

Excellence in Prevention – descriptions of the prevention programs and strategies with the greatest evidence of success

Name of Program/Strategy: Raising the Minimum Drinking Age

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1. Overview and description

Increasing the legal age for purchase and consumption of alcohol to age 21 and therefore reduces alcohol sales, use, and problems among young people.

2. Implementation considerations (if available)

3. Descriptive information

Areas of Interest	Substance abuse prevention
Outcomes	
Outcome Categories	Alcohol

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Ages	
Gender	Male Female
Races/Ethnicities	American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Hispanic or Latino White Race/ethnicity unspecified
Settings	
Geographic Locations	Urban Suburban Rural and/or frontier Tribal
Implementation History	
NIH Funding/CER Studies	
Adaptations	
Adverse Effects	
IOM Prevention Categories	Universal

4. Outcomes

Scientific Evidence

In the most comprehensive review to date, an analysis of 78 measures of all identified published studies on the drinking age from 1960 to 1999, a total of 132 documents, conclude that, compared to a wide range of education programs and efforts to reduce drinking among high school students, college students, and other teenagers, increasing the legal age for purchase and consumption of alcohol to 21 appears to have been the most effective strategy (Wagenaar and Toomey, 2002), including 45 percent showed that a higher legal drinking age was associated with reduced alcohol consumption among youth.

In 57 published studies that assessed the effects of changes in the legal minimum drinking age on over 100 crash outcome measures (e.g. fatal crashes, drink-driving crashes, self-reported driving after drinking), more than 50 percent indicated that raising the drinking age reduced crashes and lowering the

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age raised the crash rate. The studies showed a statistically significant effect of changing the drinking age on vehicle crashes (Wagenaar & Toomey, 2002).

A review of 32 published research studies both before and after the minimum drinking age law changed found solid scientific evidence that increasing the minimum age for purchasing alcohol reduced the number of alcohol-involved traffic crashes for those younger than 21 (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1987).

The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimated that a drinking age of 21 reduced traffic fatalities by 846 deaths in 1997 and prevented a total of 17,359 deaths since 1975 (NHTSA, 1997).

Increasing the minimum drinking age significantly decreases self-reported drinking by young people, the number of fatal traffic crashes, and the number of arrests for DUI. The result of implementation of a minimum drinking age of 21 years in New York State showed a 70 percent decrease in self-reported alcohol purchases by 19- and 20-year-olds (Yu, Varone & Shacket, 1997).

The minimum age affected self-reported alcohol use among young people and reduced traffic crashes and the effect on vehicle crashes continued well after young people reached the legal drinking age (O'Malley & Wagenaar, 1991).

Implementation of the uniform minimum legal drinking age of 21 in the United States reduced the overall prevalence of drinking and driving (Klepp, Schmid & Mirray, 1996).

Raising the minimum legal drinking age from 18 to 21 decreased single vehicle nighttime (SVN) crashes involving young drivers from 11 percent to 16 percent at all levels of crash severity (Saffer & Grossman, 1987a, b; Wagenaar, 1981, 1986b; Wagenaar & Maybee, 1986a).

Data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia for the years 1982 through 1997, showed that enactment of age 21 as the minimum drinking age law was responsible for a 19 percent net decrease in fatal crashes involving young drinking drivers after controlling for driving exposure, beer consumption, enactment of zero-tolerance laws, and other relevant changes in the laws during that period (Voas et al., 1999).

- 5. Cost effectiveness report (Washington State Institute of Public Policy – if available)**
- 6. Washington State results (from Performance Based Prevention System (PBPS) – if available)**

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7. Who is using this program/strategy

Washington Counties	Oregon Counties
All counties	

8. Study populations

9. Quality of studies

The documents below were reviewed for Quality of Research. The research point of contact can provide information regarding the studies reviewed and the availability of additional materials, including those from more recent studies that may have been conducted.

