

Alcohol: Changing the Narrative

**A Report on Recover Alaska's
Day of Conversation**

May 9, 2019

Nuka Learning and Wellness Center, Anchorage

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[Final Participant Agenda](#)

Event [Powerpoint presentation](#), with polling data included

[SSRS Polling Survey](#)

[World Cafe handout](#) with questions for small groups



Dr. Katherine Gottlieb welcomes participants to "Alcohol: Changing the Narrative," hosted at Southcentral Foundation's Nuka Learning and Wellness Center.



Laying the Foundation

On May 9, 2019, Recover Alaska welcomed over 60 diverse professionals from around the state who share the vision of Alaskans living free from the consequences of alcohol misuse to participate in a day of conversation. The theme was “Alcohol: Changing the Narrative,” highlighting the importance of social norms in building strong solutions to this complex issue.

Brief Overview of the Day

Recover Alaska leadership shared key results of a [2018 SSRS Polling Survey](#) that assessed Alaskan’s perceptions of alcohol use, risk, treatment and recovery. Participants in the room used polling devices that allowed them to respond anonymously to questions about their own perceptions as well, in real time.

Together, we used all that data as a springboard into conversations around social and community norms, including some emergent topics not covered by the data collected by the SSRS survey. We envisioned pathways into new positive social norms around safe, low-risk levels of drinking, which may range from no consumption to standard levels determined by the NIAAA/CDC’s guidelines. We brainstormed possible action steps for the network as a whole, as well as personal action steps we each committed to do to change the narrative around alcohol use.

Woven through the day’s activities, a graphic recorder captured emerging insights and questions. We took time to envision new social norms that support a culture of healing, connection, respect for diversity, and resilience. To that end, we made time to connect and create safety; honored our bodies with nourishing food and energizing activities; and engaged each other in ways that respected our different learning styles and areas of expertise. As an organization that emphasizes systems change, it was important that we consider how we build relationships with one another as a component of the work we do together.

Why does Recover Alaska care about norms?

Tiffany Hall, Executive Director for Recover Alaska, helped frame the work for the day by defining social norms and relaying the importance they have in building a common narrative about alcohol consumption.¹ Social norms are hidden narratives that shape individual and collective behaviors, attitudes, values, and choices. Social norms are intersectional and derived from multiple sources, and we assume that prevalent social norms are contributing to alcohol misuse in Alaska. While social norms can contribute to risk behaviors and misinformation, some norms can protect against alcohol misuse. For example, young people overall are drinking less than in years past. Positive social norms can create safe, supportive environments that contribute to the health and wellbeing of people and communities.



Tiffany Hall, Recover Alaska Executive Director, presents on social norms and the recent poll of Alaskan’s values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors around alcohol use and misuse. (Photo credit- O’Hara Shipe)

Recover Alaska supports conversations, campaigns, and “memes” that encourage new social norms around low-risk levels of drinking that range from no consumption to moderate consumption of alcohol. We also support inclusive, non-judgmental language that reduces stigma and improves social attitudes about people with alcohol use disorders and improves the likelihood they will seek treatment.

¹ See pgs. 12 - 18 of the PowerPoint presentation: <http://bit.ly/2WB8nr2>



Tracy Kunkler of Circle Forward facilitates the day. (Photo credit- Matt Waliszek)

The Objectives for the Day

The objectives for the day included:

- building the network of relationships;
- learning and professional development; and
- identifying personal and collective points of action.

Recover Alaska leadership wanted to share what has been learned about how Alaskans think about alcohol, and gave participants opportunities to engage with the data and give feedback about what is most important and what might be missing, from the vantage point of their work and their communities. On page 16 is a more detailed list of our objectives and results of the participants' evaluation of the day.

How this Report is Organized

This report is intended to provide snapshots of the themes, insights, and recommendations for action that came out of the interactions among the participants. It is organized chronologically to follow the event's PowerPoint [presentation slides](#), which include the real time polling data from the participants.

