



OMNI INSTITUTE REPORT

Fremont County Impaired Driving Focus Group Summary Report



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Suggested Citation:

OMNI Institute (2024). Fremont County impaired driving focus group summary. Submitted to Fremont County Department of Public Health and Environment. Cañon City, Colorado.

Executive Summary

Impaired driving is a significant issue in Fremont County with the county showing a high rate of DUI-related injuries and fatalities over recent past years. The Fremont County Department of Public Health and Environment (FCDPHE) has engaged in extensive resource development and evaluation work to address the issue. In Spring 2024, FCDPHE contracted OMNI Institute (OMNI), a social science non-profit consultancy, to conduct focus groups with community members to gather their insight into the issue. The focus groups, which covered a wide range of sectors across the community, provided an overview of Fremont County residents' perceptions of substance use and impaired driving and generated community-driven recommendations on how to address the issue. Through these focus groups, OMNI gathered information related to the social norms surrounding substance use in Fremont County, perceptions of the impaired driving issue, and community recommendations to reduce impaired driving. OMNI then synthesized the data and, in this report, provides a set of recommendations based on community ideas and best practices.

Findings

Perceptions of Substance Use in Fremont County

Participants in all focus groups shared their concerns about the prevalence of substance use in Fremont County. Alcohol and marijuana were seen as key substances of concern, but participants noted several factors that influenced substance use within the community.



Normalization of Substance Use: Focus group participants believed that substance use is normalized in Fremont County. They felt that, starting at a young age, youth witness their parents consuming substances which normalizes the behavior as they become teenagers.



Youth Party Culture: Some participants described a youth party culture where alcohol and marijuana consumption is common among teenagers. Youth often consume these substances as a means of fitting in with their peers.



Substance Use as a Form of Socialization: Three focus groups believed that alcohol consumption at public events and in bars, breweries, and restaurants was a common form of socialization in Fremont County. These sites were identified as common meeting places where alcohol was consumed as a pass time.

Causes of Impaired Driving in Fremont County

Focus group participants identified several levels of factors that influence impaired driving in Fremont County. These included factors at the county, individual, and social/cultural levels.



County Factors: At the county level, focus group participants noted a lack of public transportation options, residents' lack of concern about driving risk due to the rural nature of the area, and the high level of substance consumption at public events. These factors, coupled with the low number of law enforcement officers in the community, led to a disregard for driving impaired.



Individual Factors: Several focus groups believed that many people drive impaired out of shame related to their overconsumption of alcohol. The focus groups also believed that some Fremont County residents may drive impaired to rebel against the law. Finally, one focus group noted that being intoxicated likely limited a driver's ability to consider the potential negative consequences of their actions.



Social/Cultural Factors: Three focus groups thought that the normalization of substance use in Fremont County leads people to drive impaired as they wish to fit in with others. Two groups said that normalization, mixed with a lack of negative consequences for most drivers, leads drivers to believe that punishment or an accident "would not happen to them."

Preventing Impaired Driving

In discussing potential prevention efforts, focus group participants identified several current programs and policies that they believed were not effectively reducing impaired driving.



DUI Laws and Punishments: Focus groups felt that DUI laws deter occasional impaired drivers, but not those who repeatedly drive impaired. They recommended more funding for the hiring of law enforcement officers and mandatory substance use services as a part of punishment.



Prevention Education: Several focus groups noted that they felt that current prevention education efforts, for both youth and adults, were ineffective at teaching the dangers of impaired driving. They recommended incorporating evidence-based prevention education in schools, starting at a young age, and developing public awareness campaigns aimed at educating the public about impaired driving.



Alternative Transportation Options: Focus groups insisted that the current transportation options were too limiting and did little to reduce impaired driving. They suggested the expansion of transportation options to include both public transportation and rideshare options.



Parking Regulations: The strict parking regulations on Cañon City's main street were believed to be a cause of impaired driving. Focus group participants noted that residents may choose to drive impaired so that their vehicle is not ticketed or towed. Focus group participants said that revisiting these regulations may reduce the impaired driving issue.

Recommendations

Drawing from the community members' voices, as well as best practices in impaired driving prevention, OMNI provides the following recommendations for Fremont County.



Consider Law Enforcement Deterrence Opportunities: The lack of resources for law enforcement may be leading to higher rates of impaired driving. Increasing law enforcement resources, particularly for hiring may assist in increasing deterrence efforts. Partnering with the courts to ensure that impaired drivers receive mandated substance use services may further reduce the issue.



Increase Transportation Options Within Fremont County: The limited transportation options in Fremont County may be increasing impaired driving incidents. The development of alternative transportation options, such as ride share services (e.g., Uber, Lyft), public transportation, and community-led designated driver programs could reduce willingness to drive impaired.



