

Consequences of Underage Drinking & A Lower MLDA

Health Issues

• Individuals who start drinking earlier than age 21 are more likely to be a driver in a motor vehicle crash, be injured, and be in a physical fight, according to a recent study. The younger the individual, the more likely he or she will experience these outcomes after drinking.¹⁰

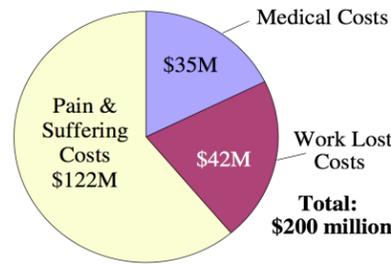
• Repeated use of alcohol during adolescence can lead to deficits in cognitive abilities, including learning and memory.

• Heavy drinking during adolescence and young adulthood is associated with poor cognitive functioning in young adulthood.¹¹

• Serious chronic diseases involving the liver, heart, and digestive system are associated with heavy alcohol consumption.

• Attention and visual/spatial skills can be particularly

Costs of Underage Drinking Vermont 2005



The cost of pain and suffering top a pricey list of expenses related to underage drinking in Vermont.

affected by early alcohol use, and significant abnormalities in brain structure and function can also occur.¹²

Financial Issues

• If Vermont lowered the 21MLDA, the State would lose \$17.4 million in National Highway Traffic Safety Administration funds.¹³

• Underage drinking costs Vermont \$200 million in 2005, ranking us 4th nationally for underage drinking-related costs to the state on a per-youth

basis, according to a study from the Pacific Institute of Research and Evaluation.¹⁴

• These costs will only increase if Vermont's MLDA is lowered.

Safety Issues

• The number of fatal crashes involving alcohol dropped to 25 in Vermont in 2002, exactly half the number seen in 1986, the year the MLDA was raised.

• Prior to the 21 MLDA, 18-20-year old drivers who drank in Vermont were over-represented by 200 percent among the total number of drivers in alcohol-related crashes. That number has dropped by half under the 21 MLDA.¹⁵

• In the continental United States in the 1980s, data showed that a lower MLDA produced an 11 percent increase in fatalities among youth, according to motor vehicle fatality data.¹⁶



Mission: To build a safe and healthy Vermont for us all by organizing prevention advocates to work collaboratively on issues of policy, practice and attitude related to substance abuse.

Vision: All of Vermont's communities will be safe and healthy.

Maintain the 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA)

The 21 MLDA law is the most well-studied alcohol policy in the United States, with 40 years of research behind it. What does this research tell us?

• Americans under 21 report less excessive drinking than the same age group in 31 different European countries.

• An estimated 17,359 lives have been saved since the implementation of the 21MLDA law, according to the National Highway Transportation Safety Agency (NHTSA).

• The 2007 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) shows that students drink between 40 percent and 65 percent less than they did 14 years ago.

• When people begin drinking later in life, they are less likely to develop alcohol dependence and abuse problems.

UNDERAGE DRINKING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES COST THE STATE OF VERMONT AN ESTIMATED \$200 MILLION IN 2005.

VERMONT WOULD LOSE \$17.4 MILLION IN FEDERAL HIGHWAY FUNDS IF THE MLDA WERE LOWERED.

Supporters of the 21MLDA

The following noteworthy organizations support maintaining the 21 MLDA:

- American Medical Association
- National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine
- National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Surgeon General of the United States

- World Health Organization (WHO) Alcohol and Public Policy Group
- WHO Expert Committee on Problems Related to Alcohol
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
- Governors Highway Safety Association
- National Safety Council
- International Association of Chiefs of Police

Prevention Works! Necessary Goals

- Age 21 must remain the Minimum Legal Drinking Age.
- The public will be provided with the facts about responsible drinking behaviors, the effects of alcohol on adolescent brain development, the European myth, and the financial losses to Vermont's economy due to underage drinking.
- Parents and others who are working to reduce and prevent underage drinking and its consequences will be supported in their efforts.
- Evidence-based programs will be implemented, and resources allocated to Vermont's colleges to assist their efforts to reduce underage and excessive drinking on their campuses.