Pages 6 - 10 recap four key focus areas from the 2018 SSRS Polling Survey, plus a fifth "open" focus area on topics that emerged from participants. Each page captures the live polling data from participants in that focus area, as well as the visual notes from the graphic recorder of the themes from the World Cafe small group discussions.²

Pages 11 - 12 recap the themes that emerged when we asked participants the question, "What will it look like and feel like when we weave new social norms around low-risk alcohol use and the normalization of treatment into our communities?"

Pages 14 - 15 recap a prioritized list of actions that participants recommended to leverage change toward the new vision.

Page 16 is a summary of the evaluation from participants on the objectives for the day. Attachments to this report are listed in the Table of Contents.

"I felt the approach [of] this event allowed for flexibility, movement, and engagement. Would love to attend another one."

² Note: you can see the questions that prompted the small group discussions in each of the focus areas [here](#).

Our Shared Norms

Tiffany Hall, Executive Director of Recover Alaska, shared the results of the [2018 SSRS Polling Survey](#), a survey conducted by SSRS with a representative sample of Alaskan adults age 18 and older. The geographic strata included six regions: Anchorage Mat-Su, Gulf Coast, Interior, Northern, Southeast, and Southwest. The goal of the research was to assess Alaskan's perceptions of alcohol use, risk, treatment and recovery and current alcohol consumption. (See also pages 22 - 58 of the PowerPoint presentation: <http://bit.ly/2Wb8nr2>.)

We focused on **4 key areas for changing social norms** from the polling data. Later, the event participants rank-ordered these four areas by priority in this way:

1. Addiction, treatment, and recovery
2. Underage drinking
3. Alcohol use during pregnancy
4. Knowledge of health risks



(Live graphic recording- Avril Orloff, Drawing Change)

Over the next five pages you will see the results of the participants' engagement with these four key areas from the polling data, plus a fifth "open" focus area on topics that emerged from participants. You can follow along in the [presentation slides](#). The graphic recording images were created during small group conversations called a "World Cafe." See [Attachment](#) for the World Cafe questions.

"The sense of community today was extremely valuable. This topic can sometimes seem so personal and individualized that you forget how important community support and understanding can be."

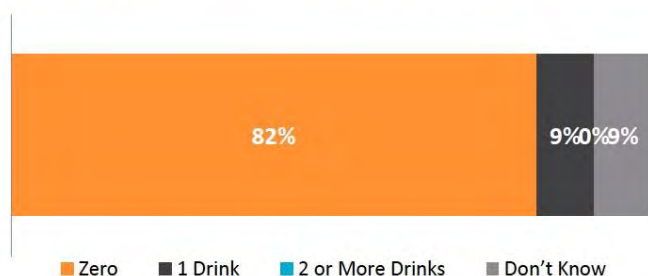
Changing Norms: Alcohol Use During Pregnancy

NEW NORMS

Increased provider & public understanding that there's **no safe level of drinking while pregnant**, with a focus on effective ways to reduce drinking.

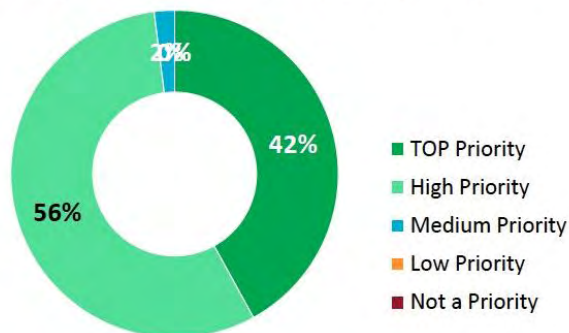
LIVE POLLING

Q1. How many drinks can a pregnant women consume at one time, without causing harm to the developing baby?



LIVE POLLING

Q2. What level of priority would you give to addressing alcohol use during pregnancy?



"I felt really energized by the sharing and ideas. I hope my contribution to discussion was valuable, as my learning from others definitely was."

