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Alcohol research fosters public health [Letter]

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11:00 a.m. EDT, August 2, 2014

Michelle Minton's attack on my alcohol policy research ("Are tax dollars paying for anti-alcohol advocacy?" July 30) exhibits a fundamental disagreement with public health research and practice.

From immunizations to smoke-free workplaces to motor vehicle safety, public health aims at population-based changes to increase health and well-being. Over the last century, life expectancy in the United States has increased 30 years. No fewer than 25 of these years are credited to public health measures. And, by definition, many of those changes came about through policy.

The research we conduct seeks to assess the impact and influence of alcohol advertising and marketing on young people in the United States. Through transparent, replicable and peer-reviewed research, we can contribute to an informed and evidence-based debate that leads to sound and effective public policy. That is public health in practice.

To date, other researchers have published at least 14 long-term studies in the research literature finding that the more young people are exposed to alcohol advertising and marketing, the more likely they are to drink, or if they are already drinking, to drink more. Alcohol is the No. 1 drug among young people in the United States and is responsible for approximately 4,300 deaths among persons under 21 every year.

Preventing these deaths is why we do what we do.

David H. Jernigan, Baltimore

The writer is director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

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