Grow Public Awareness and Education Efforts: Mass media campaigns, though potentially costly, can be a great way to increase public education about an issue. Sharing campaign information on social media, radio, television, and billboards, among other efforts can be a strong way to share the message about safe driving. Further, messaging should reflect the community and be guided by their experiences and culture.



Incentivize Not Driving Impaired: Incentivizing alternatives to impaired driving can be a powerful way to deter impaired driving. Partnering with bars, restaurants, breweries, and event spaces to offer incentives such as free or reduced cost food and drink, or validated parking, may convince residents to seek alternative transportation.



Change Parking Regulations in Fremont County: Downtown Cañon City's parking regulations do not allow drivers to leave their cars overnight which can lead some residents to drive impaired. Changing the regulations to allow overnight parking may assist in ensuring that drivers seek alternative transportation options.



Develop a Community Action Board: Community action boards can be an effective way to rally community members behind an issue. Including members who represent different sectors of the community can aid in brainstorming and resource coordination.

Introduction

Driving impaired, whether under the effects of alcohol or other substances, places significant risk on pedestrians and other drivers. Colorado faces high rates of impaired driving cases with over 16,000 DUI cases being filed in 2023 alone (Colorado Bureau of Investigation, 2024). According to the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), one in every three fatal car crashes in Colorado involves an impaired driver (CDOT, 2024). In 2023, impaired driving incidents resulted in the deaths of 218 Coloradans (CDOT, 2024). Such high rates of impaired driving incidents have led the state to attempt to combat the issue with various awareness campaigns, such as the Shift into Safe campaign, and enforcement efforts, such as The Heat is On campaign which involves increased enforcement efforts from various law enforcement agencies across the state.

As Colorado is a very diverse state in terms of terrain and population density, including both urban and rural areas, the risk of impaired driving varies due to substance use rates. Data shows that substance use tends to be higher in rural areas in comparison to urban spaces (American Addiction Centers, 2024). For example, 33% of youth and young adults aged 12-20 who lived in rural areas reported misusing alcohol in comparison to 29% of those in big cities (American Addiction Centers, 2024). Opioid use, binge drinking behaviors, methamphetamine use, and prescription pain reliever misuse occur at similarly high rates in rural areas (American Addiction Centers, 2024).

Fremont County, nestled in South-Central Colorado, is a rural locality that consists of about 49,000 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2023). Key pieces of data (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021; Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, 2022) highlight substance use and social norms around consuming alcohol and other substances in Fremont County and the surrounding region.



8% of high school students in Region 13 report using marijuana in the past 30 days (HKC, 2021)



19% of high school students in Region 13 report drinking alcohol in the past 30 days (HKC, 2021)



52% of high school students in Region 13 believe that it would be sort of easy or very easy to get alcohol (HKC, 2021)



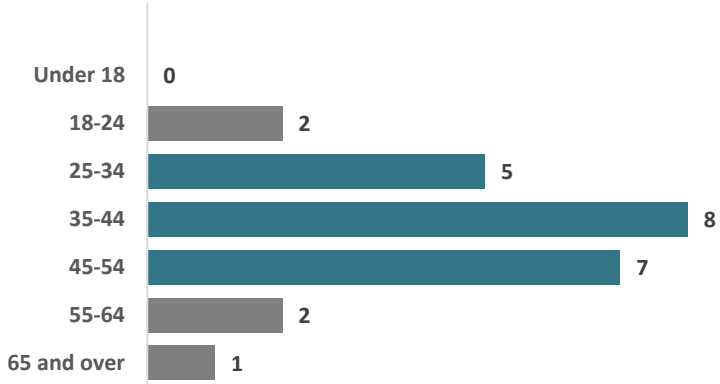
16% of adults in Fremont County reported binge drinking behaviors in the past 30 days (CDC, 2021)

Law enforcement data similarly shows that impaired driving is a serious issue for Fremont County and its residents. According to Colorado State Patrol (2024) alone, 146 impaired driving related crashes occurred between January 2019 and December 2023. Of these crashes, 5% involved a fatality, 31% led to injuries, and 64% involved property damage. To combat this, Colorado State Patrol (2024) has written 300 preventative citations in the same time period, with the majority of these involving alcohol (74%) or a combination of marijuana and alcohol (8%). While some agencies, such as

the Fremont County Sheriff’s Office (Colorado Bureau of Investigation, 2024) have reported a decrease in impaired driving arrests (75 arrests in 2019 versus 25 in 2023), impaired driving remains an issue for the community.

In an effort to address impaired driving in Fremont County, the Fremont County Department of Public Health and Environment (FCDPHE) contracted OMNI Institute, a social science non-profit consultancy, to aid in developing and evaluating efforts to reduce impaired driving incidents in the county. This work, thus far, has led to increased education about impaired driving at public events, social media campaigns, partnerships with local organizations, and data gathering. As a part of this continued work, OMNI Institute conducted focus groups with Fremont County residents to gain a better understanding of substance use and impaired driving in Fremont County, as well as potential approaches to reduce the issue. This report provides a summary of the focus group discussions and presents several recommendations to address impaired driving in Fremont County.

