

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE – NEW JERSEY
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NCADD-NJ paper confronts underage drinking, details six remedies

TRENTON ... (July 29, 2003) - The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey today released a policy paper examining the state's disturbing and destructive underage drinking problem and outlining six measures to confront the issue. The paper, a continuation of a more narrow examination of the problem that was published in April, notes that New Jersey's youth, as is found across the country, have made alcohol their drug of choice, leading to some lives being lost in an instant and others being erased over years.

"NCADD-NJ intends to continue calling attention to this devastating but by no means hopeless problem. We intend to press lawmakers, community leaders and the public so they fully appreciate how great a toll underage drinking takes and understand that we have the responsibility of doing all we can to put a stop to this behavior, something we are not doing at present. New Jersey families need not undergo the experience of losing a child in yet another alcohol-related crash; nor need they see the potential of a young person go unfulfilled because of early exposure to alcohol," said the agency's director of Public Affairs and Policy, John Hulick.

The extent of youth drinking is revealed in such statistics as 29 percent of high school seniors, 22 percent of 10th graders, and 12 percent of 8th graders reporting that they had had five or more drinks in a row (the definition of binge drinking) within the past two weeks. Alcohol, the paper states, is implicated in the three top causes of teenage deaths: accidents, homicide and suicide. Less dramatic but perhaps taking an even greater a human toll are the long-term effects of youth drinking: underage use is the primary cause of alcoholism in adulthood, with individuals who begin drinking before the age of 15 being four times more likely to become dependent on alcohol than people who don't drink until they reach the legal age of 21.

NCADD-NJ's policy paper discusses science-based strategies, including some straight-forward ones such as making it

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more difficult for youth to get alcohol. This goal can be achieved partly through the creation of price-barriers, a tack that has had great success reducing youth smoking. An increase in the state's alcohol excise tax would both increase cost and generate revenues, some of which the paper urges be dedicated to create and support a comprehensive underage drinking prevention and education program.

Another of the agency's specific recommendations focuses on the source of alcohol at many parties where underage drinking takes place, namely kegs. Keg registration exists in 21 states, where it is required that retailers tag each keg with the purchaser information. In this way, if police learn of a party where minors have been served beer from a keg, the adult who purchased the barrel is held accountable.

In a more general sense, NCADD-NJ'S paper encourages a shift from the present often lax attitudes toward underage drinking. For example, sporadic enforcement of laws governing youth possession and consumption of alcohol leads to the view among adolescents that the issue is not of great importance. One suggested consequence of youth drinking that would likely have a real effect is the loss of one's driver's license, a prized possession for most adolescents. The possibility of having their driving privileges suspended or revoked if found drinking would offer a forceful deterrent to youth alcohol use.

Another aspect of the problem is how drinking is presented in alcohol industry advertising, which equate drinking with 'the good life,' with no hint of its downside. The industry spends \$4.5 million per year promoting its products, often using wealth, sex and power to appeal to a young audience. To give adolescents a truer picture about alcohol use, the paper proposes a counter-ad campaign to impress on youth the harmful effects that often accompany underage use.

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 addicted to alcohol or other drugs, and to reducing the stigma that frustrates a public health approach to the disease of addiction.

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