

# Alcohol and COVID-19 Pandemic in Maine and the Nation



Tim Diomede, MPPM  
October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022



State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup [www.MaineSEOW.com](http://www.MaineSEOW.com)

# Purpose/Background



*The State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) serves as a clearing house for substance use and mental health related data indicators. Established in 2005.*



*The SEOW was funded under the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Partnership for Success grant, focused on the prevention of substance use among 12- to 25-year-olds.*



*Currently funded by a combination of funding streams under the Maine CDC*

# SEOW Objectives

- ✓ Identify, organize, analyze and share key substance use prevention and related behavioral health indicators data;
- ✓ Create data-guided products that inform prevention planning/policies;
- ✓ Assist communities in understanding, using and presenting data in an effective manner;
- ✓ Build state and local level monitoring and surveillance systems;
- ✓ Help secure funds and measure progress; and
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for networking and collaboration.



### STATEMENT OF NEED

Alcohol misuse is a public health concern that became worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data show that access to alcohol in Maine has steadily increased along with associated death, injuries, and diseases. This brief provides information and context for alcohol use in Maine during the pandemic and beyond.



### NEW RESEARCH

A study by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism found that deaths due to alcohol increased 25% between 2019 and 2020.<sup>1</sup> It is projected that around 8,000 additional deaths will occur nationally due to increased alcohol consumption during the pandemic, however the full impact of increased alcohol consumption during the pandemic is currently unknown. Projected deaths are attributed to 18,700 more cases of liver failure and 1,000 more cases of liver cancer by 2040.<sup>2</sup>



### ALCOHOL USE IN MAINE

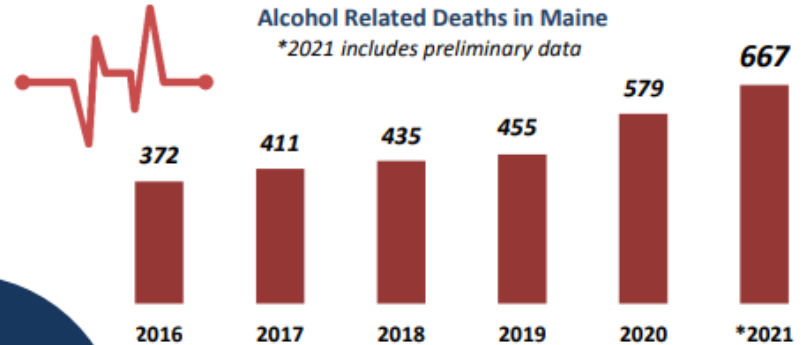
Alcohol is the most widely used substance in Maine and can have harmful impacts on society, including motor vehicle crashes, crime, chronic disease, straining health/medical resources, and lowering work productivity. It is the manner and frequency with which people use alcohol and/or other substances that are often linked to substance-related consequences.<sup>3</sup>



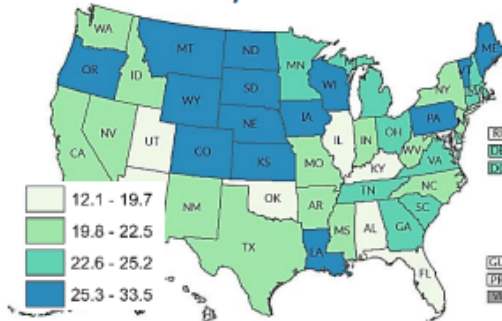
*Increased alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic is projected to cause short and long-term public health consequences.*

### MORTALITY

Preliminary data from 2021 show that 667 Mainers died due to an alcohol related cause (disease or poisoning); this is a 47% increase since 2019. There were 88 more alcohol related deaths in 2021 than reported in 2020, and 295 more deaths than in 2016; a 79% increase.<sup>5</sup>