Individuals between the ages of 25 and 54 were most likely to be arrested for DUI's by the Fremont County Sheriff's Office in 2023.



Methods

Focus groups were held in April 2024. A total of four focus groups were conducted with each focused on a different segment of the Fremont County population including law enforcement, first responders, and medical providers, business owners and community members, parents and teachers, and youth. In total, four participants attended the first responders group, three attended the business owners and community members group, one attended parents and teachers, and three youth attended the youth group. As only one participant attended the parents and teachers group, OMNI conducted a separate interview with a former teacher in Fremont County. For the purposes of reporting, this interview was then considered as a part of the parents and teachers focus group. All focus group participants and interviewees were offered a gift card as compensation for their time.

Focus groups were all held virtually over Zoom and lasted roughly one hour. To aid in conversation, OMNI used a semi-structured interview guide consisting of 13 questions that focused on three key areas of information: substance use in Fremont County, impaired driving in Fremont County, and preventing impaired driving. OMNI chose to use a semi-structured approach to the interviews to ensure that necessary information was gathered while also offering participants the opportunity to ask questions and focus on topics that felt most important to them. The exact questions used can be found in Appendix A.

After completing the focus groups, all recordings were transcribed and then coded and analyzed in Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software. One member of the team read through each of the transcripts and generated broad codes related to the three areas of the interview guide (substance use in Fremont County, impaired driving in Fremont County, and preventing impaired driving). Upon completing the initial round of coding, a second round of coding was conducted to ensure that all necessary information was coded and accurate. Once the initial coding stages were completed, another member of the team conducted a thematic analysis where they assessed the codes and generated broad themes aimed at capturing participants’ thoughts across each of the key areas. Findings of the thematic analysis are presented below. For the purposes of clarity, all findings are reported by focus group, rather than individuals.

Results

The focus groups resulted in a wide range of information from Fremont County residents. The residents, representing different sectors in the community, provided detailed information about their perceptions of substance use and impaired driving. Additionally, they shared recommendations on how to best address impaired driving in Fremont County. This section provides a summary of the focus group findings.

Perceptions of Substance Use and Impaired Driving in Fremont County

Participants in all focus groups spoke broadly about substance use in Fremont County and shared their concerns about the prevalence of substance use in their community. **In particular, focus group participants identified alcohol and marijuana as particularly problematic substances.** The youth focus group discussed youth party culture in Fremont County and mentioned that it was common for youth to consume alcohol and marijuana at high school parties and in areas outside of town. Regarding the adult residents in Fremont County, marijuana was seen as less of a concern in comparison to alcohol. The focus groups believed that consuming alcohol after work hours was a common activity, with some of Fremont County's residents regularly socializing at bars and breweries after work hours. Alcohol was also seen as a central feature of festivals and social events hosted within Fremont County.



Regarding the culture that alcohol plays in our communities, I'd have to say it's a pretty big piece of it. We have a lot of breweries where people go, and a lot of tap houses where people go to drink and come together to meet. And it's kind of a community. Some of the breweries are community meeting spots where certain groups get together and have alcohol as a part of the culture...So alcohol is a big part of our culture...maybe just American culture in general. But I think in Colorado, in our area, maybe even more, just because we've got breweries and that sort of thing that maybe they don't have a lot of breweries in other parts of the country.

Three focus groups (youth, parents and teachers, and business owners and community members) expressed concerns about the normalization of substance use in Fremont County. Many of the focus group members believed that the rural nature of Fremont County had an impact on this normalization. In addition to the social events, alcohol was viewed as easy to come by, whether purchased in Fremont County or in a neighboring community, which allowed residents to drink in their homes or at their friends and family members' houses. This caused concern to participants as they noted that much alcohol and substance consumption occurs in front of youth, which they believed modeled the behavior for youth's later consumption of substances.

The focus groups unanimously highlighted the severity of the issue of impaired driving in Fremont County. **They described it as a significant problem, emphasizing its negative impact on individuals, families, the community, the economy, and the area's reputation.** The law enforcement, first responders, and medical providers group mentioned the concerning consequences of substance use and impaired driving, which they've witnessed first hand, such as increased driving fatalities, domestic violence incidents, child welfare issues, neglect, homelessness, and mental health challenges. While some believed that the impaired driving problem may be worse in surrounding counties, they agreed that impaired driving is an increasing issue for Fremont County.



I'm just speaking to the numbers now and, statistically, for every DUI we arrest we save a life...Is it bad? Yes, because it's happening and it shouldn't be happening. And people are getting hurt and killed in crashes and things like that...Are we as bad as the Pueblo area? No...But it still happens here. We still have people getting killed, seriously injured, all the things that come with crashes here in Fremont County.

