



More than 20,000 lives saved...and counting. More than 20,000 lives saved...and counting. More than 20,000 lives saved...and counting. More than 20,000 lives saved...and counting. More than 20,000 lives saved...and counting. More than 20,000 lives saved...and counting.

History in the Making

Legislation has saved lives, but new bills aim to save even more

More than 20,000. That's how many young people have been saved since the 21 Minimum Drinking Age Law was enacted in 1985. More than 20,000. That's equivalent to the approximate student body of several universities, the seating capacity of a number of sporting arenas or the population of countless towns across the United States.

Without question, the 21 Minimum Drinking Age Law is one of the most effective pieces of legislation to have

young people as the 21 Minimum Drinking Age Law has been.

A Campaign for Change

It is quite a contrast to state that the 21 Minimum Drinking Age Law is one of the most effective laws ever enacted and then to go on to say that underage drinking remains the No. 1 youth drug problem.

The incongruity is due, in part, to adults. Many parents don't know or don't want to know about their

and mental impact that alcohol has on growing adolescents but still provide alcohol to young people.

Since 1998, MADD and other public health groups have been urging Congress to create a national underage drinking prevention media campaign that would target adults. The purpose of this campaign would be to educate adults about the dangers of youth alcohol use and of the consequences adults would face for facilitating underage drinking. The campaign has become a focal point for the public health community since other media prevention campaigns, such as teen pregnancy and youth smoking, have been successful in changing risky behavior.

For years, the alcohol industry has intensely opposed the idea of an underage drinking prevention media campaign. As a way to stall the campaign, the industry requested that Congress direct the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to conduct a study on underage drinking prevention efforts. Unfortunately for the alcohol industry, the NAS did just that.

After the NAS examined hundreds of studies and compiled the best research, they created one strategic

report. The release of the historic NAS report in September 2003 proved to be a blueprint of action for curbing underage drinking. The report uses science-based solutions—many of which the alcohol industry vehemently opposes, such as more stringent alcohol advertising practices and increased alcohol excise taxes. It also calls for the adult-oriented media campaign MADD has long pursued.

Initiatives for Success

Since the release of the NAS report, MADD has been working with members of Congress and their staff to create a bill that would bring the NAS report's science-based solutions to fruition. In July 2004, after months of careful thought and negotiation, seven members of Congress—Senators Mike DeWine (R-OH) and Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Representatives Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), Frank Wolf (R-VA), Tom Osborne (R-NE), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Zach Wamp (R-TN)—have introduced two companion bills. These are the most significant initiatives to combat underage drinking in 20 years because they would:

- Establish a coordinated leadership role for the federal government to combat underage drinking through an interagency coordinating committee. Right now, responsibilities for underage drinking prevention are scattered throughout at least eight executive-level federal departments and almost twice as many agencies. When the NAS report was written, there was no effort to coordinate all underage drinking prevention initiatives within or across departments. This meant wasted efforts or worse, no efforts, as agencies thought certain areas

were someone else's responsibility. Progress has already been made with an informal Interagency Coordinating Committee on Reducing Underage Drinking. The bill would formalize a group at the federal level.

- Create an annual report card for the federal government and for states so the nation is able to monitor the progress of key underage drinking indicators. Because information is scattered across federal and state agencies, it is very difficult to determine whether we are making progress in the fight against underage drinking. Only by knowing what has worked can we

groups such as MADD know what works to combat underage drinking but do not have the funds to implement the solutions. Other times, new solutions don't go beyond the local level because there is no money to evaluate programs and model them in other areas. Community efforts are a necessary part of any underage drinking solution.

- Expand and fund additional underage drinking research. There is so much we don't know about underage drinking. The legislation seeks to increase federal research and data collection on youth alcohol use, including reporting on the types and brands



The 21 Minimum Drinking Age Law is estimated to save 1,000 lives each year.

focus on activities that will work in the future. The bills would set up a report that monitors what federal agencies and states are doing about underage drinking, how the efforts have worked and how much underage drinking occurs.

- Authorize a national, adult-oriented media campaign to prevent underage drinking. Such a campaign would help educate adults about the dangers of underage drinking and the consequences of facilitating illegal access. It also would help change how our culture responds to the nation's deadliest youth drug problem.

- Establish community grants for coalitions to prevent underage drinking generally and at the college level in particular. Quite often, community

of alcohol youth consume, and more information about the impact underage drinking has on the developing adolescent brain.

MADD Is Making It Happen

MADD is working hard to get this legislation passed. If enacted, the nation would have, for the first time in history, a foundation to tackle the most significant public health problem our children face.

Please visit www.madd.org and click on the "Activism" tab to learn more about these important lifesaving bills.

Twenty years ago, one of the most effective pieces of legislation in history was enacted—the 21 Minimum Drinking Age Law. It is time to make history again.

Despite the success of the 21 law, underage drinking remains the nation's No. 1 youth drug problem.



been enacted. In fact, it is estimated that the law saves 1,000 young lives every year.

Yet, despite the law's efficacy, underage drinking rates have remained at alarmingly high levels for the past decade. Two new companion bills that are up for debate in Congress aim to fix that, which could be as significant in saving our nation's

children's alcohol use. The common attitude is "at least it isn't drugs." This is despite the fact that alcohol kills more young people than all other illegal drugs combined.

Another issue with adults is their lack of education about the serious consequences that can occur with underage alcohol use. And, there are some adults who are aware of the negative physical

and mental impact that alcohol has on growing adolescents but still provide alcohol to young people.

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