



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
11:00 a.m., October 9, 2007

CONTACT:
Annmarie Edwards
(301) 871-5852
annmarie.edwards@gmmb.com
Misty Moyse
(469) 420-4558
misty.moyse@madd.org

MADD, AMA, NTSB, IIHS and Others Launch *Support 21* Coalition
Overwhelming Research in Support of 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age Law's
Lifesaving Impact—Young Lives Protected, Roadways Safer

(Washington) – Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the American Medical Association (AMA), the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) today announced the formation of *Support 21*, a coalition of leading health and safety groups in support of the 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age Law (21 Law). The 21 Law is one of the most studied and successful alcohol-related laws on the books. Since states began setting the legal drinking age to 21, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates nearly 25,000 lives have been saved.

MADD convened this group of stakeholders from science, medical and public health organizations committed to the vigorous support for the science and effectiveness of the 21 Law, to detail the overwhelming research that proves the lifesaving benefits of the law.

“Science speaks for itself. When the legal drinking age is 21, lives are saved and injuries are prevented,” said Glynn Birch, national president of MADD. “The 21 Law saves lives on the road and keeps countless youth from starting to drink at early ages. The earlier a youth begins drinking alcohol, the more likely they are to become alcohol dependent, binge drink and to drive drunk later in life.”

There have been almost 50 peer-reviewed studies that specifically looked at the effect of the 21 Law on traffic fatalities. Each one of them found that an increased drinking age significantly lowers alcohol-related fatalities. Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) looked at over 50 studies from states and countries that changed their drinking ages. They found

that increasing the drinking age decreases fatalities and crashes by 16 percent and that lowering drinking ages increases fatalities and crashes by 10 percent.

“The Safety Board has long recognized the need for laws that prevent alcohol consumption by people under age 21, and we have not identified any new information that merits changing the Board’s position,” said NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker. “Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of death and alcohol the leading drug of choice for teenagers. Our society should not tolerate the repeal or weakening of laws that have been proven to save teenagers’ lives.”

Recent public opinion research shows strong support for the 21 minimum drinking age, despite efforts to undermine the lifesaving law. According to a July 2007 Gallup poll, more than three in four Americans (77 percent) say they would oppose a federal law that would lower the drinking age in all states to 18. Six in 10 Americans support stricter penalties for underage drinking.

“It is impossible to ignore the growing body of literature demonstrating the dangers of early alcohol use for children and adolescents,” said AMA President Ronald M. Davis, M.D. “The adolescent brain is a work in progress, marked by significant development in areas of the brain responsible for learning, memory, complex thinking, planning, inhibition and emotional regulation. The neurotoxic effect of excessive alcohol use has been shown to be a danger to these key regions of the maturing adolescent brain.”

There are ripple effects of underage drinking that go beyond the problems of drunk driving and binge drinking. It costs American taxpayers nearly \$61.9 billion annually, according to the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. That includes medical costs, work loss and lost quality of life. Also of great concern and often not quantified, is the pressure kids face to drink. Studies show that about 16 percent of alcohol is purchased by youth.

“Statements made in recent news reports reflect ignorance about the years of research comprising the scientific justification for these laws,” said Adrian Lund, president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. “Study after study has found that when the drinking age was lowered, nighttime fatal crashes for young drivers went up. When the drinking age was raised, crashes went down almost 30 percent. It’s irresponsible to assert that untested educational programs could alter these results. If we allow states to lower the drinking age again, more teens will drink and drive and more will die.”

MADD also announced today that a summit of stakeholders will convene in the spring to determine the most effective strategies for arming parents, enforcement leaders and communities with underage drinking prevention resources and tools. Adults are the number one supplier of alcohol to those under 21 and parents are the number one influencer of teen alcohol behavior.

The 21 Law is a vital tool in MADD's *Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving*. MADD's grassroots leaders and other supporters have helped further the Campaign tremendously in just one year by strengthening interlock legislation for convicted drunk drivers nationwide. Leaders are preparing for the upcoming holiday crackdown, as well, by working with enforcement agencies nationwide to conduct sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols to deter drunk driving. The Campaign is expected to be a topic brought forth to Congressional leaders during potential legislative hearings later this month. The lifesaving research supporting 21 may also be reviewed.

The *Support 21* coalition is comprised of: American Medical Association, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, Governors Highway Safety Association, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, National Liquor Law Enforcement Association, National Safety Council, National Transportation Safety Board, Nationwide Insurance, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, and the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

For more information about the lifesaving research and the *Support 21* coalition, please visit www.why21.org.

Additional resources can be found at:

- American Medical Association (www.ama-assn.org)
- Center for Science in the Public Interest (www.cspinet.org)
- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (www.cadca.org)
- Governors Highway Safety Association (www.ghsa.org)
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (www.iihs.org)
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (www.theiacp.org)
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (www.madd.org)
- National Liquor Law Enforcement Association (www.nllea.org)
- National Transportation Safety Board (www.nts.gov)
- National Safety Council (www.ncs.org)
- Nationwide Insurance (www.nationwide.org)
- Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (www.pire.org)
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (www.ncadd.org)

###