Alcohol Justice as violence prevention

Practitioners and Advocates Featured:

Jorge Castillo, MA
ADVOCACY DIRECTOR
Alcohol Justice

PreventConnect
A NATIONAL PROJECT OF CALCASA

PREVENTION INSTITUTE

Founded in 1987, Alcohol Justice is an advocacy agency that organizes with community groups to pass laws that regulate the production, distribution, and sales of alcohol in order to keep communities healthy and safe. Instead of focusing on individual behaviors associated with alcohol, Alcohol Justice promotes evidence-informed public health policies and organizes campaigns with diverse communities against the alcohol industry's harmful practices. The agency views its work as part of the social justice movement, given the fact that working class communities and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by negative health effects and violence related to alcohol.

THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ALCOHOL, HEALTH AND SAFETY

Alcohol Justice promotes evidence-informed public health approaches to alcohol prevention and regulation because it sees the negative effects of alcohol as having a community-wide impact. In 2008, Alcohol Justice published a study looking into the cost and harms associated with alcohol in California, focusing within the four domains of illness, injury, crime, and traffic. The results of the study revealed that the state of California, including local governments, spends $38 billion per year managing alcohol related harms. Nationwide, the number rises to $249 billion. The study also revealed that in California, alcohol is a contributing factor in 20% of assaults, rapes, and homicides. These statistics help frame and make the case that alcohol has a negative impact on public health.



Alcohol Justice is an advocacy agency that organizes with community groups to pass laws that regulate the production, distribution, and sales of alcohol in order to keep communities healthy and safe.
Photo provided by Alcohol Justice.

In making the case for the connection between alcohol and sexual and domestic violence, Jorge, Alcohol Justice's advocacy director points to data from the Bureau of Justice that relates to incidents where alcohol was involved. The data shows that when people drink and violence occurs, the majority of victims are women, and the majority of incidents happen within domestic relationships in a residence or home. Alcohol Justice draws on these statistics to inform their view that the majority of alcohol-related violence is, in fact, domestic violence.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO PREVENT ALCOHOL OUTLET OVERSATURATION

Alcohol Justice is a member of the Los Angeles Drug and Alcohol Policy Alliance, which is currently organizing with the support of Councilmember David Ryu to pass a city ordinance that will create Alcohol Restricted Use Subdistricts (ARUS). ARUS is a planning and land use tool that places a limit on the number of alcohol licenses that are granted in selected neighborhoods – an ARUS zone can be as small as a few blocks, and can span as far as a few miles. With the introduction of this ordinance, communities would have the ability to petition for an ARUS zone if they have alcohol outlet overconcentration, high rates of violence, or if community members want to protect areas with particularly sensitive populations, such as parks and schools. Alcohol Justice hopes that having ARUS's in selected areas of Los Angeles will encourage healthier retail options in place of liquor stores.



Alcohol Justice is a member of the Los Angeles Drug and Alcohol Policy Alliance, which is currently organizing with the support of Councilmember David Ryu to pass a city ordinance that will create Alcohol Restricted Use Subdistricts. Photo provided by Alcohol Justice.

Alcohol Justice encourages communities to form diverse coalitions made up of hospital associations, labor unions, churches, social justice groups, healthy retail activists and more, to push for the community change that they want to see. When communities avoid working in silos, more can be achieved: coalitions can advocate changing local laws in order to limit alcohol density, they can enact policies that prohibit local retailers from selling single alcohol containers, and they can push to lower the legal blood alcohol concentration.

ALCOHOL OVERCONCENTRATION AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

In addition to making the case for the health impact that alcohol has on communities, Alcohol Justice emphasizes their belief that alcohol overconcentration is a social justice issue. Jorge states, "Working class and communities of color have been historically marginalized, economically and racially segregated, and politically excluded. The alcohol industry, from the producers to the distributors, to the liquor stores owners, exploits these conditions to their advantage… they are only interested in increasing alcohol sales and profits. They focus their efforts into deregulating local and state laws to create legal loopholes so that they can saturate our communities and colleges with alcohol sales." Alcohol Justice wants to ensure that communities

have the knowledge about the alcohol industry's responsibility and motivation for alcohol overconcentration so that communities can more effectively resist the industry's harmful practices and effects. In order for a community to resist these forces, they need to have a political voice so that they can advocate for themselves, and for the change that they wish to see in their community.

Jorge focuses on local, state and national coalition organizing, training of leadership, press-worthy activities and empowerment of local organizations. He promotes the environmental prevention model and its practical application in campaigns and policy outcomes. Jorge received his bachelors from the University of Iowa in Political Science and Latin American Studies and his Master's degree from UCLA in Latin American Studies.

Written by:

Sonja Lockhart
PROGRAM ASSISTANT
Prevention Institute

Edited by:

Ashleigh Klein-Jimenez, MPA
PROJECT MANAGER
CALCASA, PreventConnect

RESOURCES

- Alcohol Justice
- Bureau of Justice Statistics alcohol and crime date
- CDC alcohol data
- LA's alcohol outlet density report

DISCLAIMER: This publication was supported by the Cooperative Agreement Number U1V/ CE002204, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.