For more information about the details of this publication, or to learn more about Prevention Works!, please contact Christine Peterson at (802) 479-7378 or teenleadaa@myfairpoint.net.

Taking Apart the European Myth

Among those who advocate for lowering the MLDA, Europe is seen as proof-positive that a younger drinking age works. After all, adolescents learn to drink responsibly when exposed to alcohol at an earlier age, right? Well, a recent study funded by the U.S. Department of Justice indicates otherwise ...

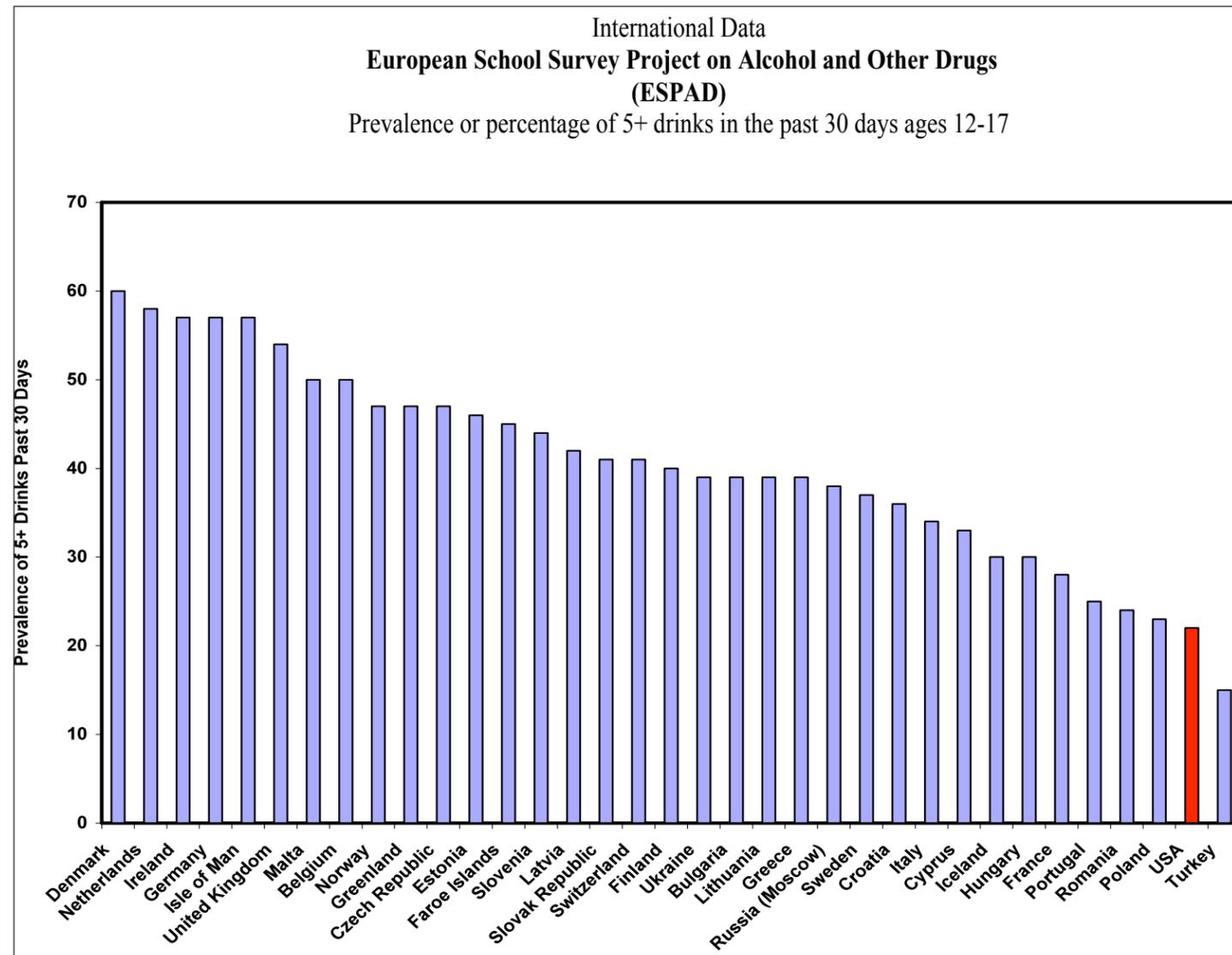
- More youth from European countries report drinking in the past 30 days, than youth in the United States.¹