World Cafe Conversation Themes



(Live graphic recording- Avril Orloff, Drawing Change)

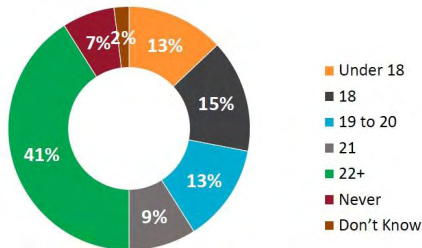
Changing Norms: Underage Alcohol Use

NEW NORMS

- ⇒ Young people seek joy, fun, and excitement in ways that increase well-being.
- ⇒ Parents understand the importance of talking to their children about alcohol and do so regularly.

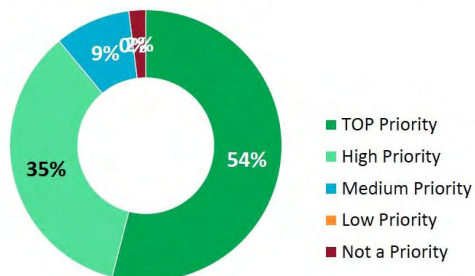
LIVE POLLING

Q3. What age is it safe for a young person to have a standard alcoholic drink?



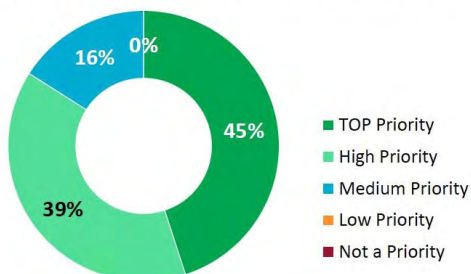
LIVE POLLING

Q4. What level of priority would you give to protective factors for youth?