While the groups did not settle on an exact cause of the increasing impaired driving issue, they believed that it was partially influenced by events like COVID-19 and increased access to substances, such as marijuana and opioids.

Causes of Impaired Driving in Fremont County

In addition to sharing their thoughts and experiences about substance use and impaired driving in Fremont County, the groups detailed the reasons they believed that impaired driving occurred in the county. The potential causes were wide-reaching and included county, individual, and social/cultural factors.

County Factors

All focus groups described county factors that may influence impaired driving. **All focus groups mentioned festivals and gatherings as causes of increased impaired driving incidents due to the high rate of alcohol and substance use at these events.** One participant in the business owners and community members focus group described the events that they thought led to the highest amount of substance consumption.



We have a lot of events here in Fremont County in particular...there's Blossom. There's also Apple Days. There's also Pioneer Days in Florence, and it's all throughout the summer, plus the rodeo happens. Fair happens. All those big events on top of that.

In addition to these event areas, the focus groups also believed that tourist areas and the main street in Cañon City were where impaired driving incidents were likely to occur.

Three of the focus groups (parents and teachers, law enforcement, first responders, and medical providers, and business owners and community members) believed that the lack of public transportation, such as taxis and rideshares, had a big impact on the impaired driving issue. In describing the current alternative transportation options, focus group members mentioned that taxi services are limited (often ending service at 10pm) and that rideshare services, such as Uber and Lyft, are nonexistent in the area. Additionally, the business owners and community members focus group noted several issues with leaving a car overnight in the downtown Cañon City area such as the city ordinance that prohibits parking cars on Main Street due to the street cleaning schedule and residents' concerns about leaving their vehicles overnight out of fear of it getting broken into.

The focus groups also stated that access to substances varies in the different areas of the county. One participant in the youth focus group who lived in a remote part of the county noted that their area had very few bars and places to purchase alcohol, which led people to drive further away to obtain alcohol. Similarly, the business owners and community members focus group said that marijuana dispensaries are not legal in Fremont County, so residents drive to neighboring areas to purchase marijuana, oftentimes consuming it on the drive back to Fremont County.

While being in remote areas may have an impact on substance access, participants noted that much of Fremont County consists of small towns. These small towns, as stated in the youth and business owners and community members focus groups, lead residents to feel as though their destination is never far away and that they can drive impaired without much risk. One member of the youth focus group said the following, *"You could make it from one side of town to the other in 5-10 minutes tops. So, I mean, you get these people that don't want to call for a ride, they're like 'Oh, it's only 10 minutes away.'"* This misperception regarding the risk of driving short distances impaired, the focus groups believed, led to many of the crashes that occur around Fremont County.

Finally, two groups (youth and law enforcement, first responders, and medical providers) mentioned local law enforcement's lack of resources to combat impaired driving. Participants described how the police departments were

short staffed, which reduced their ability to engage in enforcement proactively. It was believed that this directly impacted residents' willingness to drive impaired as they are often able to drive impaired several times with little to no consequences. Because of this, it leads to the false belief that they can "handle" driving after consuming substances and that an accident will not happen to them.

Individual Factors

In addition to the county factors that influence impaired driving, all focus groups also identified individual factors that influence residents' decisions to drive impaired. **Members of the youth and business owners and community members focus group believed that there was a general disregard for the law in Fremont County.** Citing the high number of prisons in the area, these participants felt as though it assisted in developing a lack of respect for authority and law enforcement. The high likelihood of not being caught for driving impaired and the low level of resources available to law enforcement seemed to increase this disregard.

Members of the parents and teachers focus group believed that many impaired driving incidents stemmed from the driver not wanting to admit to consuming a substance or feeling a level of shame associated with their substance use. These were, in part, related to the fact that local newspapers publish the names of people who are arrested for DUIs. Similarly, as mentioned in the youth focus group, youth may consume substances at a party or outing with their friends and then worry about getting in trouble for drinking alcohol or smoking marijuana. Because of this, they choose to drive impaired, rather than call for a ride. These behaviors were likely influenced by the fact that many substances are new to youth and they may be unsure of how their body will react to the substances.

Participants in the law enforcement, first responders, and medical providers focus group felt that being intoxicated likely prevents drivers from considering the potential negative outcomes of their actions. Related to this, they believed that many people who get intoxicated at local bars will likely get into an argument with someone, leading to high negative emotions, and an even reduced likelihood of considering the potential consequences of their behavior.

One medical provider mentioned that they believed that there was a level of unaddressed trauma in some community members which leads them to consume substances and drive impaired. Because of this unaddressed trauma, it was likely that impaired driving was not a key concern to the individual.

