

Investigating Alcohol's Impact on New Mexico

Ted Alcorn

Oct. 6, 2022

Throughout, feel free to add questions to the chat and I will try to answer along the way.

About me

- Raised in Albuquerque, NM
- MHS, MA at Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health and School for Advanced International Studies
- Independent journalist for national + local outlets primarily covering:
 - Hepatitis C, organ transplant, hospital anti-trust
 - Substance use and treatment
 - Police, prosecutors, jails, prisons
 - On occasion: science fiction, opera, yoga, waacking



*“It’s one of the most popular commodities —
with the highest social cost.”*

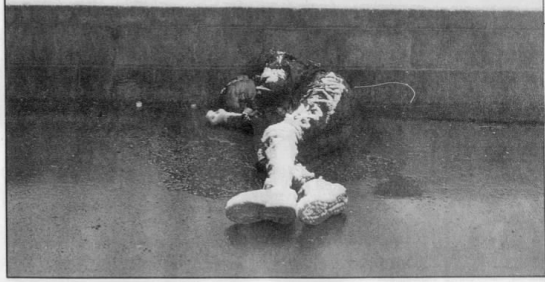
-Rep. Antonio “Moe” Maestas, D-Albuquerque

The Albuquerque Tribune



Alcohol blurs line between a way of life, a way of death

Hosting of April snow gathers on a factoring frontier. Another drunk die in Gallup, this time in the northwestern New Mexico town...



Bernice Largo's body lies frozen where he passed out in his Chamber of Commerce Park after the mid-April overnight temperatures dipped to below freezing.

- INSIDE: By George B2 Movies B8, By George B10 Nation C8, By George B10 Sports C10, By George B10 Sports C10, By George B10 Sports C10...

Hit the high road for changing of the colors — Options, C1

The Albuquerque Tribune

18 children hurt in APS bus collision. Eighteen middle school children were slightly injured this morning when their bus was hit by a pickup on the F.R. Northeast Highway.

Cities breathe easy after smoking ban. If you light up a Marlboro in a restaurant in Aspen, Colo., you'll be complaining.



Just Business. They mine the liquid gold that weighs Gallup down. These Italians also are among the men's business, grocers, real estate agents, judges and politicians.

Alcohol-related deaths. From 1975-1979, McKinley County had nearly six times the rate of alcohol-related deaths per 100,000 people as the United States had during the same period.

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Welfare system to be drastically changed. Starting in 1994, one adult in each 2-parent welfare family would have to perform 16 hours a week of community work...

The coach's ego lost the gold for U.S. basketball — Sports, B1

The Albuquerque Tribune



S.D. chief resigns from post. WASHINGTON — In a surprise announcement, Lita James announced that she will resign as director of the research program to develop a space-based anti-missile defense.

NASA gives go-ahead to Discovery. CAPT. CANAVERAL Fla. (AP) — NASA cleared the space shuttle Discovery for flight today and gave the go-ahead to launch the orbiter at 7:59 a.m. EDT Thursday.

Social services for drinkers. In Gallup, population 22,470, there are: 21 drunk shops, 1 blood plasma center, 324 drunk shops, 2 overnight shelters, 3 free overnight stays in the Gallup jail with no charge for transportation, 5 free transportation to a free detoxification unit, when a bed and these 24 are an available.

Welfare system to be drastically changed. Starting in 1994, one adult in each 2-parent welfare family would have to perform 16 hours a week of community work, on-the-job training, child care and transportation services.

INSIDE: Weather Thursday fair and cooler with southeast winds to 15 mph. Albuquerque low in mid-40s and high in mid-70s. Please see Page A2.

New liquor licenses for NM restaurants 'wildly successful'

BY DAN MCKAY / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

TUESDAY, AUGUST 9TH, 2022 AT 5:26PM



A 2021 state law aims to make it more affordable for restaurants to serve spirits made by local companies, such as Left Turn Distilling. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

SANTA FE — Plenty of new restaurants are embracing the chance to pour New Mexico-made gin and vodka under the state's reshaped liquor-license system.

But the home delivery of alcoholic drinks hasn't taken off quite as fast, according to a presentation to legislators.

Man charged after driving SUV into Gallup parade, injuring 15

By KOB

Updated: August 5, 2022 - 11:18 PM

Published: August 4, 2022 - 11:12 PM

GALLUP, N.M. — A 33-year-old Pinedale man was arrested and charged with DWI after driving an SUV through the **Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial parade** Thursday night.

33-year-old Jeff Irving is accused of driving through the parade. 15 people were injured — including two Gallup police officers, Gilbert Gonzales and Elijah Bowman.

According to the criminal complaint, Irving had a blood alcohol content of 0.24 — three times the legal limit — and was driving with a revoked license due to a previous DWI. He reportedly admitted to drinking "two cans" of beer before driving, and multiple open containers were found in the vehicle.

The complaint states Irving and his brothers — Davis and Dave Begay — were watching the parade in a 1999 Chevrolet Tahoe SUV. Around 7:50 p.m., they decided to leave in the SUV and took off east on Coal after two Gallup police officers tried to stop them.

Police tried to get parade participants out of the road as the SUV drove down Coal, turned onto South 2nd Street and then U.S. Route 66 where he crashed into a parked vehicle near the Red Shell Jewelry store. Police removed Irving and his brothers from the SUV after finally getting them to stop.

The two brothers were detained and taken to the Gallup Detox Center.



