

NEWS RELEASE



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NCADD-NJ case for alcohol tax increase to advisory body puts emphasis on combating underage drinking

TRENTON ... (January 20, 2004) – A National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey presentation today outlined the benefits of an increase in the state’s alcohol excise tax for the Governor’s Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, which is considering a resolution recommending the increase. The case for raising the alcohol tax for the first time since 1992, according to NCADD-NJ Director of Public Affairs John Hulick, rests on providing a price deterrent to youth alcohol use and on generating revenue to create and sustain a comprehensive underage drinking and education program.

“In last week’s State of the Union, Governor McGreevey listed many areas affecting the future well-being of New Jersey,” Hulick said. “No mention was made, however, of one thing that represents a threat to that future: the prevalence of underage drinking. Recent figures from the 2003 Monitoring the Future survey from the University of Michigan found that while youth drug use dropped significantly in the past year, underage drinking did not decline at all over that time. The funding through an alcohol tax increase of education and prevention programs would help produce the same results with underage drinking as we have seen with illicit drugs and tobacco. The state needs to show the same resolve in confronting youth use of alcohol as it has with smoking and illicit drug use.”

Nationally, New Jersey’s alcohol excise taxes rank 39th on beer, 22nd on wine and 10th on spirits. If the state were first in these categories, it would generate nearly \$300 million. NCADD-NJ urges that a significant portion of revenue from an alcohol tax increase go to the state’s Alcohol Education, Rehabilitation and Enforcement

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Fund, whose allocation for the past 13 years has remained at \$11 million. AEREF dollars go to the state's 21 counties, which provide matching funds dedicated to education, prevention and treatment programs.

Last year, NCADD-NJ issued a policy paper detailing what could be achieved through an increase in the alcohol tax. It also released a more sweeping paper that contained six recommendations related to underage drinking. These proposals include a prohibition of underage drinking on private property (something an increasing number of municipalities are adopting), keg registration, more sentencing latitude for judges, including the authority to suspend driver's licenses, an ad campaign to counter the alcohol industry's appeal to youth, and ensuring that appropriate treatment is available for young people. Both of these papers can be found at www.ncaddnj.org.

A draft of the GCADA resolution on the tax includes provisions for increasing drug and alcohol prevention, education and treatment services. The draft reflects NCADD-NJ's recommendation that a substantial amount of the revenues be dedicated to establishing and sustaining a comprehensive underage drinking prevention, education and treatment program. The proposed tax increase would require the Legislature's approval and the governor's signature. The governor did not signal his view of the measure when the resolution was announced in November.

NCADD-NJ has dedicated itself for more than 20 years to educating New Jersey's citizens about alcohol and drug use issues, to advocating on state policies concerning individuals affected by addiction, and to reducing the stigma that frustrates a public health approach to the disease of addiction.

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