

## KTVA CBS 11 | Anchorage, Alaska News and Weather Anchorage, AK

[Print this article](#)

# Addiction Treatment Advocates Call for More Alcohol Tax Money for Programs

*Originally printed at <http://www.ktva.com/home/outbound-xml-feeds/Addiction-Treatment-Advocates-Call-for-More-Alcohol-Tax-Money-for-Programs-140742513.html>*

By Corey Allen-Young  
February 28, 2012

ALASKA - Calling substance abuse an epidemic in Alaska, advocates of treatment and prevention say the key to getting more people help is by increasing the amount of dollars used from the alcohol beverage tax – money they say could save lives.

The numbers are quite frankly embarrassing and heartbreaking, with substance abuse playing a role in nine of Alaska's top ten causes of death.

A list of groups from restaurants to bars to even the Anchorage Assembly say only using 50 percent of the alcohol sin tax is not enough if we want stop the tragic cycle of addiction.

"This is the best I've done being addicted to drugs," said Holly, who's getting treated for her addiction to prescription meds. "This is the cleanest I've ever been." It's a long road to recovery that Holly, who is pregnant, first started when she used drugs with a boyfriend as a teenager. "He was using them partying and I dabbled a little bit in OxyContin." It became a cycle of abuse that not even her family could get her out of.

"That was very, very scary for me. I looked for all kinds of different ways to get help," Holly said. But the problem is the help takes a lot longer than you would think because there isn't enough funding to support the demand.

"Some cases it could be six months or a year," said Anna Sappah, the executive director of Alaska Addiction Professionals Association. "[We've] got programs that aren't running at full capacity because they don't have the staff and manpower." This year, the state made \$40 million on alcohol taxes. Half of it goes toward treating and preventing substance abuse. Drug counselors say the other half should be used for

treatment, as well, if we want fewer addicts.

“While people were waiting on their waiting list they actually died of the disease of addiction, either overdosed, or you’ll hear of folks freezing to death,” said Sappah.

“If people want help, help should be available for them,” said APD spokesman Lieutenant Dave Parker. “If you have people on a waiting list, those people are motivated at least at the time that they write their name on the list.”

“Really, you’re not going to do it unless you’re ready, nobody can force you,” said Holly, who adds she and her baby are alive because she got help. The state says this year they have spent \$42 million on treatment for about 7,000 people, with 450 waiting to be served.

But when you hear that 690 people were arrested for drug related offenses in Anchorage this year and that 484 sit in prisons statewide, its a push from both private and government organizations for 100 percent of the alcohol taxes to get that extra \$19 million they say will lower numbers and cut down costs.