



PEER EXCHANGE HIGHLIGHTS

November 19, 2024

Topic: Alcohol and Breast Cancer: Awareness and Health Disparities

Dr. Priscilla Martinez, Scientist and Deputy Scientific Director at the Alcohol Research Group, discussed associations between alcohol use and breast cancer. Despite strong evidence about the relationship between alcohol use and breast cancer, there is a general lack of awareness in general. There are also racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in awareness. Dr. Martinez highlighted a social media campaign, [“Drink Less for Your Breasts”](#), which aimed to increase awareness of the link between alcohol and breast cancer in young women in California.

Alcohol and health outcomes:

- Alcohol use is associated with over 200 ICD-10 diseases and injuries, including cancer.
- Alcohol contributes to acute issues, including intoxicated driving and crime.
- Marginalized groups are disproportionately affected and experience higher rates of alcohol-related chronic diseases and social consequences (e.g., domestic abuse, arrests) than their more advantaged peers.

Alcohol and breast cancer:

- 1 in 8 women will develop breast cancer; prior or current alcohol use significantly increases risk.
- Biological mechanisms of alcohol use responsible for this association include:
 - Increased estrogen levels;
 - Reduced absorption of folate and B vitamins; and
 - Alcohol breaks down into acetaldehyde, a known carcinogen.
- Awareness of link between alcohol and breast cancer is low:
 - A study found only 25% of women know alcohol use is a breast cancer risk factor, compared to 90% awareness of the link between smoking and lung cancer.
 - Among college students, only one-third recognized alcohol as a risk factor for breast cancer.

Strategic approaches to improve awareness of alcohol and breast cancer on college campuses:

- Develop targeted campaigns to address disparities in awareness by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.
 - Take time to engage the population to develop and test messaging.
 - Focus on empowering messages that center a proactive approach to reducing alcohol-related harm.
- Utilize a multi-pronged approach that includes health education and policy changes, as was successful in tobacco control.
- Utilize existing resources, such as the free social media toolkit developed by Dr. Martinez’s team: <https://arg.org/social-media-toolkit/>