- In most European countries, more



- The majority of European countries have higher rates of intoxication among young people than does the United States. Less than one quarter of European countries have intoxication rates lower or equivalent to those in the United States.³

- Europe has two times the number of alcohol-related diseases as the United States, according to WHO.⁴



Old Enough To Fight Isn't Old Enough To Drink

All U.S. military bases have adopted the 21 MLDA.

If you're old enough to fight and die for your country, you should be old enough to have a beer, according to advocates of lowering the MLDA. The U.S. military doesn't agree.

- All U.S. military bases maintain the 21 MLDA.

- U.S. military bases can choose to adopt the MLDA of Canada or Mexico if they are located within 50 miles of the border, but they do not.

- Fort Bliss, located in New Mexico, was the last U.S. military base to adopt the 21 MLDA in 2008. This was done to reduce high rates of alcohol-related problems like drunk driving crashes, fights, domestic violence, and sexual assaults, all alcohol-related problems.⁵

- "The problem, of course, is that physical ability alone is too simplistic a measure for wider societal standards," said U.S. Air Force Colonel Evan Hoapili. "For example, you have the physical ability to turn wheels and push pedals long before the minimum driving age. You have the physical ability to reproduce earlier than the legal age of marriage. And you have the physical ability to pull a trigger well in advance of the youngest age to serve in the military."



'Forbidden Fruit' vs. 'Low-Hanging Fruit'

Does the 21 MLDA turn alcohol into a forbidden fruit, tempting and hard to say no to? Or would lowering the MLDA end up making alcohol a low-hanging fruit, within reach and plentiful?

- A study of 290 first-year university students showed that students base their attitude and behavior around alcohol on what they see their parents doing.⁶

- That study also showed that parental approval of underage drinking during the latter high school years was a characteristic that could be used to consistently predict that those students would engage in drinking in college and experience negative consequences as a result.⁷

- Research shows that adolescents are more likely to develop alcohol dependency issues when they begin drinking early.⁸

- A "trickle down" effect, in which older teens provide alcohol to younger adolescents, has been found when the MLDA is lowered.⁹

1 U.S. Dept. of Justice (2005) Youth Drinking Rates and Problems: A Comparison of European Countries and the United States. Prepared by Joel Grube, PhD. Prevention Research Center, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 World Health Organization (2006) Framework for alcohol policy in the WHO European Region. Copenhagen, Denmark.

5 Caldwell, A., Associated Press, 06/01/2008, http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2008/05/ap_fortbliss_drinking_052908/.

6 Abar, C., et al. "The impact of parental modeling and permissibility on alcohol use and experienced negative drinking consequences in college," *Addictive Behaviors*, Vol. 34:6-7, June-July 2009, pp. 542-547.

7 Ibid

8 Agrawal, A. et al, "Evidence for an interaction between age at first drink and genetic influences on DSM-IV alcohol dependence symptoms," *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, published online Sept. 17, 2009. <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/jour-nal/122600955/abstract>

9 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.

10 Hingson, R. et al., "Age of Drinking Onset and Injuries, Motor Vehicle Crashes, and Physical Fights After Drinking and When Not Drinking"

11 Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, Vol. 33:4, April 2009, pp 1-8.

12 Ibid

13 Vermont Dept. of Health. Op cit.

14 Pacific Institute of Research & Evaluation.

15 Center for Science in the Public Interest; Alcohol Policies Project Fact Sheet; Jim Hall, Chairman, National Transportation Safety Board, at press conference on the National Drunk & Drugged Driving Prevention Month, Washington, DC December 18, 1997.

16 Cook, PJ & Tauchen, G, "The Effects of Minimum Drinking Age Legislation on Youthful Auto Fatalities, 1970-1977". *Journal of Legal Studies*, 15(4): 159-162, 198