

PEER EXCHANGE HIGHLIGHTS

October 23, 2024

Topic: Impaired Driving: The Impact of Cannabis on a Persistent Problem

Dr. Jim Lange, Executive Director of the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Drug Misuse Prevention and Recovery, discussed how alcohol-impaired driving is now compounded by the increased use of cannabis in college-aged youth. However, the impacts of cannabis on driving ability are not well-understood, and cannabis poses its own challenges when it comes to detection, enforcement, and even evidence-based guidelines around driving.

A Peek at the Problem: Impaired Driving Amongst College Students

- Data presented on associations between impaired driving and student death rates.
- Despite slight declines in alcohol-related impaired driving rates, data has shown that college students are at higher risk for impaired driving than their non-college peers of the same age.
- We don't have as much established data for cannabis use and impaired driving.
- More students consume alcohol than use cannabis overall, but the rate of driving after using cannabis is much higher.

Discussion with campuses regarding impaired driving often starts and stops with “that’s not one of our problems.”

Reasons to not look at data include:

- Complicated data sets;
- Campus doesn't often interact with consequence of impaired driving (crashes happen off campus);
- Lack of institutional involvement in DUI/DUIC arrests;
- Focus of student affairs is often on first-year students and sophomores, rather than juniors and seniors (harder to reach students); and
- Presumption that Uber and Lyft have resolved the issue.

What needs to be looked at to address the problem?

We need to understand:

- Risks involved in the use of various substances and driving patterns;
- How decisions are made for road users (knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, decisions, behaviors);
- What's effective: designated driver can help lower the BAC of driver and others and Uber/Lyft may actually raise alcohol consumption levels; and
- What's not effective: beer goggles and the crashed car example.

Strategic Approaches to Build Understanding and Create Effective Interventions

- Campus Environmental Scan (worksheet) looking at all of the determinants that might be impacting impaired driving: demographics, prevalence of binge drinking, data, knowledge of bars, restaurants, fraternities that create the environment where it is occurring).
- Strategic measurement - surveying is important if you are trying to do something with improvement in mind and you are assessing change.
- Environmental interventions have been shown to work when you increase the perception of enforcement related to impaired driving.