Social/Cultural Factors

Social/cultural factors were seen as a key influence on impaired driving behaviors in three of the focus groups (youth, parents and teachers, business owners and community members). **All three of these focus groups believed that peer pressure and a desire to fit in led people to consume substances and then drive impaired.** This was seen as a particular issue for youth as they attempted to fit in with their peers and would often start attending parties and driving around the age of 16. One participant described this in more detail.



...Being in the cool groups, I guess the cliques, if you're at a party or something and you're drinking, you think you can drive until you can't. Just having a license at 16 in Cañon City is interesting. You're coming from parties and stuff, and especially since we have Skyline Drive... You get these young kids that drink, and then they want to go out and go up there, then [they] roll off the cliff.

According to participants, these social factors combine with the above-mentioned individual concerns of getting in trouble to lead to high rates of impaired driving.

The youth and parents and teachers focus groups similarly felt that impaired driving was normalized within Fremont County. They believed that, due to the rural nature of the community, driving impaired was seen as less of a risk as drivers may not encounter another driver as they move between locations. Further, participants believed that Fremont County residents see their parents and family members driving impaired during their youth and then believe that it is

an acceptable behavior. This, combined with limited law enforcement resources leads to a mentality of “you’re only in trouble if you get caught,” as identified by the parents and teachers group.

Finally, two groups (business owners and community members, parents and teachers) mentioned Covid-19 as a social factor that has impacted impaired driving, specifically referencing decreased anti-social behavior after the pandemic and general aftermath effects of the pandemic.

Specific Groups

There was no general consensus for who was most likely to engage in impaired driving across groups. **All four groups believed impaired driving was a widespread issue that was generally done by a wide segment of the Fremont County population.** For example, in discussing age groups, focus groups mentioned that it was an issue for teenagers through adults in their 60s. The business owners and community members group discussed Millennials and Generation Z as engaging in higher rates of substance use, but did not see them contributing to the impaired driving issue in any differing way.

Instead, participants described the need to focus on individuals who repeatedly engage in substance use and are consistently arrested and charged for DUIs. One treatment provider in the law enforcement, first responders, and medical providers focus group had the following to say.



Some of them are, you know, hardcore alcoholics, so they’re drunk all the time. They’ll drink by themselves or drink with friends. They’ll just drink all the time and those are the ones that are driving. Those are the ones that we see have multiple DUIs throughout their lifetime.

As many of these individuals, according to the group, engage in substance use as a means of self-medicating for past traumas, it was believed to be more effective to ensure that mandated treatment is a part of sentencing and that this group receives the highest level of attention.

Preventing Impaired Driving

In addition to describing social norms around substance use in Fremont County and why impaired driving occurs at such a high rate, participants provided a wide range of potential approaches to address the issue. Broadly, focus group participants identified currently ongoing efforts that they believed were not adequately addressing the impaired driving issue, noted several things that could be changed in Fremont County, and offered potential reduction efforts including messaging that may connect with Fremont County residents. This section provides an overview of the prevention discussions.

Programs and Policies with Limited Effectiveness

All four focus groups identified programs or policies that they felt were not adequately addressing impaired driving in Fremont County. Of the mentioned efforts, legal approaches to impaired driving were discussed most often. **All three of these focus groups (youth, parents and teachers, business owners and community members) felt as though the current DUI laws were not effective at reducing a person’s willingness to drive impaired.** The parents and teachers focus group said that government efforts to say that residents cannot drink and drive will likely lead someone to do it as a means of rebelling. Similarly, participants in the other two focus groups felt that individuals would not be concerned about what the law told them they could and could not do.

The groups also described various law enforcement efforts to deter impaired driving. These included DUI checkpoints, arrest, and overall police presence. With regard to DUI checkpoints, participants expressed that they felt they were rarely conducted and would likely be ineffective because of the layout of Fremont County’s roadways.



Participant 1: I think, with the DUI checkpoints...I've never personally seen one, but I don't think they'd really work in our town, either, because of the way our highway is set up. If they had a DUI checkpoint on the highway, the traffic is already so congested that it would just back up miles and miles. And it just wouldn't work properly. It would just mess the whole town up.

Participant 2: Nor would it work with locals because they know the roads to turn off on.

Similarly, arrest was viewed as ineffective as, the youth focus group noted, they would repeatedly see the same people getting arrested for DUIs. One participant also spoke to the lack of police presence in the area and its impact on impaired driving deterrence and response times to crashes. This participant, who had lost a loved one in an impaired driving incident, noted that it had taken over 30 minutes for law enforcement to respond to the crash scene.

Two focus groups (parents and teachers, business owners and community members) stated that current adult education efforts were not effectively deterring impaired driving. **While adult education was not broadly described, the business owners and community members focus group noted that 'scared straight' education attempts, such as the mandatory coroner's videos post-DUI conviction, do not deter people from impaired driving in the long-term.** The parents and teachers focus group felt that efforts were not being made to educate adults about the dangers of impaired driving in the same way that they are the youth.