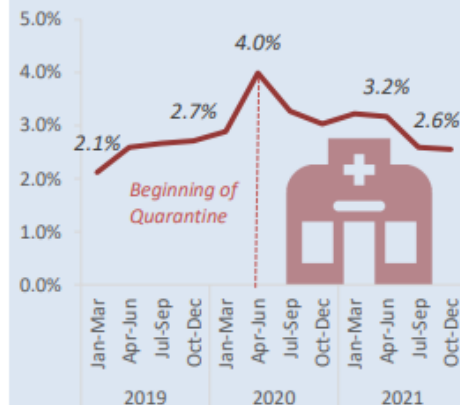
### Binge drinking among 18 to 24-year-olds, by State: 2020



Maine has continued to observe some of the highest rates of binge drinking among young adults 18-24 in the nation. In 2020, more than one in four (27.1%) young adults in Maine reported binge drinking in the past month.<sup>4</sup>

### EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS

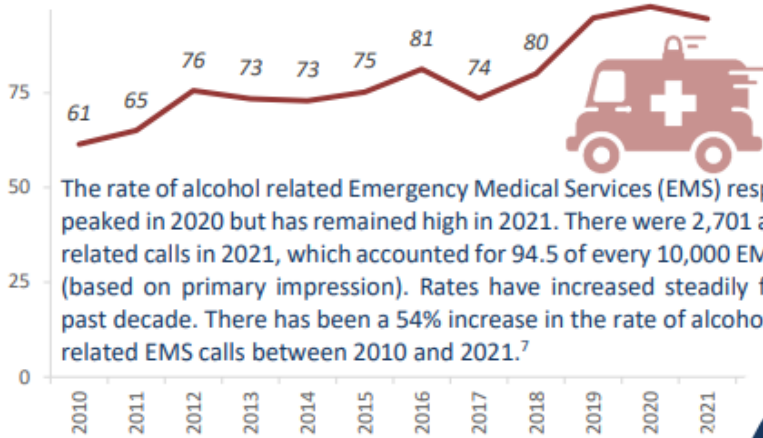
#### Percentage of ED Visits for Alcohol in Maine



The proportion of emergency department (ED) visits related to alcohol steeply increased at the start of the pandemic and peaked between April and June of 2020 (4.0%). The overall number of alcohol related ED visits remains high with 19,602 in 2020 and 19,480 in 2021; this equates to more than two alcohol-related ED visits every hour.<sup>6</sup>

## AMBULANCE RESPONSES

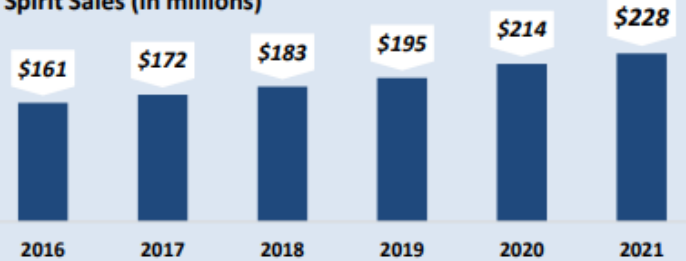
Rate of Alcohol-related Calls per 10,000 EMS Calls



The rate of alcohol related Emergency Medical Services (EMS) responses peaked in 2020 but has remained high in 2021. There were 2,701 alcohol related calls in 2021, which accounted for 94.5 of every 10,000 EMS calls (based on primary impression). Rates have increased steadily for the past decade. There has been a 54% increase in the rate of alcohol related EMS calls between 2010 and 2021.<sup>7</sup>

## SALES

Spirit Sales (in millions)

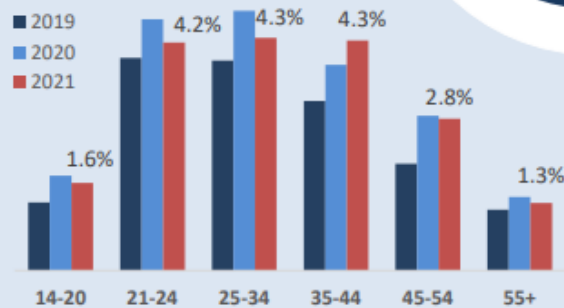


Agent sales of spirits (e.g., hard liquor) to off premise outlets (e.g., liquor stores) in Maine increased through the pandemic. Sales increased 17% from 2019 to 2021 and 42% since 2016.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the estimated economic burden of excess alcohol use in Maine was nearly \$1 billion dollars in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