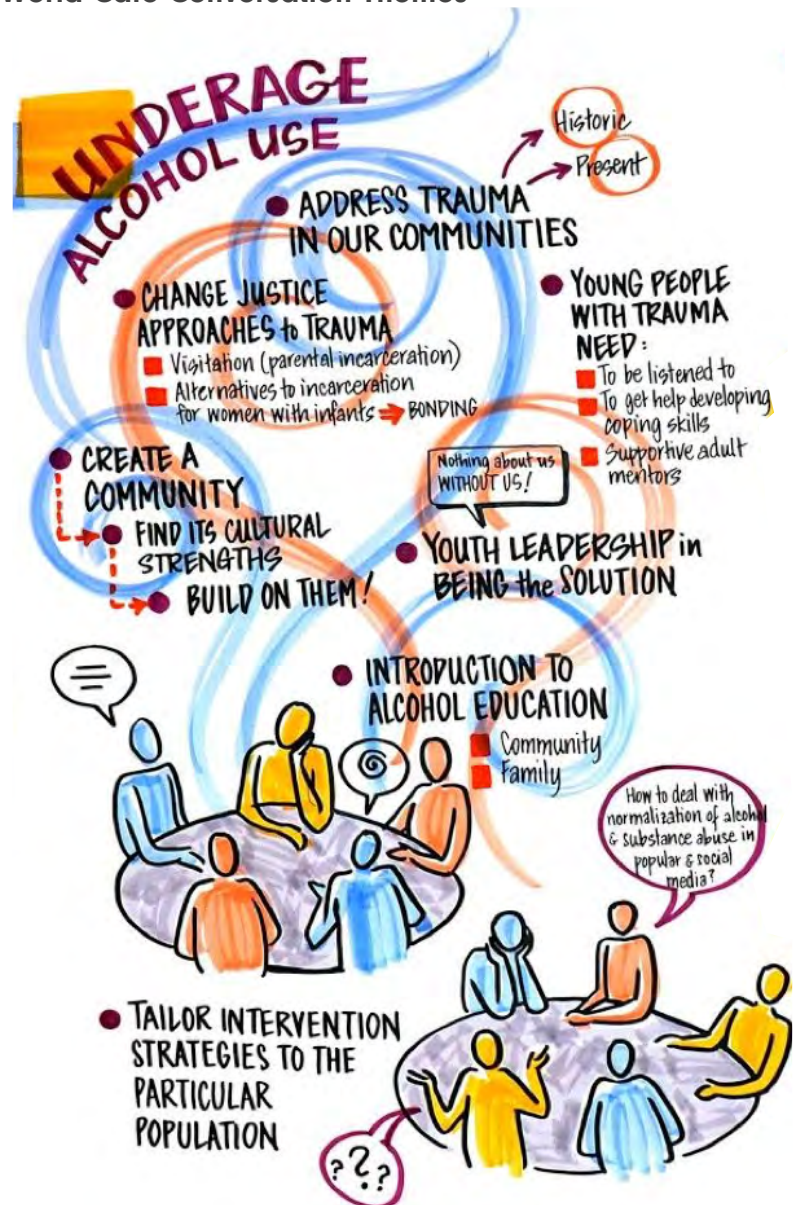


LIVE POLLING

Q5. What level of priority would you give to adults speaking with youth about alcohol use?



World Cafe Conversation Themes



(Live graphic recording- Avril Orloff, Drawing Change)

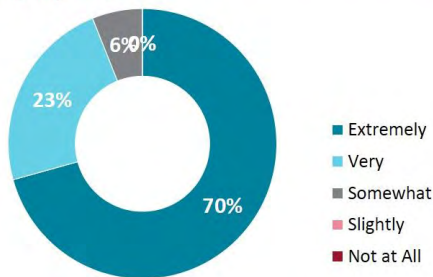
Changing Norms: Addiction, Treatment, and Recovery

NEW NORMS

- ⇒ People understand that addiction is a chronic disease (not a moral failing or self-indulgent pleasure-seeking), and that recovery is possible.
- ⇒ People understand that there are many pathways to recovery and help is available.

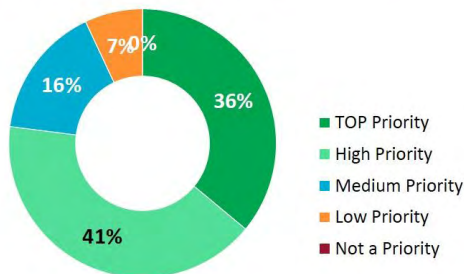
LIVE POLLING

Q6. How believable do you find the statement, "Recovery is possible"?



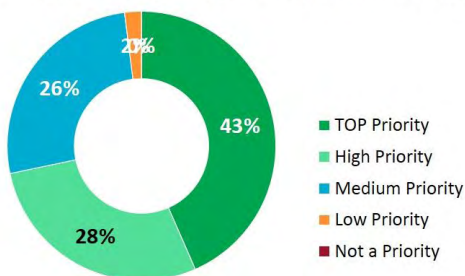
LIVE POLLING

Q7. What level of priority would you give to addiction as a chronic disease?