Irving is facing 21 charges:

- Aggravated DWI
- Third-degree felony aggravated fleeing
- 14 counts of misdemeanor leaving the scene of an accident
- One felony count of leaving the scene, resulting in great bodily harm
- Driving with a revoked license

About the investigative series



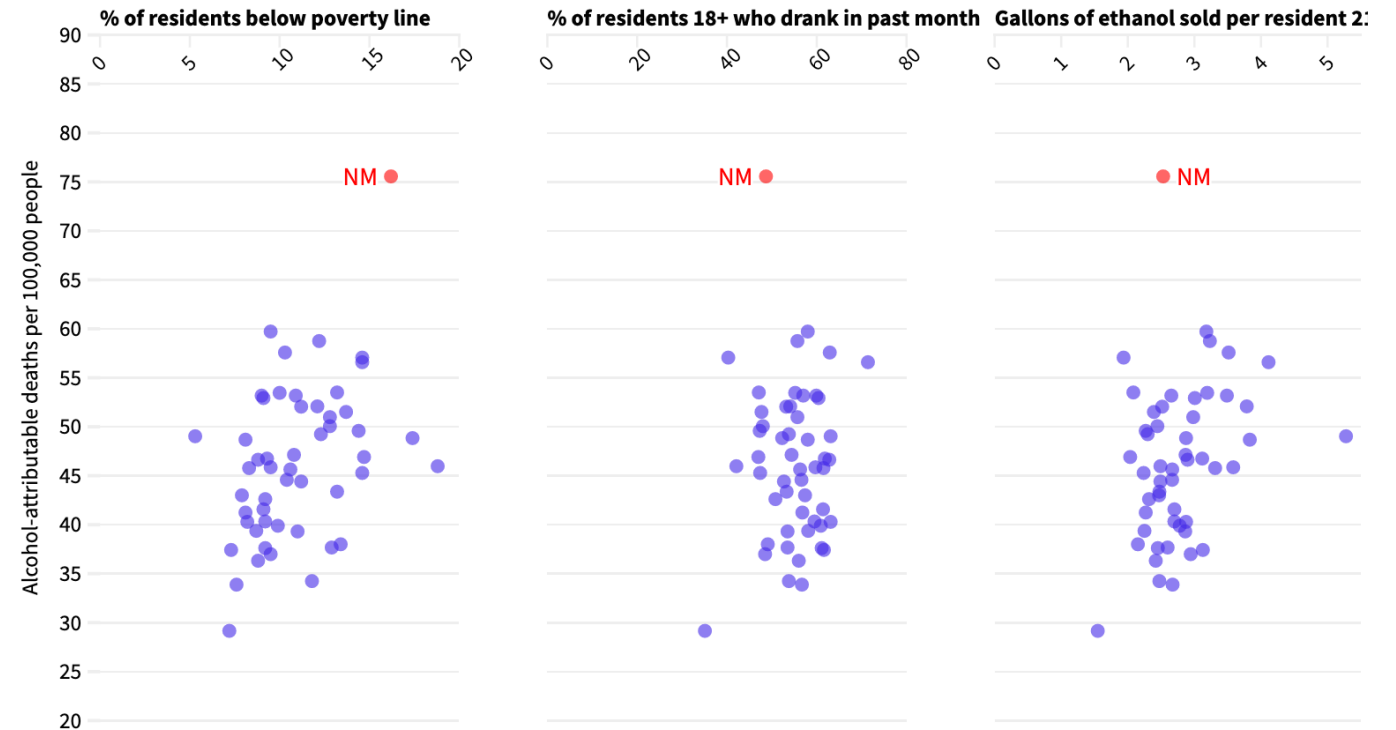
Read it in full: <https://nmindepth.com/2022/blind-drunk/>

- Reported for *New Mexico In Depth*, a member-supported, digital-first, nonpartisan news organization.
- Over 150 interviews, data from over a dozen agencies.
- Also published in the Santa Fe New Mexican, Las Cruces Sun News, and other papers throughout the state.
- Supported by grants from the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism, the McCune Charitable Foundation, the Con Alma Health Foundation, and the Association of Health Care Journalists.

Conclusion #1: New Mexico has a drinking problem.

- 3x the national death rate
- Causes more deaths than fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamines combined
- More deaths among working-age people than Covid-19

People in **New Mexico** die of alcohol-attributable causes at a higher rate than people in states that are poorer, where more people drink, and where the drinkers drink more.



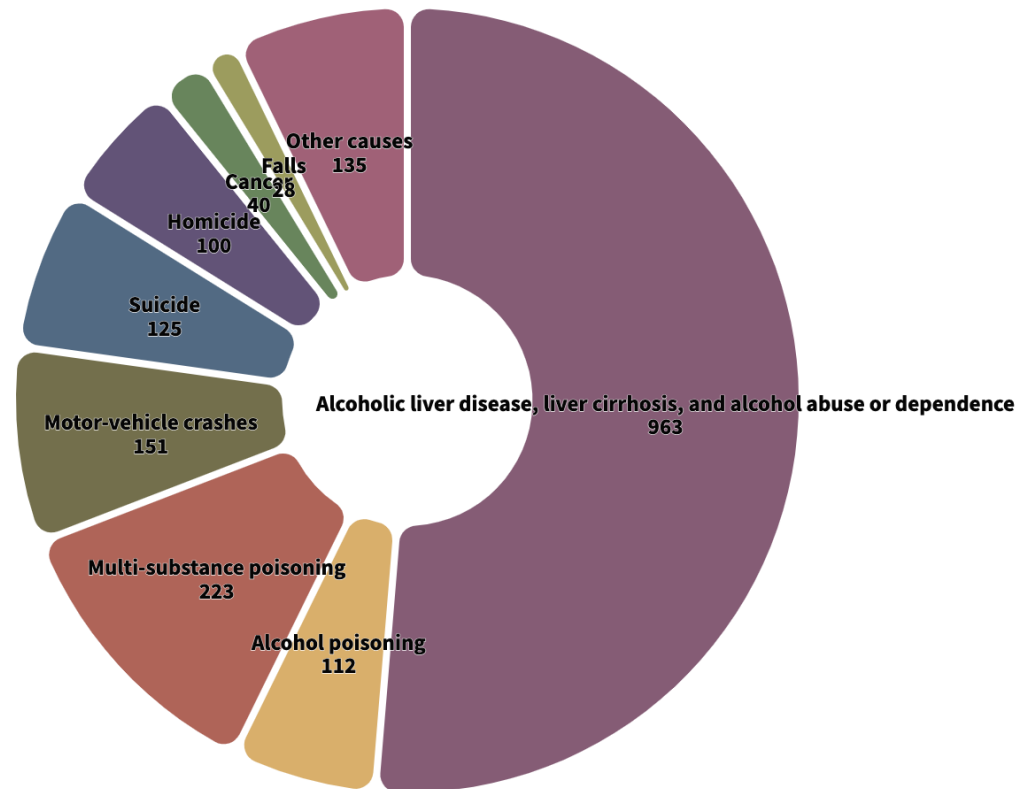
New Mexico In Depth

Apparent alcohol consumption in 2019 from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Alcohol-attributable deaths in 2015-19 from U.S. CDC, Population (2018-20) and share of residents below poverty line (2020) from U.S. Census • Share of residents who had a drink in the past month from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health

Conclusion #2: The problem is not what many people think.

