

While recent research has shown declines in alcohol consumption among college students, the numbers remain alarmingly high for drinking in general and binge drinking. On an average day, 1.2 million college students drink alcohol.¹ In addition, nearly 5.4 million full-time college students, totaling 60 percent of the college population, drank alcohol in the past month, with 3.5 million of them binge drinking.

Binge drinking is defined as heavy consumption of alcohol over a brief period. Drinking by college students can lead to negative consequences for many. It also places strain on community resources needed to address these issues.

Addressing Underage Drinking in College Communities

A campus's reach extends far beyond its physical boundaries. Colleges and universities are an integral part of the social fabric of their communities and play a significant role in setting standards for the community as a whole. Addressing underage drinking at the campus level sends a strong message regarding acceptable community standards and norms. The goals are to create a safe and healthy environment for all affected, reduce the economic and physical burden on public resources, and to strengthen campus/community relationships.

Consequences

Unfortunately, underage and binge drinking in college communities can lead to a whole host of negative consequences that include, but are not limited to, sexual assault, impaired driving, academic failure, and even death. The following estimates, regarding negative consequences attributed to college drinking, have remained relatively unchanged over time:

- Annually, 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor-vehicle crashes.²
- Annually, 696,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.³
- Annually, 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report experiencing alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.⁴
- Roughly 20 percent of college students meet the criteria for an alcohol use disorder (AUD).⁵
- About 1 in 4 college students report academic consequences from drinking, including missing class, falling behind in class, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall.⁶

Considerations for Addressing Drinking

While some strategies will work across different campuses, one cookie-cutter approach to addressing underage and binge drinking on college campuses will not be successful. Each college campus is unique and presents a specific culture that must be factored in when addressing the problems of each campus. We know that students' decisions to drink are affected by, campus social norms and expectancies, campus policies and procedures, availability of alcohol, enforcement of regulations and laws, and the availability of alcohol-free social and recreational options.⁷ Consequently, addressing underage drinking in a college community requires a comprehensive approach: education and

awareness programs, development and implementation of clear and consistent alcohol policies, increased enforcement activities, community involvement, and media enhancement of deterrent efforts.

Helpful Tips and Suggestions

- Assess your campus and community to identify specific issues. Prioritize the issues of greatest impact to your community and identify realistic solutions. Utilizing the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) allows campuses and communities to invest in a planning process for preventing substance use and misuse. The framework includes five steps and two guiding principles that offer prevention professionals a comprehensive process for addressing substance misuse and related behavioral health problems facing their campuses and communities.
- Participate in administration of the Illinois Alcohol and Other Drug Statewide CORE Survey. The purpose of the CORE survey is to establish the current incidence and prevalence of alcohol and other drug use on Illinois' 2- and 4-year campuses. The survey can provide valuable data to schools as they identify strategies to reduce underage and binge drinking.
- Establish a standing committee to review current policies and make recommendations for changes where needed.
- Identify who should be on a campus-community committee. (Student affairs, athletic department, AOD professionals, dean of students, residence hall staff, campus police, local police, Greek life, students, community members, etc.)
- Conduct a thorough review of all relevant state laws and city ordinances to determine if changes are needed.
- Research the structure of your campus. Find out the following information:
 - o Who is in charge?
 - o How are decisions made?
 - o Is there a legal staff or are legal issues contracted out?
 - o Is there a judicial affairs office/student conduct board? If so, how do they function?
 - o Who investigates sexual assaults?
 - o Who investigates complaints of alleged violations of school policy?
 - o What policies exist regarding use of alcohol on and off campus?
 - o What policies exist about alcohol use in residence halls?
 - o What policies exist regarding alcohol use at athletic events, concerts, and special events?
 - o What is the current level of enforcement? Is increased enforcement warranted?

Resources and Tools

SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF): <https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/applying-strategic-prevention-framework>

Illinois Higher Education Center: <https://www.eiu.edu/ihec/>

Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Drug Misuse Prevention and Recovery: <https://hecaod.osu.edu/>

Missouri Partners in Prevention: <http://pip.missouri.edu/>

College AIM – Alcohol Intervention Matrix: <https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/collegeaim/>

References

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