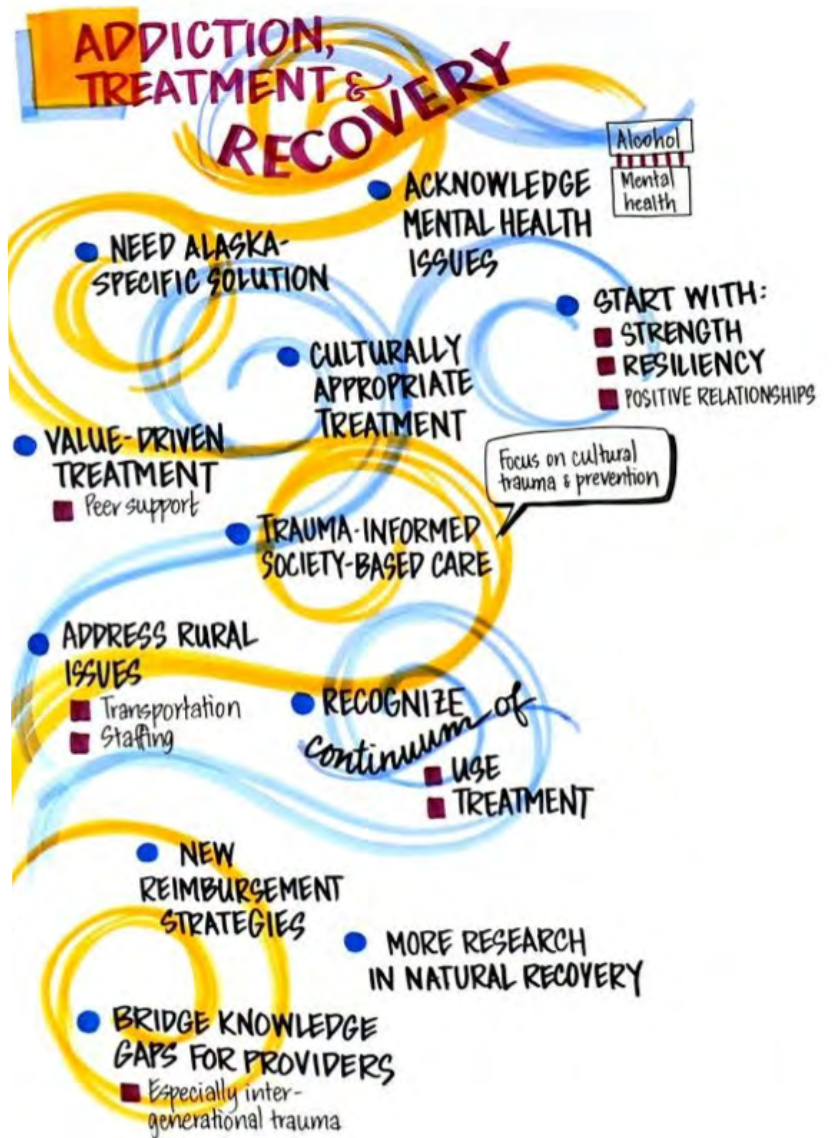


LIVE POLLING

Q8. What level of priority would you give to increasing knowledge of pathways to recovery?



World Cafe Conversation Themes



(Live graphic recording- Avril Orloff, Drawing Change)

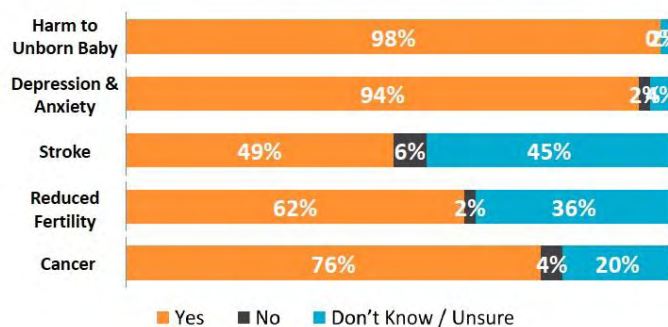
Changing Norms: Knowledge of Health Risks

NEW NORM

People are more aware of various health risks related to alcohol and understand possible solutions.

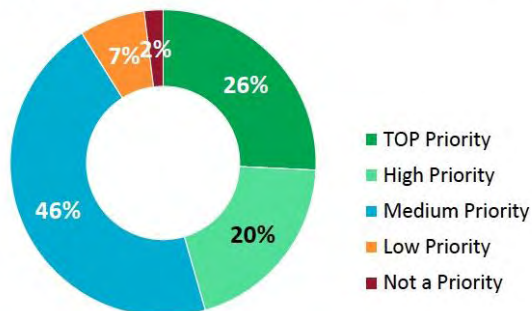
LIVE POLLING

Q9. Alcohol use is associated with increased risk of ...



LIVE POLLING

Q10. What level of priority would you give to increasing knowledge of health risks associated with alcohol use?



"Hearing different perspectives was the most valuable. I was surprised by how enjoyable the experience was and how genuine and creative the group was."

World Cafe Conversation Themes



(Live graphic recording- Avril Orloff, Drawing Change)

Changing Norms: Emergent Themes

"What additional priorities should we have as a state?"

Live Polling

WHAT MATTERS TO YOU?