## IMPAIRED DRIVING

During the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the proportion of impaired driving crashes due to alcohol and/or drugs. All age groups observed increases from 2019 to 2021; the highest rates were among Mainers 21 to 44.<sup>8</sup>

Percent of Maine Motor Vehicle Crashes due to Alcohol and/or Drug Impaired Driving

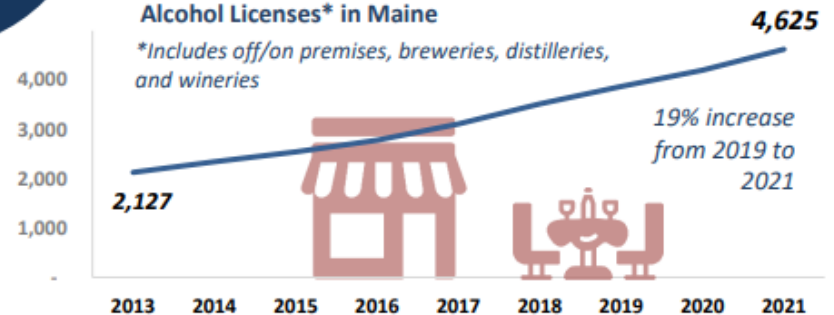


Public health concerns and long-term impacts must be considered when making decisions on alcohol policy, availability, and consumption.

## ACCESSIBILITY

Alcohol Licenses\* in Maine

\*Includes off/on premises, breweries, distilleries, and wineries



Maine establishments selling alcohol more than doubled between 2013 and 2021 (+117%).<sup>9</sup> From 2019 to 2021, off premise alcohol outlets (e.g., grocery stores, convenience stores) increased by 18% while restaurants/lounges serving alcohol increased by 24%. The cocktails-to-go program started at the beginning of the pandemic has been continued by legislation through March 2025 extending Mainers heightened access to alcohol.

This fact sheet is a product of the Maine State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW). For more info, visit [www.maine-seow.com](http://www.maine-seow.com)



1. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism  
 2. Massachusetts General Hospital  
 3. 2020 SEOW State Profile  
 4. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System\*  
 5. Maine Data, Research, and Vital Statistics  
 6. Rapid Health Information for Maine  
 7. Maine Emergency Medical Services