Members of the first responders focus group noted that the current public transportation or rideshare options in the county were too limited to offer an alternative to impaired driving. In describing the current transportation options they identified one taxi service and highlighted that it stops providing services after 10pm and often takes over an hour to arrive. Additionally noted was the lack of rideshare options, such as Uber and Lyft, which could provide easy alternatives to driving impaired.

The parents and teachers focus group raised the public shame efforts that occur in local newspapers in Fremont County. They stated that local newspapers will publish the names of people arrested for DUIs across the county. According to this focus group, while this may have an impact on deterring some people from driving impaired, it does not seem to have an impact on people who repeatedly drive while impaired.

Finally, the business owners and community members focus group discussed the parking restrictions in place on the main street in Cañon City. These restrictions, while in place to allow for the city to clean the streets, limit residents' ability to leave their car parked overnight. For fear of getting their car fined or towed, residents will instead drive home impaired.

Potential Reduction Efforts

While focus group participants noted a number of existing efforts in Fremont County that they felt were not adequately reducing impaired driving, all focus groups also provided potential efforts that could be put in place to reduce impaired driving incidents. Of the mentioned approaches, stricter enforcement approaches were described most often. **Broadly, the focus groups noted the need for harsher punishments for impaired driving as they felt that current punitive efforts were doing little to dissuade people from driving impaired.** These harsher punishments included mandated substance use treatment through courts, increased fines, and increased jail/prison time for those who repeatedly drive impaired. Focus group participants also cited the need for more law enforcement personnel to increase the visibility of law enforcement on roadways. The business owners and community members focus group also believed in the potential benefits of increased requirements around breathalyzer technology in vehicles for those who have been found guilty of a DUI in the past.

Alternative transportation options were raised by each of the focus groups as well. **Several of the focus groups mentioned the potential benefits of a community-led designated driver program.** These programs would consist of

volunteer drivers who would offer to serve as free transportation options to residents who were intoxicated and did not want to drive impaired.



It would be cool if there was something that was made app-wise by the Sheriff's Department. But not monitored in a sense of getting people in trouble...It would be more effective if [the Sheriff's Office] could go to someone you know or somebody else that they feel safe around or comfortable with...if I'm off work and someone needs a ride. I would gladly take someone home. It's expensive for taxes, but that's still no excuse...It would be nice if the Fremont County Sheriff's Office made a little community group chat. And if someone asked for a ride home [then volunteers could provide that]. Maybe the Sheriff's Office could give them the free ride home.

Community-based programs, such as the one mentioned above, were popular amongst the focus groups. These options were seen as a way to better connect community members to each other and provide safe alternatives to driving impaired. While the method of these groups varied (e.g., an app, a Facebook group), they all provided the same service.

All focus groups also described the potential benefits of increasing preventative education efforts. These efforts, the groups believed, should focus on specific community populations (i.e., youth, employees) and the general public. One participant in the parents and teachers group said that their son had attended a presentation on impaired driving that was co-hosted by the FCDPHE that had a big impact on their child. Another member of that group felt strongly that, while most prevention education begins around the time that youth start driving, it would be beneficial to start education much younger (10 years old according to their recommendation) so that youth can repeatedly receive the messaging as they approach driving age. Focus group members also expressed the need to educate employers and their employees as impaired driving on the job was growing to be a bigger issue. According to them, increasing awareness of the penalties of impaired driving, and educating employers on risk signs, may help to deter impaired driving and get people the help that they need before someone is injured.

The youth and business owners and community member focus groups also raised public awareness events and campaigns as potential options to deter impaired driving. **While specific events were not mentioned, these focus groups felt that it was important for health officials to get out into the community and participate in events that bring in a wide range of locals.** Doing so would aid in growing awareness of the impaired driving issue and could serve as a reminder not to drive impaired. Social media campaigns were seen as another way to widen the net of residents that received the messaging (see below for more information on participants' recommended messaging).

Three focus groups (youth, parents and teachers, business owners and community members) recommended potential intervention strategies that could be put in place at local bars. As many of the focus groups felt that bars were a common problem area of alcohol consumption, they were seen as an important point of intervention. **These groups believed that incentivizing the use of a designated driver or using some form of ride service could be a particularly effective approach.** Potential incentives included gift cards, free food/drinks, and free rides. One participant, who stated that a trolley on the main street could be an effective approach to deterring impaired driving said the following about reducing impaired driving and promoting the use of public transportation.



I was even thinking...if the town worked with local businesses downtown [to] incentivize people to take the trolley home, you'd get 10% off your meal or validate their parking or something like that, just for taking the trolley to get people to use it and try it.

