

# Underage Drinking in Pennsylvania

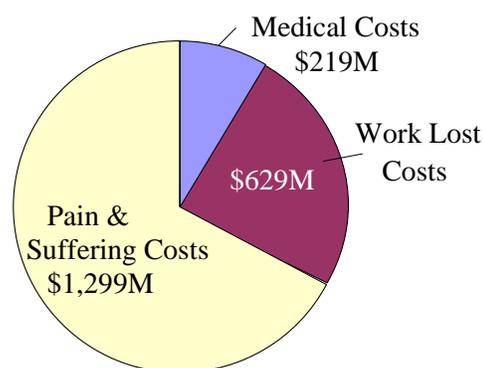
## *The Facts*

Tragic health, social, and economic problems result from the use of alcohol by youth. Underage drinking is a causal factor in a host of serious problems, including homicide, suicide, traumatic injury, drowning, burns, violent and property crime, high risk sex, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol poisoning, and need for treatment for alcohol abuse and dependence.

### *Problems and Costs Associated with Underage Drinking in Pennsylvania*

Underage drinking cost the citizens of Pennsylvania \$2.1 billion in 2010. These costs include medical care, work loss, and pain and suffering associated with the multiple problems resulting from the use of alcohol by youth.<sup>1</sup> This translates to a cost of \$1,737 per year for each youth in the State or \$2.81 per drink consumed underage. Excluding pain and suffering from these costs, the direct costs of underage drinking incurred through medical care and loss of work cost Pennsylvania \$848 million each year or \$1.11 per drink. In contrast, a drink in Pennsylvania retails for \$1.20.

**Costs of Underage Drinking  
Pennsylvania, 2010 \$**



**Total: \$2.1 billion**

**Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem, Pennsylvania, 2010 \$**

Problem	Total Costs (in millions)
Youth Violence	\$1,242.3
Youth Traffic Crashes	\$390.0
High-Risk Sex, Ages 14-20	\$150.2
Youth Property Crime	\$148.8
Youth Injury	\$71.7
Poisonings and Psychoses	\$25.7
FAS Among Mothers Age 15-20	\$40.2
Youth Alcohol Treatment	\$77.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,146.2</b>

Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in Pennsylvania represent the largest costs for the State. However, a host of other problems contribute substantially to the overall cost. Among teen mothers, fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) alone costs Pennsylvania \$40 million.

Young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more

likely to develop alcohol dependence and are two and a half times more likely to become abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at age 21.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, 2,120 youth 12- 20 years old were admitted for alcohol treatment in Pennsylvania, accounting for 9% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the state.<sup>3</sup>

## ***Alcohol Consumption by Youth in Pennsylvania***

Underage drinking is widespread in Pennsylvania. Approximately 511,000 underage customers in Pennsylvania drink each year. In 2009, Pennsylvania students in grades 9-12 reported:<sup>4</sup>

- 70.5% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 19.0% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 38.4% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasion in the past 30 days.
- 21.9% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.
- 2.8% had at least one drink of alcohol on school property in the past 30 days.

In 2009, underage customers consumed 12.5% of all alcohol sold in Pennsylvania, totaling \$916 million in sales (in 2010 dollars). These sales provided profits of \$449 million to the alcohol industry.<sup>1</sup> Ranking states based on the percentage of alcohol consumed underage, with 1 the highest, Pennsylvania ranked number 26. This percentage is affected by both adult and youth drinking levels.

Annual sales of alcohol consumed by youth in Pennsylvania averaged \$1,792 per underage customer. Underage customers were heavier consumers than adults. They drank an average of 4.1 drinks per day; in contrast, legal customers consumed only 1.5.

## ***Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in Pennsylvania***

Underage drinking in Pennsylvania leads to substantial harm due to traffic crashes, violent crime, property crime, unintentional injury, and risky sex.

- During 2009, an estimated 49 traffic fatalities and 2,670 nonfatal traffic injuries were attributable to driving after underage drinking.
- In 2009, an estimated 80 homicides; 33,500 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery and assault; and 55,900 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2007, an estimated 11 alcohol involved fatal burns, drownings, and suicides were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2009, an estimated 854 teen pregnancies and 41,716 teens having risky sex were attributable to underage drinking.

For comparison with other states, in US rather than state prices, the harm from underage drinking per youth in Pennsylvania averages \$995. Such comparisons require caution. In part, they may reflect differences in crime and crash rates, problem-reporting to police, and co-occurring drug use.

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<sup>1</sup> Levy, D.T., Miller, T.R., & Cox, K.C. (2003). Underage drinking: societal costs and seller profits. Working Paper. Calverton, MD: PIRE.

<sup>2</sup> Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-110.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Episode Data Set. (2011). *Substance Abuse Treatment by Primary Substance of Abuse, According to Sex, Age, Race, and Ethnicity, 2009*. Available [On-line]: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/SAMHDA/studies/30462>.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Disease Control (CDC). (2011). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Available [On-line]: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx>.