8. Maine Dept. of Transportation.  
 9. Bureau of Alcohol Beverages and Lottery  
 10. CDC  
 \*Self-reported data



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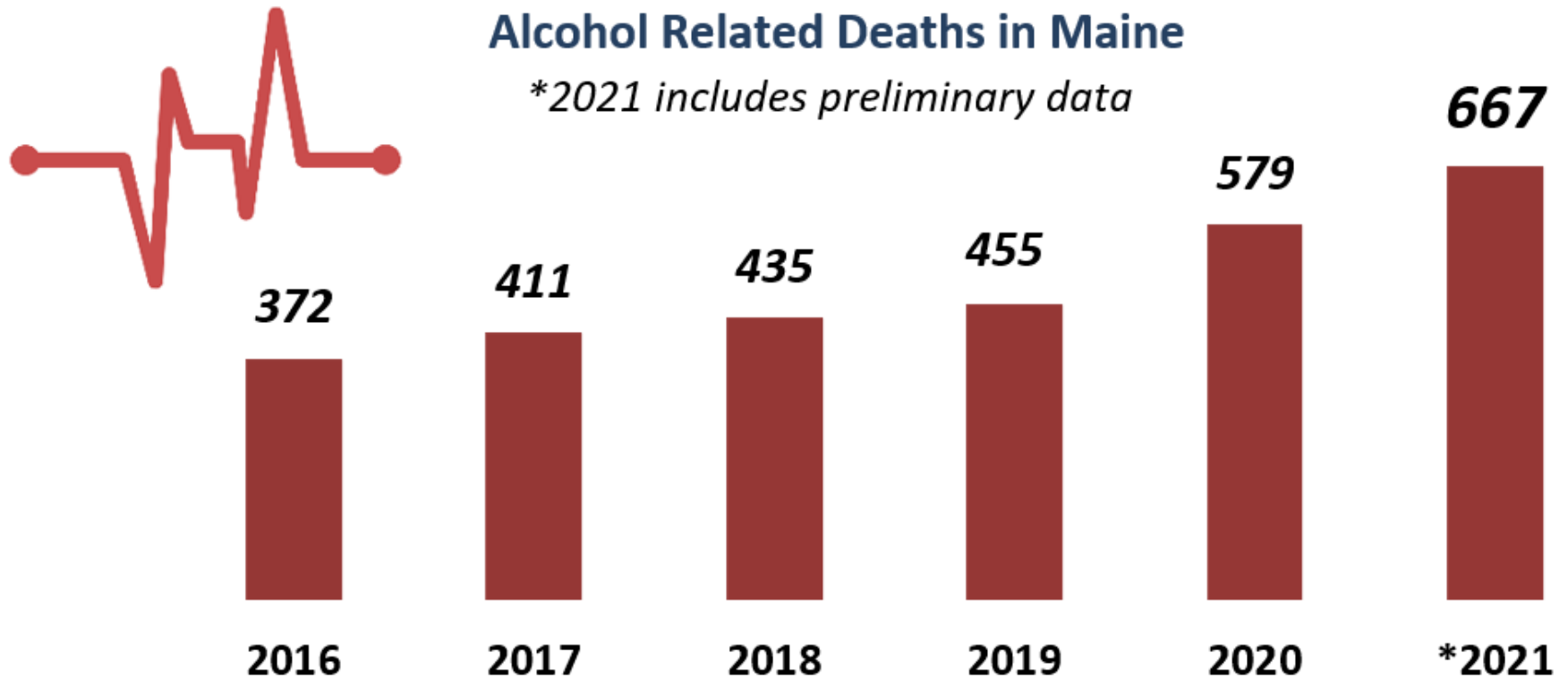
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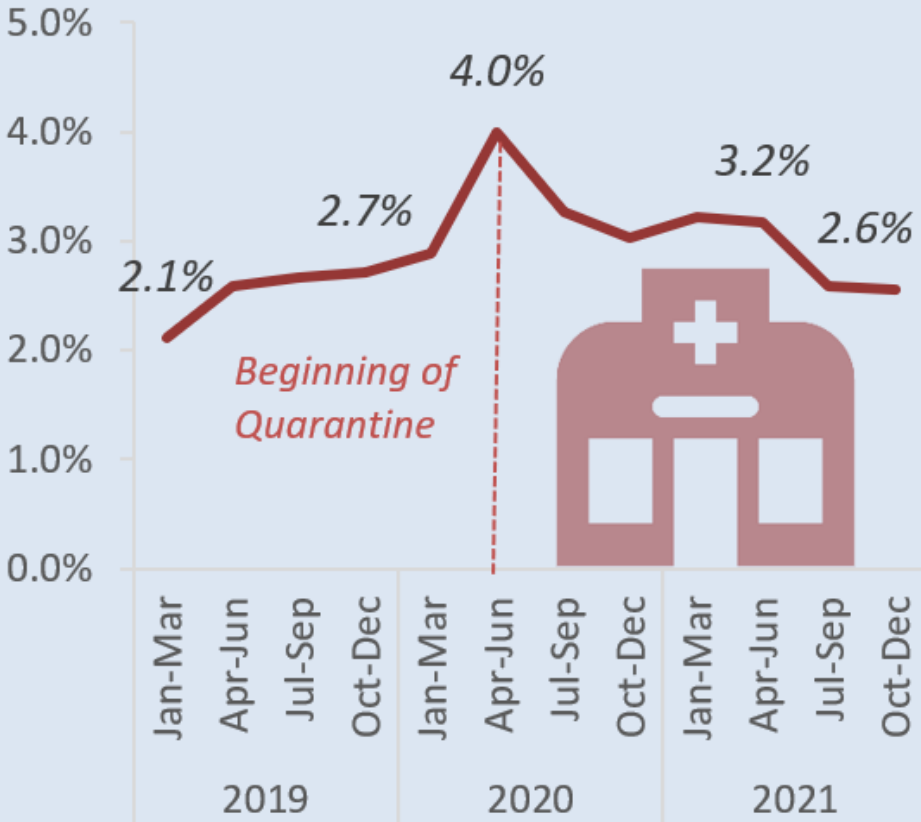







# EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS

**Percentage of ED Visits for Alcohol in Maine**



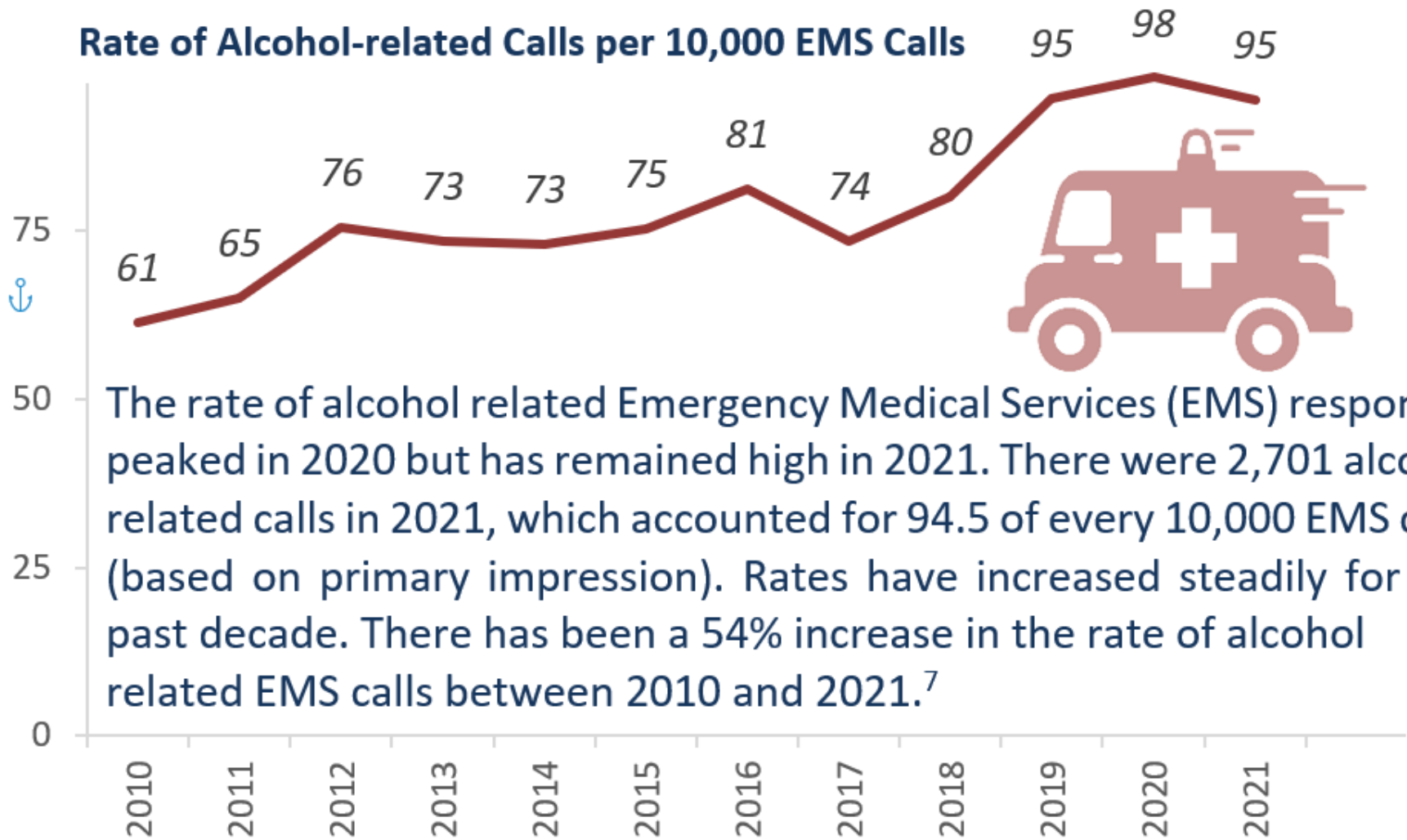
