

New Mexico

Providing Evidence to Make the Case for the Prevention of Excessive Alcohol Consumption

Public Health Problem

Despite the huge public health impact of excessive alcohol consumption in the United States, state health departments have very little public health capacity to monitor the extent of the problem or to assess whether prevention programs are making a difference. To address this gap in state public health capacity, CDC's Alcohol Team began supporting an alcohol epidemiologist in New Mexico in 2002. This epidemiologist is responsible for conducting public health surveillance and assisting in the design, implementation, and evaluation of evidence-based programs to prevent underage and binge drinking.

Taking Action

In 2007, New Mexico's alcohol epidemiologist, Jim Roeber, MPH, provided scientific support for important policy and programmatic initiatives related to the prevention of excessive alcohol consumption and related harms in the state, including the following:

- Advised state policymakers and prevention specialists (e.g., the New Mexico Driving While Intoxicated [DWI] Leadership Team and program coordinators from the DWI Programs in each of the 33 New Mexico counties) on evidence-based strategies for preventing excessive alcohol consumption and related harms.
- Led the Prevention Subcommittee of the New Mexico DWI Leadership Team, at the request of the Governor-appointed DWI Czar, and championed the adoption of environmental strategies (e.g., increasing alcohol excise taxes) for the prevention of excessive drinking in general and DWI in particular.
- Provided technical assistance to New Mexico's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)-funded State Epidemiological Workgroup, including both the state's substance abuse agency and community-based prevention organizations.
- Represented the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) Substance Abuse Epidemiology Unit at a historic Public Health Surveillance Conference in Window Rock, AZ that was co-sponsored by The Navajo Nation Division of Health, Navajo Area Indian Health Service, and the Four Corners State Health Departments.
- Responded to state and local press inquiries on a study that used Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data to assess the usual type of alcohol consumed by high school students in New Mexico and in three other states.

In addition, New Mexico's alcohol epidemiologist successfully used state public health surveillance data to assess alcohol-related problems in the state and disseminated his findings through peer-reviewed publications in scientific journals and presentations at national meetings.

Implications and Impact

By conducting research and providing leadership on the issues of underage and binge drinking, New Mexico's alcohol epidemiologist is translating the data and evidence-based research about excessive alcohol consumption into public health practice. These activities demonstrate the importance of having alcohol epidemiologists at the state level.