References

- Klepp, K. I., Schmid, L. A., & Murray, D. M. (1996). Effects of the increased minimum drinking age law on drinking and driving behavior among adolescents. *Addiction Research*, 4(3), 237-244.
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- O'Malley, P. M., & Wagenaar, A. C. (1991). Effects of minimum drinking age laws on alcohol use, related behaviors and traffic crash involvement among American youth: 1976–1987. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 52(5), 478-491.
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- Voas, R. B., Tippetts, A. S., & Fell, J. C. (1999). The United States limits drinking by youth under age 21: Does this reduce fatal crash involvements?, 43rd Annual Proceedings of the Association for the Advancement of Automotive Medicine, September 20-21, 1999, Barcelona (Sitges), Spain pp. 265-278). Des Plaines, IL: Association for the Advancement of Automotive Medicine.
- Wagenaar, A. C. (1981). *The Minimum Legal Drinking Age: A Time-Series Impact Evaluation*, Dissertation Abstracts Int. 41 (8B) pp. 2984).

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Wagenaar, A. C. (1986). Preventing highway crashes by raising the legal minimum age for drinking: the Michigan experience 6 years later. *Journal of Safety Research*, 17(3), 101-109.

Wagenaar, A. C., & Maybee, R. G. (1986). The legal minimum drinking age in Texas: Effects of an increase from 18 to 19. *Journal of Safety Research*, 17, 165-178.

Wagenaar, A. C., & Toomey, T. L. (2002). Effects of minimum drinking age laws: Review and analyses of the literature from 1960 to 2000. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*(Supplement 14), 206-225.

Yu, J., Varone, R., & Shacket, R. W. (1997). Fifteen-year review of drinking age laws: Preliminary findings of the 1996 New York State Youth Alcohol Survey. New York: Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse.

10. Readiness for Dissemination

Revised Code of Washington

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) is the compilation of all permanent laws now in force. It is a collection of Session Laws (enacted by the Legislature, and signed by the Governor, or enacted via the initiative process), arranged by topic, with amendments added and repealed laws removed. It does not include temporary laws such as appropriations acts.

RCW 66.44.270— Furnishing liquor to minors — Possession, use — Penalties — Exhibition of effects — Exceptions.

(1) It is unlawful for any person to sell, give, or otherwise supply liquor to any person under the age of twenty-one years or permit any person under that age to consume liquor on his or her premises or on any premises under his or her control. For the purposes of this subsection, "premises" includes real property, houses, buildings, and other structures, and motor vehicles and watercraft. A violation of this subsection is a gross misdemeanor punishable as provided for in chapter 9A.20 RCW.

(2)(a) It is unlawful for any person under the age of twenty-one years to possess, consume, or otherwise acquire any liquor. A violation of this subsection is a gross misdemeanor punishable as provided for in chapter 9A.20 RCW.

(b) It is unlawful for a person under the age of twenty-one years to be in a public place, or to be in a motor vehicle in a public place, while exhibiting the effects of having consumed liquor. For purposes of this subsection, exhibiting the effects of having consumed liquor means that a person has the odor of liquor on his or her breath and either: (i) Is in possession of or close proximity to a container that has or recently had liquor in it; or (ii) by speech, manner, appearance, behavior, lack of coordination, or otherwise, exhibits that he or she is under the influence of liquor. This subsection (2)(b) does not apply if the person is in the presence of a parent or guardian or has consumed or is consuming liquor under circumstances described in subsection (4) or (5) of this section.

(3) Subsections (1) and (2)(a) of this section do not apply to liquor given or permitted to be given to a person under the age of twenty-one years by a parent or guardian and consumed in the presence of the

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parent or guardian. This subsection shall not authorize consumption or possession of liquor by a person under the age of twenty-one years on any premises licensed under chapter 66.24 RCW.

(4) This section does not apply to liquor given for medicinal purposes to a person under the age of twenty-one years by a parent, guardian, physician, or dentist.

(5) This section does not apply to liquor given to a person under the age of twenty-one years when such liquor is being used in connection with religious services and the amount consumed is the minimal amount necessary for the religious service.

(6) Conviction or forfeiture of bail for a violation of this section by a person under the age of twenty-one years at the time of such conviction or forfeiture shall not be a disqualification of that person to acquire a license to sell or dispense any liquor after that person has attained the age of twenty-one years.

11. Costs (if available)

12. Contacts

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
West Building
Washington, DC 20590
(888) 327-4236

Learn More by Visiting: www.nhtsa.dot.gov