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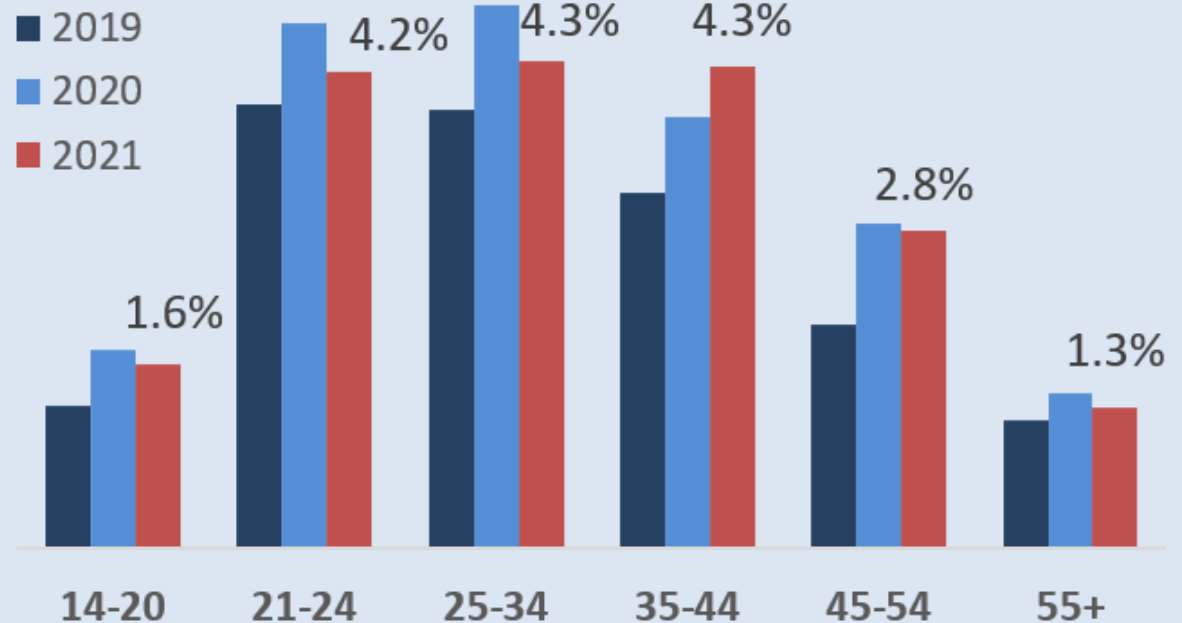
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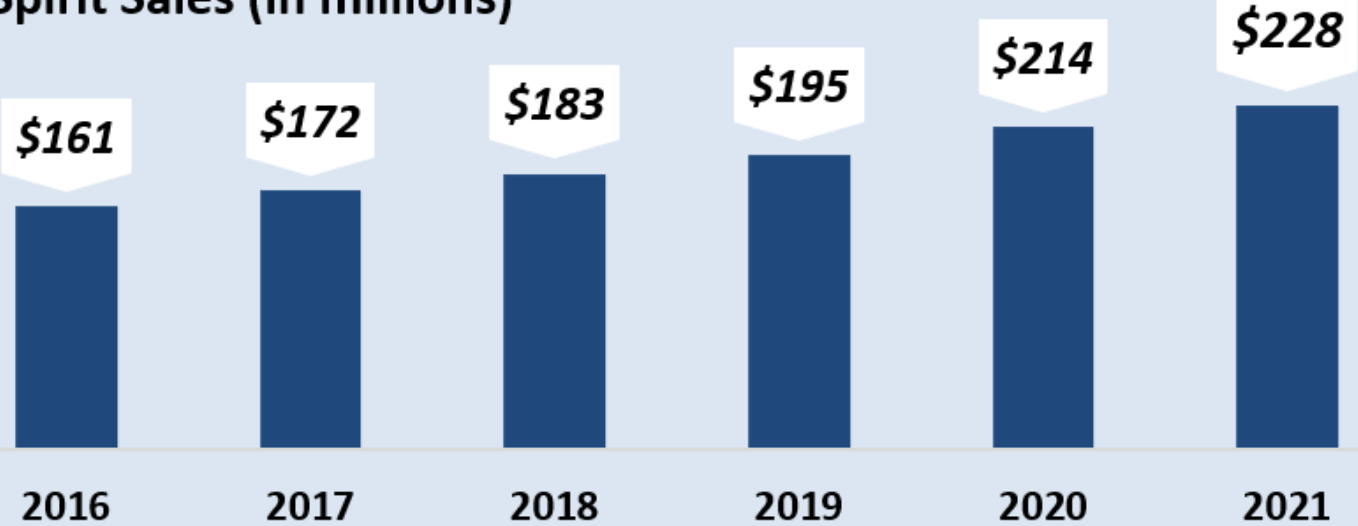