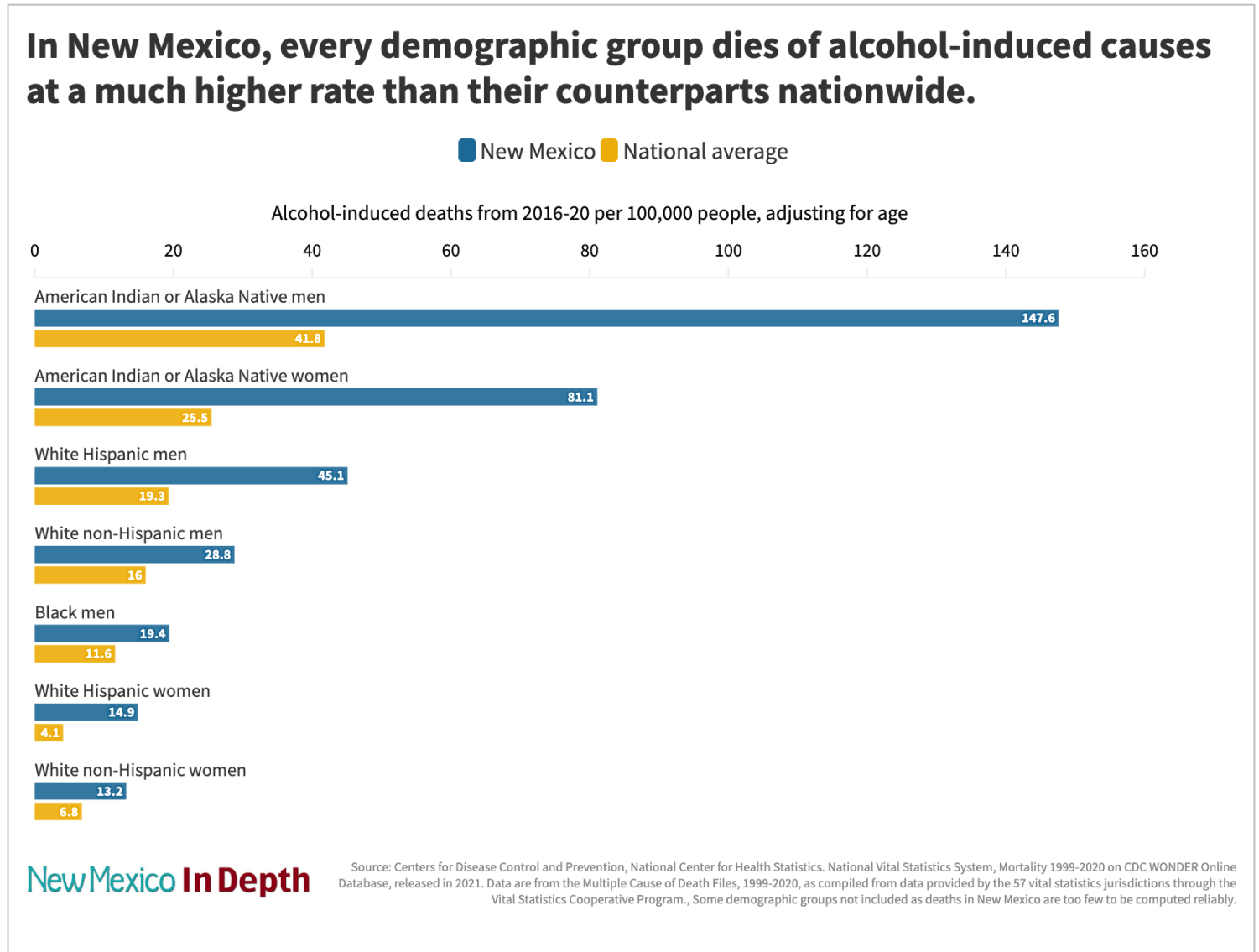
- DWI accounts for only 1 in 10 alcohol-attributable deaths.
- Of homicides in NM, 42% of victims had been drinking at time of death.
- Half of deaths due to alcoholic liver disease, cirrhosis, or alcoholic “abuse” or “dependence.”

In 2020 there were 1,878 deaths in New Mexico attributable to alcohol, whether by chronic illness, acute poisonings, injuries, or violence.



Conclusion #3: The problem is not who many people think.

- Native people have highest rate of alcohol-related deaths— but all demographic groups in NM have elevated death rates compared to peers elsewhere.
- Fastest growth in deaths among women, people ages 25-34.



Conclusion #4: The most effective interventions target the whole population, not just “problem drinkers.”

