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Letter to the editor

Wisconsin's top ranking in drunken driving adds to our shameful record of top in the nation in heavy and binge drinking, drinking among high school students, and drinking among expectant mothers.

While more stringent legislation would address part of the problem—our laws regarding drunken driving, for example, are among the nation's most lax—clearly our state's residents are not being given the information or assistance they need to make the connection between alcohol use and negative consequences for their own health and safety and that of others.

We need a sea change in the way our health care system addresses alcohol misuse. Gov. Jim Doyle acknowledged this in his proclamation of April as Alcohol Awareness Month. We need to change community norms that foster alcohol misuse, eliminate the stigma and other barriers to treatment, and increase awareness that treatment for alcohol dependence is as effective as treatment for other chronic diseases.

The Wisconsin Initiative to Promote Healthy Lifestyles offers screening for potential alcohol use disorders (and other health issues) as part of regular health exams at 24 primary care clinics statewide and is eager to add more. The initiative offers evidence-based interventions and referrals to treatment for patients in need of more intensive care.

The effectiveness of these services has been demonstrated in many studies, and these services will more than pay for themselves. Visit www.wiphl.org to learn more about the initiative and how you can help make your community a healthier and safer place to live.

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