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Experts say raise alcohol tax and limit supply to curb Wisconsin's thirst

Shamane Mills, Wisconsin Public Radio, Wheeler News Service Published Thursday, May 08, 2008



Health and policy experts say Wisconsin could reduce over-consumption of alcohol by raising the liquor tax and making it less available.




Data on Wisconsin's drinking habits show beer is the most popular choice and that availability of alcohol in general is high.

Paul Moberg with the UW-Madison's Population Health Institute says on average there is a liquor license for every 336 people in Wisconsin. Iron County has the most bars and liquor stores per capita and Waukesha County, the fewest.

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years. It's still about 6 cents a gallon.

Moberg thinks it should be higher. He says this would be one policy avenue to generate revenue and impact at least adolescent drinking.

State legislative efforts to increase the liquor tax have always fizzled. Instead, lawmakers have chosen to beef up penalties for repeat drunken drivers.

However, Moberg says data shows 92 percent of drunken drivers in fatal accidents have never been arrested for OWI.

A recent federal study showed more than a quarter of Wisconsin motorists admit to drinking and driving in the past year, and the state has been among the leaders in binge drinking.

Richard Brown directs the Wisconsin Initiative to Promote Healthy Lifestyles. He says questionnaires to gauge consumption habits are accurate.

He says while some ask why somebody would respond that way, they find that many people in the state are proud to say, for example, that they had a six pack while watching the game.

Brown says primary care doctors can help spot problem drinkers or those at risk.

However, alcohol assessment has generally taken a back seat to screening for conditions like high blood pressure, cholesterol and obesity.

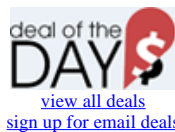
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