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prevention
Tactics

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Workshops on Community Action to Reduce Binge Drinking are available to communities, coalitions, agencies or programs interested in reducing this problem in local communities.

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is published periodically by CARS under its Community Prevention Institute contract with the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (DADP). The purpose of this publication is to help practitioners in the prevention field stay abreast of best practices emerging from current research and to provide practical tools and resources for implementing proven strategies.

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¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, December 2003. <http://www.DrugAbuse Statistics.samhsa.gov>

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, December 2003. <http://www.DrugAbuse Statistics.samhsa.gov>.

³ Henry Wechsler et al. "College Binge Drinking in the 1990s: A Continuing Problem," *Journal of American College Health*, 48 (March 2000).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ U S Department of Health and Human Services. National Institutes of Health. NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking, "A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges," 2002.

prevention **Tactics**

By Sandra Hoover

BINGE DRINKING:

Community Action to Reduce Binge Drinking

INTRODUCTION

Binge drinking is the consumption of alcohol to the extent that harmful consequences - health, academic, legal, and others - may be expected. The term binge drinking is arguably the most recognized and used in the media. Other terms include "high risk," "hazardous," "dangerous," "harmful," and "unsafe" drinking. Over the last decade, media and the public have paid particular attention to the problems of college binge drinking. At the same time, research on the drinking behavior of college students has prompted educational institutions, college officials, government agencies, foundations, and others to address this problem. Colleges across the country have forged partnerships with their communities with an emphasis on changing college student behavior. Clearly, this is an important goal; however, binge drinking is not strictly a college problem. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reports that in 2002, 51 percent of persons aged 12 or older were current



drinkers, and current drinkers, aged 12-25 years old, regardless of college enrollment, were heavier drinkers than those aged 26 or older.¹ In the recent (2002) Monitoring the Future Report, approximately 28.6% twelfth graders, 22.4% tenth graders and 12.4% eighth graders reported binge drinking 30 days prior to the survey.

The NSDUH findings and those from other surveys (see Table 1) underscore the importance of viewing binge drinking on a continuum, as a behavior that begins in the early teens and continues into the young adult years. The impact on the individual ranges from poor school performance to unplanned or unprotected sex to traffic injuries or fatalities, and violence, including homicide and suicide. This behavior not only affects the individual drinker, but has an impact on the community as well with increased crime, vandalism, property damage, and economic costs to the community associated with dealing with these problems.

Recent definition by NIAAA

A "binge" is a pattern of drinking alcohol that brings the blood alcohol level concentration (BAC) to 0.08 gram percent or above. For the typical adult, this pattern corresponds to consuming 5 or more drinks (male), or 4 or more drinks (female), in about 2 hours. Binge drinking is clearly dangerous for the drinker and for society.

* In the above definition, a "drink" refers to half an ounce of alcohol (e.g., one 12-oz. beer, one 5-oz. glass of wine, or one 1.5-oz. shot of distilled spirits).

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Tactics (tak'tiks) n. **1.** a plan for promoting a desired end. **2.** the art of the possible.

Table 1. Alcohol Use and Risks among Young Adults²

- Almost 2 in 5 young adults, aged 18-24, regardless of college enrollment, reported binge drinking.
- Current drinkers aged 12-17 and young adults aged 18-25 drank more drinks per day on the days they drank alcohol than adults aged 26 or older.
- Current drinkers aged 18-25 were more likely to drive under the influence of alcohol during the past year than drinkers aged 26 or older.
- Full-time students, aged 18-21 had higher rates of binge drinking than nonstudents, ranging from below 40% to nearly 60%.
- Nonstudents, aged 18-21, reported binge rates from approximately 30% to about 45%, peaking at age 21 for both students and nonstudents.
- In the 2001 Harvard College Alcohol Study (CAS), 44% of college students reported that they had engaged in binge drinking behavior, the same rate as in the 1993 study.³
- Approximately 35% of college men and 25% of college woman got drunk 3 or more times in the 30 days prior to the survey (CAS, 2001).⁴
- Data from the CAS show that nearly 70% of binge drinking college students began binge drinking in high school.⁵

Table 2. Problems Resulting From Binge Drinking

Impact on individuals:

- Unplanned/unprotected sex or other risky sexual behavior
- Fights, sexual assault or date rape, other violence
- Traffic injuries or fatalities
- Other unintentional injuries
- Contributes to homicides and suicides
- Damage to physical, cognitive and social development
- Poor school performance

Impact on the community:

- Vandalism and property damage
- Increased noise, trash
- Costs associated with increased police calls, medical/emergency services, lost productivity, etc.

A Comprehensive Community Approach to Binge Drinking:

Much work in the prevention field has emphasized changing the individual, by educating young people about the dangers of drinking, especially binge drinking. However, education alone is not enough. An environment that does not support good choices seriously undermines the education and awareness programs presented to youth. Thus, while young people get messages from their parents, teachers, and guidance counselors, among others, about the dangers of alcohol use, advertisements and media portray drinking as the essence of “cool”-- fun, sexy, and glamorous. Young people report they have easy access to alcohol, either buying it themselves or getting it from adult providers. They are aware of the attitude of many adults that “thank goodness, it’s only alcohol” or “kids will just be kids,” “it’s a rite of passage.” In many instances, they live in communities that place a lower

