



Talking Points:

Preventing Excessive Alcohol Consumption



Many Americans Report Binge Drinking

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines binge drinking as having five or more drinks for males on one occasion, or in about two hours. For females, it is defined as four or more drinks on one occasion.
- More than half of U.S. adults are current drinkers and 15 percent of adults are binge drinkers.
- An estimated 75 percent of the alcohol consumed by adults is during binge drinking.
- More than 40 percent of all high school students are drinkers and nearly two-thirds of those who drink report binge drinking in the past month.
- An estimated 90 percent of the alcohol consumed by youth under age 21 is during binge drinking.
- Binge drinking is highest among 18- to 20-year-olds, with more than 50 percent reporting binge drinking.



Excessive Alcohol Consumption Is Costly

- The annual economic loss due to excessive alcohol consumption in the U.S. is approximately \$185 billion. Alcohol abuse costs include lost productivity and wages, health care and costs incurred in the criminal justice system due to alcohol-related crime.
- In 2001, nearly 76,000 deaths nationwide were attributed to excessive alcohol use.
- Excessive alcohol use is the third leading lifestyle-related cause of death in the U.S. each year, after tobacco use and poor diet/physical inactivity.
- Excessive alcohol use is associated with a variety of costly health problems, including liver disease, heart disease, psychological problems and some cancers, as well as unintentional injuries, such as motor vehicle crashes.
- Excessive alcohol consumption also has high societal costs. Alcohol is the most frequently abused substance among parents involved in child abuse or maltreatment cases. Four in 10 violent victimizations involve alcohol.



What Policies Can Reduce Excessive Alcohol Consumption?

- **Effective community-wide policies include:**
 - **Regulating the density of liquor stores and places that serve alcohol through zoning restrictions.**
 - **Enforcing laws that prohibit alcohol sales to minors and those who are intoxicated.** For example, requiring mandatory training of bar and restaurant staff about liquor laws reduces the number of intoxicated drinkers.
 - **Increasing alcohol excise taxes to raise the cost of alcohol.** This causes people—and particularly youth—to decrease how often and how much they drink.
 - **Maintaining the minimum legal drinking age of 21, which reduces underage drinking.**
 - **Reducing the legal blood alcohol limit to .00 for underage drivers.** Lowering the BAC for young or inexperienced drivers reduces the numbers of crashes where alcohol is involved, fatal crashes and injuries. Only 14 states and the District of Columbia have lowered the blood alcohol limit for underage drivers to .00.

- **Education and enforcement to reduce drinking and driving.** Mass media campaigns about drinking and driving, along with high-visibility enforcement efforts, reduces the number of alcohol-related crashes.
- **Medical care policies encouraging health care professionals to:**
 - **Screen patients for alcohol use.** According to one study, even though the majority of excessive drinkers had health insurance and had a recent medical checkup, they were not being screened for alcohol use.
 - **Provide brief behavioral counseling on reducing alcohol misuse.**



What Can State Legislators Do?

- **Support increased excise taxes on alcoholic beverages** to decrease how often and how much people drink.
- **Encourage communities to limit the density of liquor stores and places that serve alcohol through zoning restrictions.**
- **Maintain your state's minimum legal drinking age of 21,** and work with state and local police agencies to enforce the minimum legal drinking age laws.
- **Work with your state Bureau of Alcohol and Beverage Control to determine if liquor licensing regulations are strong enough and adequately enforced.**
 - In New Mexico, the state statute required liquor licenses to be revoked after two violations within 12 months, yet the licensing regulations only provided for revocation after five or more violations. Since hearings for a violation could take a year, no license had ever been revoked. In 2006, a governor-appointed task force recommended reducing the number of violations needed to revoke a license from five to three. By the end of 2007, six bars and restaurants had hearings scheduled to consider revoking their liquor license.
- **Require insurers to cover alcohol screening and counseling sessions** to encourage more health care professionals to provide them. Also make sure that insurers cover treatment for those who are dependent on alcohol.
- **Encourage your state Medicaid program to consider using patient alcohol screening** as a quality-of-care-measure for primary care providers and managed care organizations.

To find state-by-state statistics on impact of alcohol use and to assess deaths and years of potential life lost due to alcohol use in your state, go to:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/ardi/Homepage.aspx>

If you would like more information or references:

- Send your inquiry to healthpolicy@csq.org or
- Call the CSG Health Policy Group at (859) 244-8000