The business owners and community members focus group also raised the idea of increasing education and awareness at bars both through increased signage and education for bartenders. With regard to signs, participants believed that it would be beneficial to post signs that include contact information for any alternative transportation services. As for bartenders, education could be provided about overserving alcohol and awareness of what to do if someone tried to drive impaired. **Members of this focus group felt that both of these approaches could be more successful if a coalition of bars and restaurants formed to implement these ideas and address the impaired driving issue.**

Two focus groups (parents and teachers, business owners and community members) mentioned the need for alternative activities and social gathering places that did not involve alcohol. While they understood that the many local events were important to the community and were a great place to gather, these events often focused on or heavily involved alcohol. In addition to these events, focus group members felt as though it was important to build a larger recreational center that could host alcohol-free events for community members to attend. **Regardless of whether a new recreational center could be built, they believed that a community action board may be a good way of determining what community members would be most interested in participating in.**

Finally, two focus groups (youth, business owners and community members) identified potential regulatory efforts. These efforts included increasing the rules on purchasing alcohol and reducing the strict parking measures on the main street in Cañon City. **While increasing rules on purchasing alcohol was met with some skepticism by other focus group members, the groups generally agreed that reducing the strict parking requirements in the downtown Cañon City area would aid in reducing the impaired driving issue as drivers would not need to worry about leaving their car overnight.**

Messaging

As many of the above recommendations related to providing information in different formats (e.g., public events, signage, social media) the focus group participants provided various ideas of messaging that may be effective at connecting with Fremont County residents. **One of the most common recommendations was educational messaging aimed at informing residents about the potential dangers of impaired driving.** These included sharing statistics about the fatality rates associated with impaired driving and the overall financial, social, and emotional cost that the issue has had on the community. Additionally, the focus groups believed that information about the risks of impaired driving could be equally as beneficial.

Related to information, participants in the law enforcement, first responders, and medical providers focus group believed that messaging could be a good way to bolster law enforcement's deterrence efforts. As, they noted, that their resources are spread too thin to hire more officers, they recommended that law enforcement agencies take a stronger stance on DUIs as a method of deterrence. **In particular, they recommended modeling messaging after Colorado's The Heat is On campaign.** Further, this focus group noted that it may be effective to highlight the cost of the DUI fines in messaging to warn drivers of the financial burden that they may experience if they were arrested for driving impaired.

Participants in the parents and teachers and business owners and community members focus groups felt that it was important for all messaging to have a community-based focus. Examples of this included sharing the stories of those impacted by impaired driving, sharing community member's voices about safety concerns in Fremont County, and messaging aimed at highlighting the culture of substance use in the county. One participant shared an experience their son had at an event at his school focused on drunk driving.



...It was a senior who did it as a capstone project, but she actually presented that she lost her twin sister in an accident that was stemming from drunk driving. My son came home and talked to me about it. And that seemed pretty impactful to him. So something like that, I think, would definitely be good.

By connecting messaging with the voices of community members, messaging could be much more effective at influencing those who may drive impaired. In particular, participants felt that the voices of other community members could be a very strong prevention tool for youth in Fremont County. Further, the voices of community members were seen as a powerful approach to shifting the culture of acceptance surrounding driving impaired in the county.

With regards to the format of the messaging, focus group members stated that all messaging should serve as a call to action. **No matter the information provided in the messaging, they were adamant that the messaging needed to remind residents that they had a choice in their actions and that those actions could have consequences.** This messaging, it was said, needed to be balanced and approachable. Messaging should not be too light (so as to not be taken seriously) or too harsh, which could cause people to want to rebel against the message. Focus group members also noted the need for messaging campaigns to be bilingual to reach the Spanish-speaking population and the need to be quick in nature (30 seconds or less) to be more easily consumed by residents.

Finally, participants in the parents and teachers focus group repeatedly spoke to the need for messaging to begin at an early age. Not only would messaging reach youth at a time before/when they were learning to drive, but it could aid in reducing the mindset that an impaired driving accident would not happen to them. The voices of the community and families impacted by impaired driving incidents were seen as particularly effective ways of reaching youth.

Recommendations

Community members that participated in the focus groups were passionate about addressing the impaired driving issue and offered a wide range of recommendations to reduce impaired driving in Fremont County. Based on community guidance, as well as best-practices recommended by leaders in the health and safety fields, the following recommendations may be put in place to aid in reducing impaired driving incidents in Fremont County.



Consider Law Enforcement Deterrence Opportunities: Community members repeatedly noted the limited resources available to law enforcement in Fremont County. This lack of resources lessens law enforcement's ability to proactively address impaired driving and arrest drivers pre-accident. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA; 2024) recommends ensuring that law enforcement have the resources to not only ensure enough officers are staffed to arrest as necessary, but that enough officers are present on the roadways to deter willingness to drive impaired. Further, through arrest, law enforcement can play a crucial role in ensuring that individuals who regularly drive impaired can be connected to mandatory treatment through the courts for underlying substance use issues.