These are selected themes that emerged, rank-ordered by priority:

1. Root causes of misuse: self-medicating fear, pain, trauma
2. Historical, community and individual trauma
3. Unique factors and approaches in rural and urban Alaska
4. Emphasize the systemic role of alcohol as it impacts other issues
5. Holistic work on shared risk and protective factors
6. Explore Alaska's disproportionate negative outcomes
7. Links between prevention upstream and positive outcomes
8. Health disparities in alcohol use and consequences

World Cafe Conversation Themes



(Live graphic recording- Avril Orloff, Drawing Change)



Jess Limbird, Recover Alaska Program Manager, engages a small group during the morning World Café. Wes Brewington and Dana Diehl also pictured.
Photo credit- O'Hara Shipe

Creating Our Shared Vision for New Norms

*What will it look and feel like when we weave new social norms around **low-risk alcohol use** and the **normalization of treatment** into our communities?*

People self-selected identities or affinities to use as a lens through which to answer this question. They divided into small groups, and envisioned the desired future, around these self-selected affinities:

- Women
- Concerned community members
- Veterans
- Family members
- Rural Alaska (off the road system)
- Non-white cultures
- Parents
- Youth
- Young adults 18-21
- Introverts

Sharing Our Collective “Vision Board”

Using an open space concept, individuals came forward with affinity groups and self-selected into the affinity groups offered. Group members were asked to select a picture or two, from among many scattered around the room, that best conceptualized an ideal future for low-risk drinking culture, which includes the normalization of treatment. The small group conversation described how the photos, as metaphor, contributed to a culture of wellbeing as viewed through the lens of the affinity of the small collective. Report backs shared key themes.



Women

The image of a stroller with baby dolls reminds us of childhood, of playing dolls and having fun together, before we knew what alcohol was....resisting the programming that you have to always “have a drink” in social situations in order to have fun. The image of the pyramids reflects our vision of building and sustaining a legacy and culture of women connecting with each other, being vulnerable, opening up and talking, and deepening relationships.

Concerned community members

We asked ourselves, “why do we need alcohol at celebrations? What would they look like without alcohol?” The image we chose of the lake with the ripple has us thinking about all the ways that reducing stigma around treatment will ripple through the community. Like the image of the storm, it is a reminder to take a proactive approach to treatment. When treatment is normalized and people feel that they can get treatment – especially over incarceration – the community is safer.



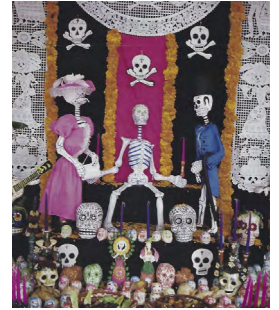
Veterans

The image of a parachute team performing a difficult maneuver conveys a vision of cohesion and belonging to a group, where everyone is working together. Unit cohesion in the military was built around alcohol and socializing with alcohol, like at softball games and picnics. Gatherings in veteran organizations are also often connected with alcohol. Even when people’s addictions lead them to drink alone, what they are really longing for is the feeling of belonging. The vision here is of recovering a whole new level of community together, with a shared sense of cohesion and purpose.

Family members

The vision from this group involved healing through family and family connections. The image of the skeletons reflects an inter-generational understanding of family, and the connections between past and future generations. It represents learning from our elders and living in community.

The image of the girl with the dog is about having support systems when someone is going through struggles with alcohol. Support can come from a family member or friend, or in this case, a pet – it doesn't even have to be a person.



Rural Alaska: off the road system / Non-white cultures / Parents

This group took on multiple identities that felt connected and important. The image of the chick emerging from its shell is about the process of becoming conscious, aware and awake. There is fragility and vulnerability in changing patterns and new beginnings. At the same time, as the eagle flying reminds us, there is empowerment in our interconnectedness and our connection to nature.

Youth under 18

Changing norms for adolescents has to involve social structure and peers, it is very important for that age group. In this image, most of the meerkats are in a group, and one is off in the distance. The metaphor is that the collective/ colony acts as a big organism, they take care of each other, look out for threats, etc.

How to build social connectedness and well-being, confidence, engagement, and supporting each other as a group in healthy ways, protect against threats.