R E S O U R C E S

National Data Sources—Websites

- **American Medical Association Office of Alcohol**
www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/3337.html
Information on Robert Wood Johnson Foundation initiatives: A Matter of Degree: Reducing High Risk Drinking among College Students (AMOD) (see A Matter of Degree Advocacy Initiative case study) and Reducing Underage Drinking through State Coalitions (RUDC). Policy papers, case studies, data, surveys, and other AMA activities regarding alcohol.
- **Harvard School of Public Health, College Alcohol Study**
www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas/
Data and articles from the College Alcohol Study from 1993 to the present. Evaluation information on A Matter of Degree.
- **Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention.** www.edc.org/hec
Extensive information on AOD issues. Publications, statistics, news clippings, information on conferences. Source for environmental prevention strategies in the college setting (see Lehigh University’s Project IMPACT: An Environmental Management Case Study), evaluation, engaging college presidents in alcohol issues, conducting environmental assessments, etc.
- **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).**
www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/
This is the website of the NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking. Includes the report to NIAAA, A Call to Action, commissioned papers of the Task Force panelists, and a PowerPoint presentation on college binge drinking.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).**
www.health.org
This is the website for the Clearinghouse—a variety of publications and statistics and information about programs. A useful publication is Preventing Problems Related to Alcohol Availability: Environmental Approaches. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (formerly the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse) can be found at www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov
- **University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, Monitoring the Future (MTF), National Results on Adolescent Drug Use.** www.monitoringthefuture.org
This report, tracking behavior and perceptions of 8th, 10th and 12th graders, appears annually, in December. MTF has also collected data on college students.
- **University of Minnesota, Alcohol Epidemiology Program.** www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol
Alcohol policies in the US, research articles on adolescent drinking, community organizing efforts, community prevention trials, alcohol-involved traffic crashes, training of alcohol outlet managers and servers, natural experiments with changes in state and local alcohol policies, and public opinion surveys.

priority on enforcing campus alcohol policies or even the minimum legal drinking age. We need to stop sending mixed messages and help young people to develop safe and healthy behavior by creating a healthier and safe community environment that is consistent with the messages we convey.

Environmental Prevention

This is the role of environmental prevention—to change those factors in the environment that influence poor choices. Rather than focusing on individual behavior, this approach seeks to change community norms, policies, and/or laws, using policy and media advocacy strategies. In a nutshell, environmental policies make it easier to do what is safe and healthy and harder to do what isn't.

Environmental and individual changes are not mutually exclusive concepts. They operate at different levels and should be seen as complementary, not in opposition. That said, change at the community level has a greater impact on behavior and is a more efficient use of resources. Findings from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) task force on college drinking, and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) model programs demonstrate the effectiveness of using science-based, environmental prevention models to effect change at the local level.

An environmental prevention model includes strategic use of data, community organizing, policy and media advocacy, and enforcement to bring about long-lasting change. Data are used to identify the problem, develop strategy, plan, and monitor progress. Community organizing ensures that community stakeholders are identified and involved to gain public support and change the norms. Environmental change often requires policy

NIAAA TASK FORCE FINDINGS⁶

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL (Evidence of success with general populations that could be applied to college environments)

- Increased enforcement of MLDA (Minimum Legal Drinking Age) laws
- Implementation, increased publicity, and enforcement of other laws to reduce alcohol-impaired driving
- Restrictions on alcohol retail density
- Increased price and excise taxes on alcoholic beverages
- Responsible beverage service policies in social and commercial settings
- Formation of a campus community coalition

PROMISING PRACTICES AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL (Evidence of logical and theoretical promise, but require more comprehensive evaluation)

- Increasing publicity about enforcement of underage drinking laws/eliminating “mixed” messages
- Provision of “safe rides” programs
- Regulation of happy hours and sales

INEFFECTIVE

- Informational, knowledge-based or values clarification interventions when used alone.

change whether it is mandated as in laws or regulations or voluntary via business or social policies or procedures. Media advocacy is the strategic use of media to gain public and policymaker support for policy or norms change. Finally, enforcement is essential to ensuring that the changes made are sustained over time.

Using an environmental change approach does not absolve youth for their actions. Certainly, they should be held accountable for their behavior, however, they are not the only ones responsible for binge drinking problems. Youth generally do not produce, promote, distribute, or sell alcohol; adults and adult businesses do. Youth do not set alcohol prices, taxes, advertising and promotion policies, nor establish laws and regulations, adult voters and businesses do.

Table 3	
ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS	SAMPLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES
Easy access and availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrict outlet types, number • Restrict serving practices • Require server and retailer training
Low cost and taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise excise taxes • Restrict price promotion • Increase licensing fees
Advertising and promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter-advertising • Restrict sponsorship of sports and musical events • Ban advertising in or near schools and campuses
Weak laws/Unenforced laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement is high priority for leadership • Community support for enforcement and/or strengthening laws
High consumption/abusive drinking norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing binge drinking is a high priority in the community • Social host policies • Alcohol-free settings/activities

A comprehensive community approach incorporates culturally-appropriate strategies that target a variety of groups from young people who are binge drinking to prevention specialists, law enforcement officers, policy-makers, school officials, parents, and the media. Table 3 provides some examples of specific actions communities can undertake.

Next Steps

Recognizing that the importance of addressing the problem of binge drinking among youth and young adults, CSAP revised its state

funding program to include this issue. CSAP recently awarded the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP) a State Incentive Grant (SIG) to develop community strategies to reduce binge drinking among youth and adults, ages 12-25. The State SIG goals include the application of evidence-based community and environmental primary prevention approaches that are culturally appropriate. The Community Prevention Institute, funded by ADP, provides technical assistance and training to support and enhance community-based primary prevention programs.