrhythmias – Irregular heartbeat
- Stroke
- High blood pressure

PANCREAS

Alcohol causes the pancreas to produce toxic substances that can eventually lead to pancreatitis, a dangerous inflammation and swelling of the blood vessels in the pancreas that prevents proper digestion.

LIVER

Heavy drinking takes a toll on the liver, and can lead to a variety of problems including:

- Steatosis, or fatty liver
- Alcoholic hepatitis
- Fibrosis
- Cirrhosis

IMMUNE SYSTEM

Drinking too much can weaken your immune system, making your body a much easier target for disease. Chronic drinkers are at a greater risk of contracting diseases like pneumonia and tuberculosis. Binge drinking slows your body's ability to ward off infections — even up to 24 hours after getting drunk.

CANCER

Excessive drinking can increase your risk of developing certain cancers, including cancers of the:

- Mouth
- Liver
- Esophagus
- Breast
- Throat



NOT ALL DRINKS ARE CREATED **EQUAL**

Binge drinking is
4 drinks for women and
5 drinks for men
in 2 hours

For more information visit speakvolumes.nd.gov

As adults, we may enjoy a drink now and then, especially when socializing with friends and family. However, drinking can be harmful, depending on your age and health status, the situation, and, of course, how much you drink.

So, how much is too much? Binge drinking, or heavy drinking, is when your blood alcohol level reaches 0.08 percent, which typically happens when men drink five drinks or women drink four drinks in under two hours, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

The caveat, of course, is that not all drinks are created equal. Some have two or more times the amount of alcohol, which makes volume a key thing to know when counting your drinks.

A standard drink is defined as 0.6 oz. of pure alcohol, or in other words, 12 oz. of a regular beer, 5 oz. of wine or 1.5 oz. of 80-proof hard alcohol. So, sometimes what's in your glass is actually more than one drink.

know your
DRINK
know your
LIMIT



1 pint of craft beer = 2 Drinks
As beers get fancier, they also get stronger. Some craft brews have about double the alcohol content of a regular variety, so an artisan pint can count for two drinks.



1 glass of wine = 1 Drink
One glass of wine should equal five ounces or about 3 and 1/3 filled shot glasses. With wine glasses being so large, be careful not to over pour.



1 Long Island Iced Tea = 3-5 Drinks
With four types of hard alcohol in a standard recipe, the harmless name of this deceiving drink disguises the fact you could get charged with a DUI after having just one.



1 Margarita = 2-3 Drinks
The sugary mix and salty rim might cloak the taste of alcohol, but with hearty pours of tequila and Cointreau, it should be consumed responsibly.

SPEAKVOLUMES.nd.gov



PREVENTION WORKS IN NORTH DAKOTA

Change can happen... and it IS happening. North Dakota communities are coming together and investing in substance abuse prevention with a common goal to create safe and healthy individuals, families, businesses and communities. Here are just a few highlights of recent prevention successes across the state:

- Grand Forks became the first city in the state to pass a Social Host Law making it illegal to provide an environment for minors to engage in underage drinking. At the same time, another law was passed banning extreme drink specials. This was a collaborative effort between the Grand Forks Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and the Community and Campus Committee to Reduce High-Risk Alcohol Use.
- One town hall meeting organized by the Boys and Girls Club of the Three Affiliated Tribes in New Town educated adults on why they should support efforts to reduce underage drinking. Community members at the meeting who completed a survey said it instilled a new appreciation for the importance of clear no-alcohol rules for children and teens at home and in the community.
- Several communities across the state are implementing texting tip lines. These tip lines offer an anonymous way for concerned citizens and students to report tips about underage drinking or other criminal activity to local law enforcement who can then respond.
- North Dakota Highway Patrol continues to increase its presence on roads during high risk times, resulting in numerous arrests such as DUI, open container, and drug possession. In one month alone, these efforts resulted in 90 DUI citations.
- Local law enforcement in many communities across the state regularly conduct bar walk-throughs to prevent underage drinking. In just one of these operations, the Grand Forks Police Department made 18 arrests which included false identification, illegal consumption and possession, minor on premises, and disorderly conduct.
- Many North Dakota communities are either enhancing or implementing server training ordinances making it a requirement that all alcohol establishment staff are trained. Some communities that recently passed or enhanced such laws are Ransom County, the city of Grand Forks, and the city of Grafton. Also, the North Dakota Safety Council recently launched online server training courses for servers working in establishments and large events, and for owners/managers of establishments (www.ndsc.org/rbs).

THIS IS WHERE —YOU— COME IN...

Take action to prevent underage drinking and adult binge drinking. Here are some things you can do to make positive change in your community:

- ☐ **Identify the issues unique to your community.**
- ☐ **Familiarize yourself with strategies proven to work.** Visit prevention.nd.gov for more information.
- ☐ **Start at home.** Be a leader and positive role model. Visit parentslead.org for useful information, tools and resources.
- ☐ **Get involved with a local coalition, community group, or your city government.** Partner with law enforcement, schools, faith groups, health departments and others working toward prevention of alcohol-related consequences.
- ☐ **Strengthen or implement policies within your community, schools, organizations, alcohol establishments and other local businesses.** Policies are one of the most effective and long-lasting prevention strategies. They are cost effective and create an environment where health and safety is promoted.
- ☐ **Advocate for prevention.**

**LEARN MORE AT
WWW.PREVENTION.ND.GOV**



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