

SWISS CHEESE RELEASE – PUT ON LOCAL LETTERHEAD)

Press Release

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[Local Group/AMA] Calls for Local, State and Federal
Action Following Release of Long-Awaited
Federal Report on Underage Drinking

Finding That Underage Drinking Costs the U.S. \$53 Billion,
National Report Outlines Prevention Measures

[city, state] – [local group] today applauded the release of a national report on underage drinking and called for increased action to prevent underage alcohol abuse. *Reducing Underage Drinking - A Collective Responsibility*, by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, is the first and largest comprehensive federal study on underage drinking. In 2002, bipartisan legislation commissioned the complete examination of existing alcohol prevention programs in America to establish a more effective underage drinking prevention campaign.

The long-awaited study finds that the annual social costs of underage drinking in the U.S. is \$53 billion a year and exposes what has been a largely invisible public health epidemic. The report analyzes the most recent data on underage drinking and addresses the best strategies to prevent youth from using and abusing alcohol. *Reducing Underage Drinking - A Collective Responsibility* is seen by many in public health and public safety fields as the first step to creating a comprehensive, national plan to combat underage drinking.

“Because we live in a society that considers alcohol use a rite of passage, the health and safety dangers of underage alcohol abuse have been largely ignored,” said Richard Yoast, Ph.D., Director of the American Medical Association’s Office of Alcohol and other Drug Abuse. “The alcohol industry and its \$4.5 billion annual marketing efforts play a major role in keeping these dangers quiet—in fact the National Beer Wholesalers Association unsuccessfully lobbied to keep this report from ever seeing the light of day.”

Key findings from the report include:

- underage drinking is closely related to the overall extent and patterns of drinking in society and is affected by the same factors that affect adult consumption;
- underage drinking cannot be successfully addressed by focusing on youth alone;
- efforts to reduce and prevent underage drinking must focus on parents, other adults and strategies that engage the society at large; and
- alcoholic beverages are far cheaper today than they were in the 1960s and 1970s.

“The AMA believes this report is a step in the right direction and applauds many of its prevention suggestions,” said Dr. Yoast. “But we must hold the alcohol industry accountable for its preying on our youth. We need solutions that are vigorous enough to counter wide-spread underage alcohol abuse and the powerful influence of an alcohol industry thirsty for profits. . We know, for example, that environmental forces such as targeted alcohol marketing campaigns play a huge part in a child’s decision to drink.”

Among the key recommendations in the report are support for community organizing to reduce regional underage drinking rates; comprehensive prevention programs and environmental changes on college campuses; and raising taxes on alcohol. Studies show that price is the single most effective deterrent for youth, and increased alcohol taxes would help states pay for costly alcohol treatment programs in a time of record budget deficits.

“Taxes alone won’t solve the problem,” says First Last, Title, Local RUDC or AMOD org. “To make a dent in our kids’ alcohol abuse, we need to proactively change the environment in which they live. Parents, local businesses, youth organizations, government agencies, universities and faith groups must join forces to create an atmosphere where underage drinking is actively discouraged.”

The American Medical Association and [local RUDC or AMOD group] are advocating legislative measures, such as requiring registration for keg sales so there is greater accountability for serving minors; diligence on the part of law enforcement in penalizing merchants that sell to minors; and parental/guardian recognition that “social hosting,” or allowing their children and their friends to drink at home, can have serious, even deadly consequences.

More information about Reducing Underage Drinking through Coalition or A Matter of degree visit: www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/3557.html