Increase Transportation Options Within Fremont County: Current transportation options within Fremont County are limited, which may be increasing the impaired driving issue. It is recommended that the Fremont County leadership consider the promotion of rideshare services (e.g., Uber, Lyft), develop an infrastructure for public transportation options (e.g., trolley, buses), or develop a community-led, voluntary designated driver program.



Grow Public Awareness and Education Efforts: Community members recommended the development of a mass media public awareness campaign to address the impaired driving issue, which aligns with recommendations from the NHTSA (2024) and the CDC (2024). Focus group participants felt that the campaign should include a range of information including facts, warnings, and stories from community members impacted by impaired driving incidents. Relatedly, increased childhood education about substance use and impaired driving, as well as a focus on adult education, may prove beneficial in addressing the issue.



Incentivize Not Driving Impaired: Participants in the focus groups believed that incentives may be a powerful tool in addressing impaired driving. Specifically, they recommended working with bars and restaurants across Fremont County to develop incentives that may lead someone to consider using a designated driver or finding an alternative transportation option. Potential incentives included a free or discounted meal or beverage, or validated overnight parking. While not thoroughly researched, incentives may prove beneficial in reducing willingness to drive impaired or for someone to serve as a designated driver.



Change Parking Regulations in Fremont County: Several groups noted the impact that the parking regulations in downtown Cañon City have on willingness to drive impaired. These regulations, which limit leaving a vehicle overnight, may unintentionally promote impaired driving as residents may not wish to get ticketed or have their vehicle towed. Ensuring that drivers can leave their cars overnight may assist in drivers' willingness to seek alternative transportation.



Develop a Community Action Board: Although not mentioned often, some groups raised the idea of having a community action board (CAB) that consists of residents and business owners. Local CABs can be effective at rallying a community behind an issue and developing interventions that are tailored specifically to the community. Ensuring that the board is made up of a wide range of community members can assist in pooling resources from different sectors and offer more intervention pathways.

Conclusion

Although community members expressed concern for the impaired driving issue in Fremont County, they shared a great sense of pride towards their community and a willingness to take action. This passion, along with the above mentioned recommendations, can provide a strong foundation for FCDPHE's future impaired driving prevention work. Through collaborative work with community members, FCDPHE can work towards building a safer community and roadway for all who visit and live in Fremont County.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

Substance Use in the Community

1. **What role do you think drinking alcohol plays in your community's culture?**
 - a. *Probe:* What role does it play in how people interact and connect with each other?
2. **Where do you think that people are most likely to drink alcohol? Why?**
 - a. *Probe:* What about at home? What about at local bars? Outdoor events?
3. **Do you think that alcohol consumption differs in areas of Fremont County (e.g., Canon City, Florence)? If so, why do you think that it varies in these places?**
 - a. *Probes:* Are there any places where you feel as though you hear more stories about impaired driving or accidents?
4. **What role do other substances, such as marijuana and prescription medications, play in your community's culture?**
 - a. *Probes:* What role does it play in how people interact and connect with each other? Do you see any problems with regards to substance use in your community?
5. **Do you see any problems with alcohol consumption or substance use in Fremont County? If any, why do you see these as problems?**
 - a. *Probes:* What do you think is causing the problem(s) that you mentioned?

Driving Under the Influence

6. **How big of an issue do you believe impaired driving is in Fremont County? Why?**
 - a. *Probes:* Does it seem to be influenced by anything in particular? Are people more likely to do it at different times of year?
7. **What factors do you think influence people's decision to drive while impaired? Do you think that there are any factors specific to Fremont County that influence their decisions to drive impaired?**
 - b. *Probes:* Do you think that drinking is a natural part of the culture in Fremont? Do people seem less concerned about the potential consequences of driving impaired?
8. **Are there any specific groups that you think are more likely to drive impaired in Fremont County?**
 - c. *Probes:* Does it seem like any groups are less concerned about drinking? Are there any groups that seem less concerned about the consequences of driving impaired (e.g., young adults, older adults)?

Impaired Driving Prevention

9. **What is one thing that you would change in or about the community to reduce impaired driving?**
 - a. *Probes:* Would you change any laws or policies? Would you change anything about the culture? Would you change anything about the way that people access alcohol and other substances?
10. **What do you think would be most effective in reducing impaired driving in Fremont County?**
 - b. *Probes:* What specific community needs could be addressed? What might get residents to reconsider driving while impaired?

11. What messaging do you think would be most effective at connecting with Fremont County residents about impaired driving?

c. *Probes:* Are there any facts or messages that you think might make people think twice about driving impaired?

12. What are some programs or policies that are currently in place that do not seem to be deterring impaired driving?

d. *Probes:* Are there any laws or regulations that don't seem to be working as they should? Are there any efforts (e.g., DUI checks) that do not seem to be working?

Wrap Up

13. Is there anything else that you would like to add or anything that you think that we may have missed?