

[HB 3197](#) oral testimony, 4/2/25

Richard Bruno

Thank you Co-chairs Kropf and Prozanski and members of the committee, I'm Dr Richard Bruno, a family medicine and preventive medicine physician in Portland, speaking today in support of HB 3197, on behalf of the Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials, CLHO, representing the county health officers across Oregon. I am an employee of the Multnomah County Health Department, but not speaking on behalf of the county today.

HB 3197 is a needed bill right now, as we've seen significant worsening of alcohol related health outcomes in Oregon over the past few decades. Alcohol consumption was associated with 3,027 deaths in 2022, each one of those people representing our neighbors, friends, and family members whose deaths were largely preventable. It's well documented that alcohol disproportionately impacts communities of color as well as rural counties, with worse health outcomes and more deaths. In fact, the top 18 counties in Oregon with the highest alcohol related death rates are rural.

The burden of alcohol across our state is striking, with 1 in 4 Oregonian adults binge drinking 4-5 drinks in a sitting, 1 in 5 drinking excessively (which for women is over 7 drinks a week and for men over 14 drinks per week), and 1 in 8 meeting criteria for an alcohol use disorder. We are all acutely aware of the urgent need for more treatment options for people with AUD, including more detox facilities as well as more CADCs and QMHPs to help support people's recovery pathway.

As a family physician caring for hundreds of people with alcohol use disorder in my career, I'm limited to the advice, medications, and referrals I can give to help patients and their families battling addiction. One of my dearest patients TJ died tragically a few years ago as his girlfriend and I tried all we could to help him stop the slow descent into liver disease and liver failure. I spoke at his funeral about how kind he was to me and the clinic staff, how desperately he wanted to stop drinking, and how as a society we have to do better at supporting people who are struggling. **Committee members, I don't want to have to speak at any more funerals of patients who've died of preventable disease, especially from alcohol.**

When alcohol is produced, many fermenting byproducts such as phenols, hydrocarbons, and asbestos, can cause harm, as well as the ethanol itself, which the liver metabolizes to acetaldehyde, a toxic chemical and probable carcinogen that causes damage to DNA and proteins in the body. Reactive oxygen species and free radicals generated in this metabolic process also cause damage to cells in the body, and prevent the absorption of vitamins and other protective chemicals.

Alcohol consumption is associated with liver damage, liver cirrhosis, and liver failure; high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke; pancreatitis, a weakened immune system, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders; depression, anxiety, and memory problems; as well as increasing the risk of developing 7 different types of cancer (mouth, throat, larynx, and esophagus; liver, colon, and breast). There is no level of alcohol consumption that is risk free.

Its toll on society is also exorbitant, and is often associated with intimate partner violence, suicide, injuries and car crashes; risky sexual behavior and lower educational attainment, as well as decreased productivity, absenteeism, and workplace related injuries.

Committee members, **you have the power to help reduce the burden of alcohol in our state by passing this sensible tax on alcohol beverages sold.** Please don't let TJ's death be in vain, please help communities get the help that they need.