Helping with treatment and recovery: one meerkat is sick or has a problem, others will help it out. Need to help each other out, and focus on under 18 to teach them to empathize and talk to each other and help each other.



Young adults age 18-21

In this image of a woman at the helm of a ship, her face looks confident but also uncertain. Young adults are often excited and confident about new experiences, but also feel afraid and unsure about what the future holds. In these transition years from family to community, when they are moving into a new stage of life, they benefit from mentors and peers who help them understand that their feelings of uncertainty are normal.

Introverts

A person who is introverted can stand back and observe in social situations, to conserve their energy. Sometimes their introversion reflects social anxiety and fear of being judged.

Alcohol can be used to feel more comfortable in public.

The image of a father holding a baby's hand symbolizes acceptance, and being in social interaction without needing alcohol. It conveys support in community, especially for someone who is struggling with alcohol; it is a tangible kind of support and acceptance without needing words. The image of sitting in a hammock represents the person who is introverted at peace and enjoying being out in the world, while being accepted for the differences in how much



direct social interaction they want and need.

Key Insights

After all the groups reported, the room was quiet, but there was a palpable sense of connection. The exercise had people take different points of view, but they all arrived at a shared place: a sense of responsibility for creating supportive and caring communities that acknowledge our human vulnerabilities. People in the room reflected that this is a personal issue: people have personal histories, possibly trauma, and relationships with others who use alcohol.

There were expressions of the importance of community, but also of individual strength. One participant summed up that the ability to be a strong individual depends upon a strong community: there is a feedback loop between the two, and they need each other. The power of the images of this positive future fueled the hope and belief that this vision can happen – and, actually, it was manifesting there in the room!



(Live graphic recording- Avril Orloff, Drawing Change)

Ideas for Taking Action

Participants brainstormed one action that would help to bring about the vision in the last exercise. We then engaged in an exercise to prioritize the actions. This is the prioritized list.

- 1. Finding and providing funding for sober, community-administered community gathering centers to help change the norm**
 - 2. More treatment and recovery services with childcare provided, and more sober residential programs where parents and kids can live together**
 - 3. Educate young adolescents about alcohol misuse* through open discussion and small group gatherings with no repercussions**
 - 4. Young adults are given a safe space where they can have access to therapy and counseling to allow them to process life and decisions**
 - 5. More collaborative and community-wide conversations about how to create more opportunities for safe supportive pathways to wellness**
-
6. Statewide guidelines and support to assess and treat brain injury and intergenerational trauma
 7. Promote social events that are sober (concerts, dinners, etc)
 8. To be mindful of our words and how they affect others
 9. Awareness and acceptance, vulnerability campaign, normalize, destigmatizing, accepting, supporting/encouraging
 10. Encourage more social activities that are not focused solely around drinking and talking, more active board
 11. Offer access to affordable therapeutic healthcare
 12. Create safe, sober opportunities for youth to bond to create healthy relationships
 13. Peer support at opportune times to allow storytelling to offer healing and prevention
 14. Form or connect a group of people who want to create a strong community of support for veterans and their families
 15. Distributing knowledge about the root causes of alcohol use (trauma, ACES, lack of resources)
 16. Educate at an early age information knowledge
 17. Know and identify who is/are the actors that will stay engaged in the efforts
 18. Building collations amongst entities working toward the same cause
 19. Create a criminal justice system that priorities treating underlying substance misuse* issues
 20. Consider your relationship with alcohol and have that conversation with people in your family and close community
 21. Start an education campaign targeting the most vulnerable regions in AK (northern and sw) about alcohol during pregnancy
 22. Coordinate local effort to empower community prioritization
 23. Every student caught with alcohol/drugs at any school should be given an alcohol/drug assessment
 24. Norm marketing on visioning life without constant alcohol woe (activities with photos)
 25. Consider routinely convening multiple community sectors for forum discussions to help shift social norms on recognition of low use alcohol consumption

*Recover Alaska has shifted participant language to misuse, as a best practice in reducing stigma around excessive alcohol use and addiction