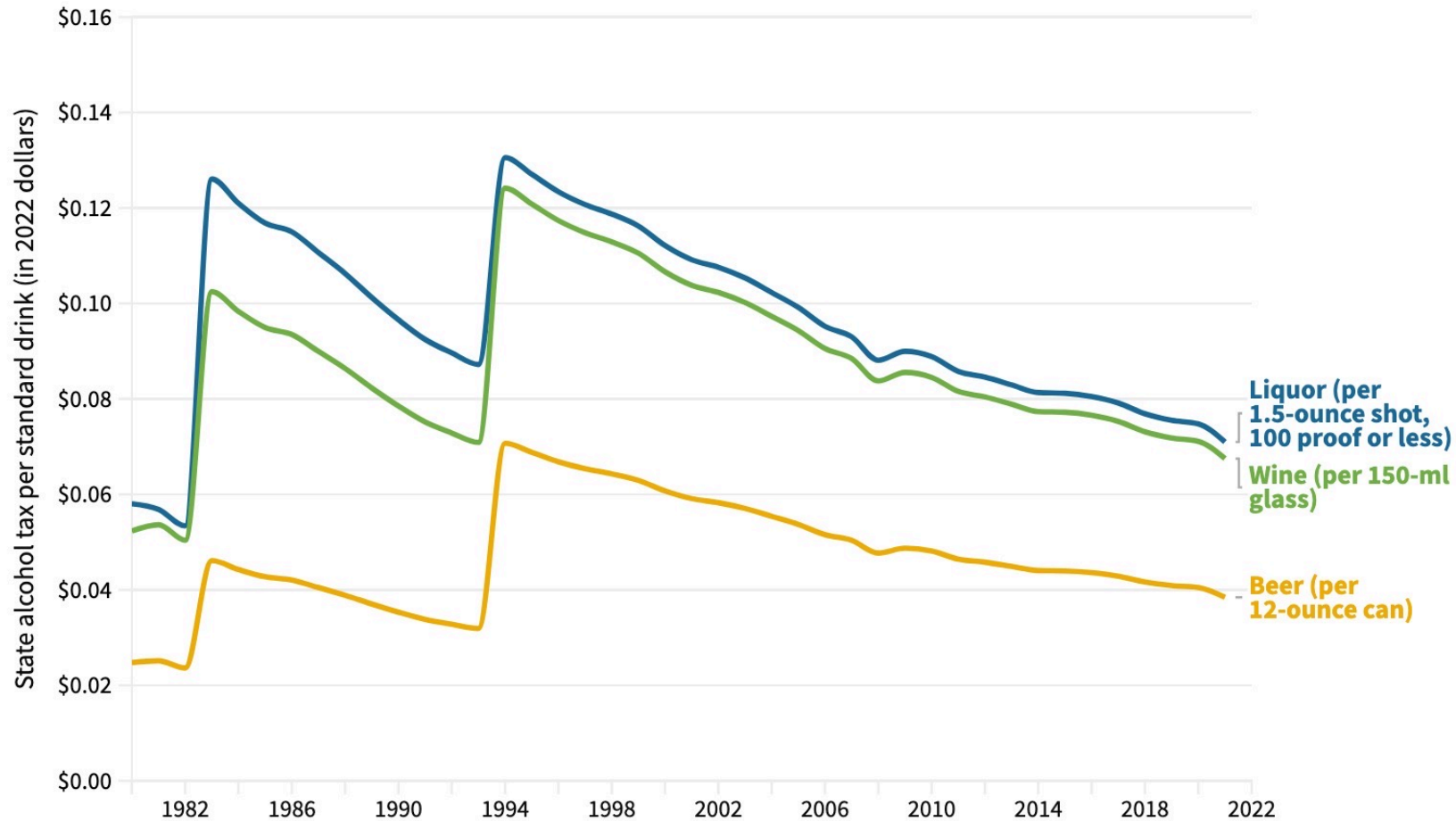
- The CDC’s Community Preventive Services Task Force rigorously reviewed and recommends a handful of measures.
- According to the New Mexico Department of Health, of the seven recommended measures, the state “needs improvement” or is moving in the wrong direction in more than half.



Intervention	CPSTF Finding
Dram Shop Liability	● Recommended (strong evidence) March 2010
Electronic Screening and Brief Intervention (e-SBI)	● Recommended (strong evidence) August 2012
Enhanced Enforcement of Laws Prohibiting Sales to Minors	● Recommended (sufficient evidence) February 2006
Increasing Alcohol Taxes	● Recommended (strong evidence) June 2007
Maintaining Limits on Days of Sale	● Recommended (strong evidence) June 2008
Maintaining Limits on Hours of Sale	● Recommended (sufficient evidence) February 2009
Overservice Law Enforcement Initiatives	◆ Insufficient Evidence March 2010
Privatization of Retail Alcohol Sales	▲ Recommended Against April 2011
Regulation of Alcohol Outlet Density	● Recommended (sufficient evidence) February 2007
Responsible Beverage Service Training	◆ Insufficient Evidence October 2010

New Mexico taxes alcohol a fixed amount by volume rather than as a percent of price, so each year as inflation pushes prices higher, it erodes the real tax rates.

Today's tax rates are at their lowest level in at least 30 years.



Conclusion #5: New Mexicans have pushed for action...



Gallup Marchers Arrive With Plea For Legislation

By John Yaeger
OF THE JOURNAL'S CAPITOL BUREAU

SANTA FE — Hundreds of people desperate for help in fighting McKinley County's severe alcohol problem joined about two dozen others in walking the final miles to the Capitol Monday to lobby legislators and the governor.

The 200-mile march was named "March of Hope — Journey for Jovita," for 3-month-old Jovita Vega, who died January in a drunken-driving accident in Gallup. Jovita's mother, Kathleen Vega, and the ex-wife of the man who drove the vehicle that struck the family's van tearfully addressed legislators and demonstrators in the Senate chamber.

"Please let it stop. Let it stop right now before people get hurt again," Vega said.

Marcy Christie, who was divorced from the drunken driver responsible for Jovita's death, and also was killed in the accident, said her young son has already learned the dangers of alcohol.

"Mom, you have to tell them that you can't drink and drive," she quoted the boy as saying.

The demonstrators, many of whom left Gallup Feb. 17, and others who joined along the way, gathered on the Capitol steps shortly before noon. The marchers were undeterred until the end, chanting and carrying banners as they approached the Capitol.

"We've watered the plants in Gallup with our blood. Our winter has lasted too long," organizer David Conejo told the group.

"Nobody's going to tell us to shut up. Nobody's going to tell us to quit," shouted Vega to the crowd.

Gov. Carrey Carruthers pledged his support in brief comments to the crowd.

"A long problem has led to a long march," Carruthers said.

Mayor Edward Muñoz of Gallup said he believes the unprecedented demonstration has paid off.

"I think it already has. We've got enthusiastic support from our legislators," he said as the group pushed through the Capitol doors.

McKinley County's alcohol-related death rate is more than five times the national average of 43 deaths per 100,000 people.

Key pieces of legislation, all still in House and Senate committees, being sought by the marchers would:

- Restrict drive-up window liquor sales.
- Increase the percentage of the liquor tax that goes to local alcohol-treatment programs.
- Appropriate \$2.3 million in state matching funds for construction of a detoxification facility in Gallup.