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# SALES

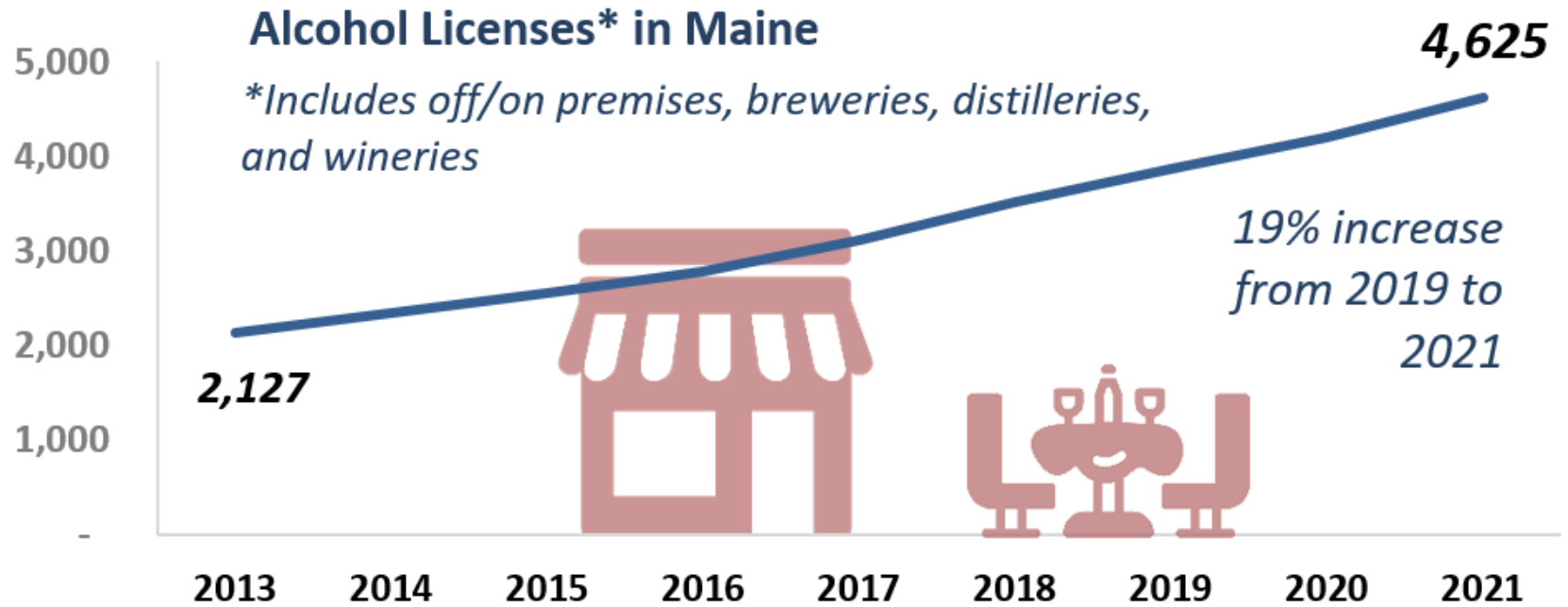
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# Contact

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