26. Consider how we have progressed to this point and how we can maintain momentum, how can we continue gaining traction for social/cultural change while being inclusive
27. Change our thoughts – I think we should say what we mean and mean what we say “advocacy”
28. A tax on alcohol companies and pharmaceutical companies to create a giant treatment center in every state with qualified professionals to help people with substance misuse* issues
29. Connect human youth to community, culture care to empower change
30. Exchange contract info with agency descriptions
31. Build a memorial
32. Celebrate (saludos/cheer) with water
33. Normalize and acceptance of vulnerability
34. Create a statewide social norm campaign “art of the positive” 80% of Alaskan youth do not drink alcohol
35. Be the influence. Be the person you ought to be
36. We should listen to our youth more. Provide them with the hobbies they want
37. Funding a platform for social groups
38. Increase awareness, resources and approach on trauma resiliency as linked to alcohol misuse*
39. We should have community driven treatment centers in every community in Alaska for life span healing and recovery
40. Spend a week in Atkasuk
41. I think Recover Alaska should narrow its focus to one or two key strategies – more specific than the current goal of reducing harm caused by alcohol
42. Personal accountability



Participants engaged in multiple, small group conversations intended to engage unique groups to aid in networking and idea-sharing.

“I was skeptical of the format, but now greatly appreciate how it fostered interaction amongst strangers. Very positive.”

*Recover Alaska has shifted participant language to misuse, as a best practice in reducing stigma around excessive alcohol use and addiction

Evaluation Results: How Well Did We Meet Our Objectives?

Outcomes	Measures	Outcomes
Building the network/ Relationships	Number of participants	61
	Number of participants from each of the six regions and Anchorage	16% of participants were from outside Anchorage and Mat-Su representing Northern, Interior, Southwest and Southeast regions. 38% of participants work for an organization that maintains relationships and programming statewide.
	Percentage of participants who interacted with someone they had never met before	97% reported they had a "meaningful connection with someone new today"
	Average number of people with whom participants had "meaningful connections"	Median was 3 - 5 people Avg = 4.6 people 28% said 6 or more people
	% of people who will continue to engage with the work of Recover Alaska	95% of participants Strongly Agree (49%) or Agree (46%) that their work aligns well with the topics covered during the day
		95% of participants Strongly Agree (68%) or Agree (27%) that their experience was worth their time and effort to be here.
Learning/ Education	Percentage of communities engaging in work around shifting social norms. "I will likely keep addressing these social norms in my work or community" (multiple responses)	21% - Alcohol Use During Pregnancy 38% - Underage Alcohol Use 62% - Addiction, Treatment, and Recovery 46% - Knowledge of Health Risks 60% - Other
	Percentage of participants who learned something they will bring back to their work or community	88% Strongly Agree (34%) or Agree (54%) they learned something that they will bring back to their work or community
Self-reflection/ Action steps	Percentage of participants who make a 30 day or 6-month goal	69% - 27 postcards/39 participants



A final photo of participants after closing circle.
Photo credit- Matt Waliszek

Partners and Participation

PARTICIPANTS

Annette Alfonsi, Unmasking Traumatic Brain Injury
Lucy Apatiki, Norton Sound Health Corporation
Sean Armstrong, Division of Public Health
Thomas Azzarella, Alaska Afterschool Network
Hector Bravo, Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation Jake's Place
Wesley Brewington, Cook Inlet Tribal Council
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Diane DiSanto, Recover Alaska Steering Committee member
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Christopher Steppe, Nome Community Center
Tara Stiller, Rural Alaska Community Action Program

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Jennifer Summers, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
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Julia Terry, Choosing Our Roots
Laura Thomas, North Slope Borough Dept. of Health and Social Services
Niki Tshibaka, Dept. of Education and Early Development
Isha Twitchell, Knik Tribal Council
Jenny Weisshaupt, Alaska Mental Health Board/Alaska Board on Alcohol and Drug Abuse
DeShaun Whiskey, North Slope Borough Department of Health and Social Services
Lisa Wexler, University of Massachusetts
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