SYDNEY BRANK / JOURNAL

Kathleen Vega, left, the mother of 3-month-old Jovita Vega who was killed in a drunken-driving accident near Gallup in January, tearfully hugs Marcy Christie, ex-wife of the man who was driving the car that struck the Vegas' van and also died in that accident. The meeting took place on the Senate floor Monday.

...but policymakers rarely listen.

- Revenue from alcohol sales in the state likely tops \$1 billion a year.
- 2,800 businesses profit including restaurants, bars, liquor stores, ski areas, state parks...
- Lawmakers themselves immersed in a culture of drinking.



Albuquerque Rep. Louis won't seek reelection after DWI arrest

BY [DAN BOYD](#) / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PUBLISHED: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH, 2022 AT 2:00PM

NEWS

New Mexico Senate Rules Committee chair Ivey-Soto resigns

Sep. 29, 2022 | Updated: Sep. 29, 2022 12:23 p.m.



Process: moving from data to storytelling

- Reviewed prior evaluations (press, scientific, legislative)
- Obtained data from NM DOT, US NHTSA
- Assessed different ways of controlling for increase in driving, time-periods, outcomes.
- Interviewed current and former agency heads
- Ride-along with New Mexico State Police, attended DWI recovery court, enrolled in DWI school, input from prosecutors, public defenders, probation, advocates, survivors
- Drafting/narrowing
- Repeated (sharper) interviews with agency heads

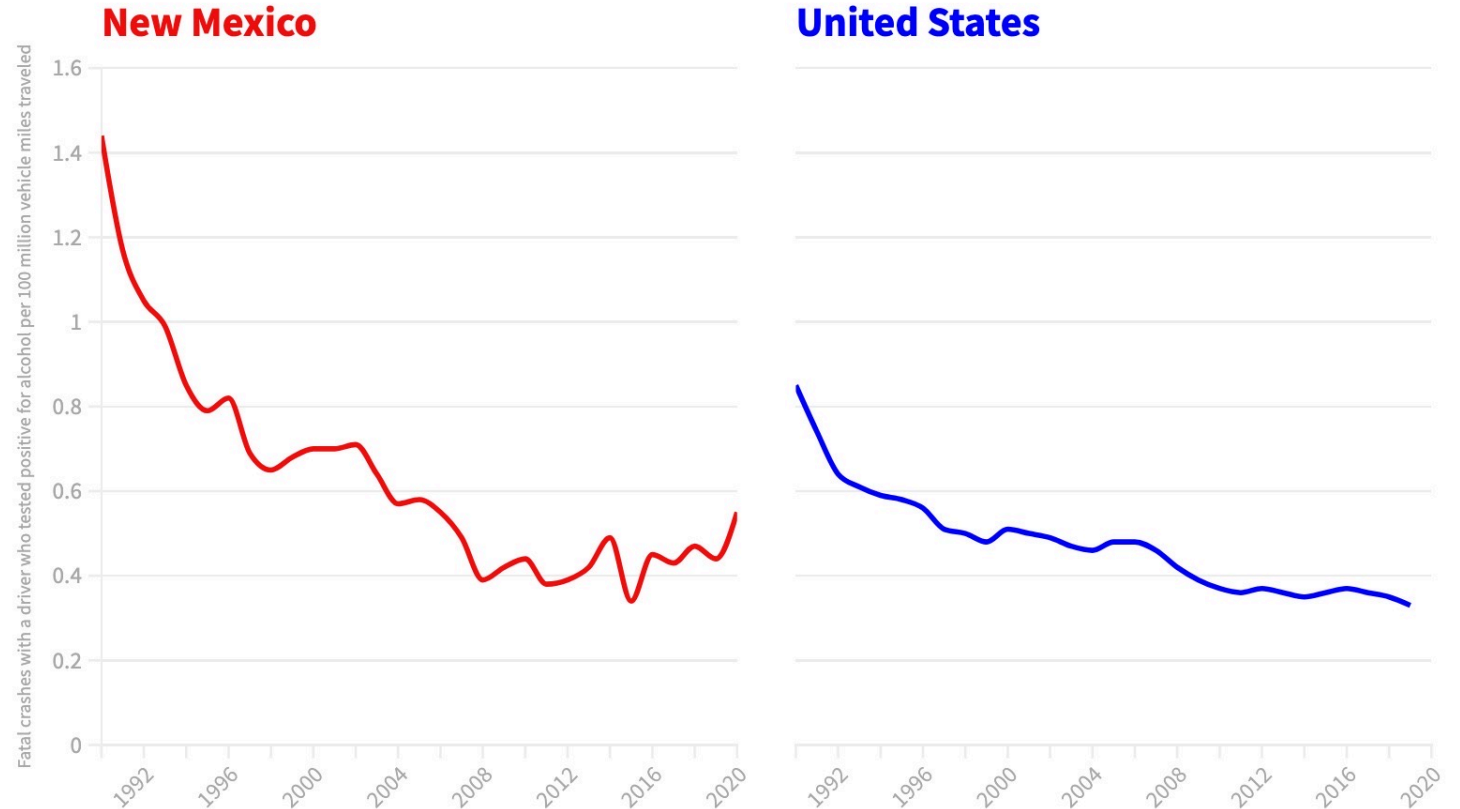
**Building a foundation in data >> theory-building >>
confirming/complicating it with reporting >> returning to leadership for accountability**

**DRIVERS INVOLVED IN FATAL TRAFFIC CRASHES
BY STATE, YEAR, AND THEIR BAC
FATALITY ANALYSIS REPORTING SYSTEM (FARS) 1982-2018 FINAL & 2019 ARF**

New Mexico

Year	Drivers Involved	BAC=.00		BAC=.01-.07		BAC=.08+		BAC=.01+	
	Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1982	660	362	55%	42	6%	256	39%	298	45%
1983	622	365	59%	31	5%	226	36%	257	41%
1984	569	324	57%	31	6%	214	38%	245	43%
1985	603	362	60%	37	6%	205	34%	241	40%
1986	589	336	57%	41	7%	212	36%	253	43%
1987	672	390	58%	47	7%	235	35%	282	42%
1988	591	324	55%	39	7%	228	39%	267	45%
1989	640	397	62%	37	6%	207	32%	243	38%
1990	585	339	58%	35	6%	211	36%	246	42%
1991	559	354	63%	19	3%	187	33%	206	37%
1992	546	339	62%	21	4%	186	34%	207	38%
1993	511	315	62%	29	6%	167	33%	196	38%
1994	530	348	66%	26	5%	156	30%	182	34%
1995	577	404	70%	22	4%	151	26%	173	30%
1996	603	417	69%	28	5%	159	26%	186	31%
1997	565	408	72%	23	4%	134	24%	157	28%
1998	508	359	71%	24	5%	125	25%	149	29%
1999	559	400	72%	29	5%	131	23%	159	28%
2000	558	394	71%	29	5%	136	24%	165	29%
2001	570	401	70%	29	5%	140	25%	170	30%
2002	571	403	70%	24	4%	144	25%	169	30%
2003	500	347	69%	26	5%	127	25%	153	31%
2004	628	487	78%	17	3%	123	20%	141	22%
2005	582	442	76%	15	3%	125	22%	140	24%
2006	572	427	75%	20	3%	125	22%	145	25%
2007	496	363	73%	19	4%	114	23%	133	27%
2008	445	340	76%	11	3%	93	21%	105	24%
2009	454	339	75%	13	3%	102	23%	115	25%
2010	447	333	74%	7	2%	107	24%	114	26%
2011	414	314	76%	12	3%	88	21%	100	24%
2012	471	368	78%	12	3%	91	19%	103	22%
2013	391	279	71%	22	6%	90	23%	112	29%
2014	473	345	73%	24	5%	104	22%	128	27%
2015	383	283	74%	12	3%	89	23%	100	26%
2016	506	373	74%	29	6%	104	21%	133	26%
2017	535	406	76%	24	5%	105	20%	129	24%
2018	516	383	74%	29	6%	105	20%	133	26%
2019	559	425	76%	22	4%	112	20%	134	24%

Between 1990 and 2008, New Mexico reduced its rate of fatal crashes involving intoxicated drivers by 70% – but then progress stalled.



New Mexico In Depth Fatal crashes in New Mexico with a driver BAC .01+ from NM Department of Transportation, fatal crashes with a driver involving alcohol nationwide from NHTSA, vehicle miles traveled from FHWA.



Largely left on the cutting-room floor:

- DWI Recovery Court
- APD DWI unit
- Survivors of DWI
- Some advocates

Process: moving from storytelling to data

- Introduced to Steve by one of the state's foremost alcohol treatment centers. In Albuquerque, accepts Medicaid, diverse patient population.
- He was now managing his alcohol disorder but had struggled for 40+ years. Implicated in divorce, job-loss, estrangement from children.
- His primary care clinician never diagnosed his drinking disorder nor referred him for treatment.
- Prescribed a benzodiazapine for long-term use.
- “He told me one time that ‘I don’t really think you’re an alcoholic,’ and that always made me feel odd — because in the long-run, I was an alcoholic.”

**Starting with a hunch >> seeking sources >>
listening deeply >>
finding unexpected connections in the science >>
building out the story**

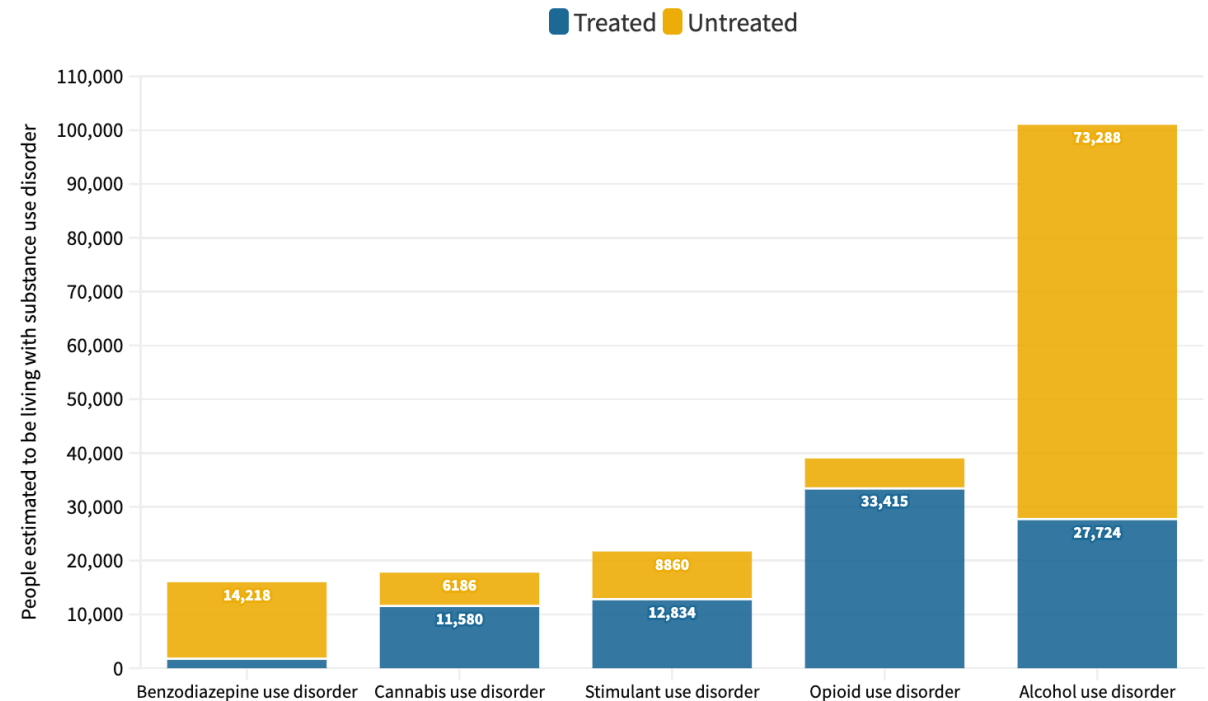


Read it in full: <https://nmindepth.com/2022/every-door-is-the-right-door>

The most common missed opportunity is in primary care:

- A recent paper found that of people with alcohol disorders, 70% say a doctor asked them about drinking in the last year, 12% say they were counseled to cut down, and just 5% say the doctor offered information about treatment (Mintz et al, 2021).
- According to the CDC's National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 26% of New Mexicans who had a drink in the last month meet criteria for an alcohol use disorder, among the highest share of any state.
- Fewer than 4,000 people in New Mexico have been prescribed naltrexone for addressing addictions including to alcohol, despite the efficacy of the medication.

The state health department recently estimated more than 73,000 New Mexicans have alcohol use disorders and are not receiving treatment — a bigger gap than for all other substances combined.



New Mexico Department of Health, New Mexico Substance Use Disorder Treatment Gap Analysis (2021) **New Mexico In Depth**

Additional materials

Help New Mexico In Depth better understand alcohol's role in the state.

Share your story with alcohol

New Mexicans die from alcohol-related causes at a higher rate than anywhere else in the country, and there isn't a clear answer why.

I am a reporter and I spent the last nine months investigating this for New Mexico In Depth. You can read what I found here: <https://nmindepth.com/2022/blind-drunk/>.

Now I need your help to better understand what's going on and what we can do about it.

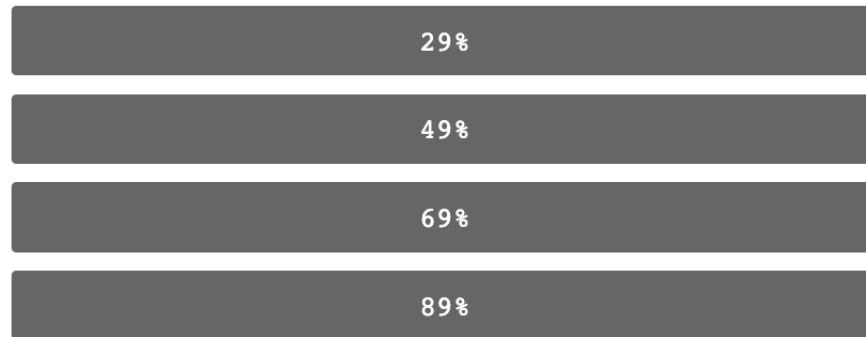
Many New Mexican families struggle with alcohol but the problem has often been neglected. That's partly because of stigma towards addiction: it doesn't always feel easy to share stories about it.

I created this questionnaire to hear directly from people who have been affected by alcohol, either due to their own drinking or that of close friends or family.

I want to learn from your experiences of treatment in New Mexico, obstacles that you confronted, and your thoughts about how both our people and our leaders can create a culture of more responsible alcohol use.

Test your knowledge of alcohol in New Mexico

Q: What share of New Mexican adults drink alcohol?



Source: National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2018-19.

[CLICK HERE to read more about the factors that explain the state's alcohol crisis.](#)

ALCOHOL AND YOUR HEALTH

How much is it safe to drink?

People generally overestimate the share of their peers who drink. In New Mexico, a majority of the adult population abstains: just 49% reported having consumed a drink in the previous month.

Drinkers' beliefs about what constitutes safe and appropriate levels of consumption are powerfully shaped by drinkers around them. Hence the old joke, "The definition of an alcoholic is someone who drinks more than their doctor." Allowing norms to guide your behavior is problematic because people tend to associate with people who have similar drinking habits, and heavy drinkers gravitate to heavier drinkers as their companions.

The science is increasingly clear that alcohol use confers [no health benefits](#) and any level of consumption poses risks. But there are objective measures for the amount of alcohol you can consume before those risks markedly increase.

Beer, wine, and liquor all contain the same intoxicating ingredient, ethanol, which affects every organ in the body in proportion to the volume one drinks. Due to their different concentrations, a 12-ounce beer (at 5% ABV), a 150 ml-glass of wine, or a 1.5 oz-shot of 80-proof liquor each contain about the same amount of alcohol and are therefore equivalent to one 'standard drink'.

ommend that men limit their consumption to two drinks a day and women to one. That's a more profound impact on women than men: for any given quantity consumed, women reach levels than men and experience more profound effects. The National Institute of Alcohol n defines [heavy drinking](#) as 14 drinks a week for men and seven drinks a week for women.

cohol use disorder?

ded the notion that drinkers can be easily divided between those who consume responsibly can't. In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association revised its diagnostic criteria to describe as a continuum ranging from mild to severe, all "[characterized by an impaired ability to stop despite adverse social, occupational, or health consequences.](#)"

of tools for diagnosing alcohol use disorder but one of the simplest follows the acronym CAGE:

It you should CUT down on your drinking?

NOYED you by criticizing your drinking?

It bad or GUILTY about your drinking?

ad an EYE-OPENER in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

ry two of these questions is highly predictive of having an alcohol use disorder.

tools for quickly [screening your own alcohol use](#) and exploring the risks your current level of your health.

ad one find motivation to change?

rother chronic illness such as diabetes or asthma, a person with an alcohol use disorder may ated to alter their long-standing patterns of behavior.

sa Lindsey, director of clinical services at UNM's Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program, to wait for motivation "can lead to a deepening of unhealthy patterns that can send someone road and possibly a much worse outcome."

amily can encourage the person to find that motivation, but it is generally unhelpful to r shun. According to William Miller, a UNM professor emeritus, "When you tell an ambivalent

Available for download: <https://nmindepth.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Alcohol-and-you-.pdf>

An ongoing story:

Raising New Mexico taxes on alcohol up for debate

By Ted Alcorn New Mexico in Depth Oct 1, 2022 29

Lawmakers concerned about New Mexico's worst-in-the-nation rate of alcohol-related deaths are focused on revising how the state taxes alcohol.

Last month, the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee chose an alcohol tax increase as one of its top priorities for 2023, and this week, another committee will hear tax experts present on the topic.

Several top lawmakers agree the state's alcohol taxes should be higher, but they don't know how much to increase them, whether to change how the taxes are levied and what to do with the revenues raised.

"Everyone needs to understand the landscape before we have a serious conversation about how it should be changed," said Rep. Christine Chandler, D-Los Alamos, who chairs the Revenue Stabilization and Tax Policy Committee that meets Thursday and Friday.



Longtime Mountain West chief to step down at end of year

SPORTS, B-1



Solemn farewell Coffin of Queen Elizabeth II leaves Buckingham Palace

NATION & WORLD, A-2

City Council delays vote on Plaza cultural events

LOCAL & REGION, A-7

Locally owned and independent Thursday, September 15, 2022 santafenewmexican.com \$1.50

Driven by consumers, inflation now more persistent

Rise in prices beyond food, energy could require Fed to hike rates above 4 percent

By Christopher Rugaber Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. inflation is showing signs of entering a more stubborn phase that will likely require dramatic action by the Federal Reserve, a shift that has panicked financial markets and heightens the risks of a recession.

Some of the longtime drivers of higher inflation — spiking gas prices, supply chain snarls, soaring used-car prices — are fading. Yet underlying measures of inflation are actually worsening. The ongoing evolution of the forces behind an inflation rate that's near a four-decade high has made it harder for the Fed to wrestle it under control. Prices are no longer rising because a few categories have skyrocketed in cost. Instead, inflation has now spread more widely through the economy, fueled by a strong job market that is boosting paychecks, forcing companies to raise prices to cover higher labor costs and giving more consumers the wherewithal to spend.

On Tuesday, the government said inflation ticked up 0.1 percent from July to August and 8.1 percent from a year ago, which was down from June's four-decade high of 9.1 percent

Heisee see story on Page A-4

INSIDE

◆ Social Security recipients to receive hefty cost-of-living increase. PAGE A-2

Pasapick

pasatiempomagazine.com

Rotations: Meet the Artists

Virgil Ortiz, Jacob Fisher, and Lauren YS discuss their permanent installations being unveiled this fall. 7 in: Mesa West, 1352 Rufina Circle, 505-395-6369; 35; meowwolf.com.

More events Fridays in Pasatiempo



Today

Mostly sunny and clear. High 76, low 51.

PAGE A-10

County Commission OKs subdivision

Developers agree to add roads, receive approval for 710 homes to be built south of city near Rancho Viejo

By Scott Wyland swyland@sfnemexican.com

Increased traffic straining weather-worn residential roads was the chief concern residents and Santa Fe County officials expressed about a 710-home subdivision proposed for the Community College District south of the city. County commissioners on Tuesday approved the conceptual plan for Esencia, a dense subdivision on 277 acres that Albuquerque-based Price Land Development Group aims to build in five phases.

At the urging of Rancho Viejo residents, however, the County Commission required the developer to install two connecting roads — extensions of Avenida del Sur from A Van Nu Po to N.M. 14, with biking and walking paths, and a gravel road between N.M. 14 and

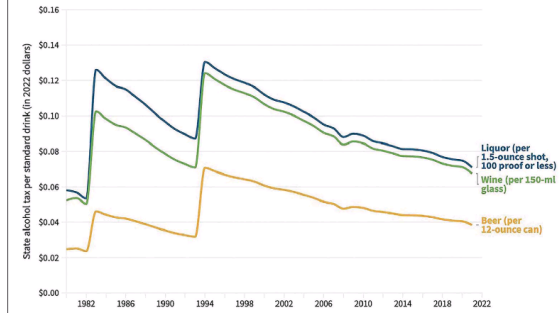
Heisee see story on Page A-4

The 277-acre property Wednesday south of Santa Fe where developers are planning to build 710 homes. LOS SANCHEZ SATURNO/THE NEW MEXICAN



TIME TO TAKE ON ALCOHOL TAXES?

New Mexico taxes alcohol at a fixed amount by volume rather than as a percent of price, so each year as inflation pushes prices higher, it erodes the real tax rates. Today's tax rates are at their lowest in at least 30 years.



Source: Tax rates derived from state statute with research assistance from the librarians of the Legislative Council Service, converted to 2022 dollars using the consumer price index for all urban consumers, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

State lawmakers say updating long-unchanged rates could help battle crisis

By Ted Alcorn New Mexico in Depth

Powerful state lawmakers are signaling their desire to address New Mexico's worst-in-the-nation rate of alcohol-related deaths in the upcoming session, including by changing how alcohol is taxed.

Sen. George Muñoz, D-Gallup, chairman of the influential Senate Finance Committee, said he supports raising statewide alcohol taxes, among the most effective measures

the state's alcohol crisis. Rep. Pary Landstrom, D-Gallup and chairman of the House committee that crafts the state budget, acknowledged "we do not have the balance right" between businesses that profit from selling alcohol and people harmed by consuming it, and said in the coming session she expected "legislation to come through that is going to cost money."

In August, lawmakers on health, criminal justice and economic committees voiced concern about New Mexico's alcohol problems. Many

"I really didn't realize how bad we were on alcohol deaths until I read all of those articles," said Stewart. "Obviously we're not doing enough to counter it."

Experts say raising taxes to make alcohol more expensive is crucial for discouraging excessive drinking, but for decades, lawmakers have largely ignored this tool. New Mexico taxes alcohol by the volume sold rather than as a percentage of its price, so as inflation pushes up the cost of purchasing alcohol, taxes make up a

'We did what we had to do to get her home'

Man accused in 2012 disappearance of Las Vegas woman takes plea deal, to provide location of remains

By Cynthia Miller and Nathan Lederman cmiller@sfnemexican.com nlederman@sfnemexican.com

A man accused of aiding in the 2012 abduction and slaying of teenage mother Cindy Rivera in Las Vegas, N.M., has accepted a plea deal in which he has agreed to provide the location of her

remains, the district attorney in San Miguel County announced Wednesday. Under the agreement with prosecutors, Anselmo "Chemo" Ortiz, 39, will plead guilty to a count of conspiracy to kidnap

Rivera, the 4th Judicial District Attorney's Office said in a news release. If he fails to lead authorities to Rivera's burial site, the agency said, additional charges he faced will be reinstated.

"The deal exposes Ortiz to a 10-year sentence. His sentencing hearing is expected to be in late October, said his defense attorney, Julia Leavell of Albuquerque. Leavell said Wednesday she approached the case in an "objective way of trying to find closure for everybody that was involved, and that's what I think the plea symbolizes."

"It's not the justice we've sought for all these years," said Cindy Rivera's attorney, David Dawson, in an



Anselmo 'Chemo' Ortiz

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