

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE – NEW JERSEY
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Academy of Sciences findings on youth drinking anticipated by NCADD-NJ's call for an alcohol tax increase

TRENTON ... (September 10, 2003) – The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey, which has focused much of its energies this year on the persistent problem of youth use of alcohol, welcomed the release today of a report by the National Academy of Sciences, “Reducing Underage Drinking, A Collective Responsibility.” The abstract to the report stated, “Alcohol use by young people is extremely dangerous - both to themselves and society at large. Underage alcohol use is associated with traffic fatalities, violence, unsafe sex, suicide, educational failure, and other problem behaviors that diminish the prospects of future success, as well as health risks – and the earlier teens start drinking, the greater the danger.” Because drinking is so ingrained in our culture, the report concludes that involvement from many segments of society, both public and private, is needed.

The NAS report recommended strategies including evidence-based education programs, a reduction in youth exposure to alcohol advertising, and an increase in taxes on alcohol. On the issue of an alcohol tax increase, the study determined that even a modest increase in the price of alcohol would help reduce youth consumption. That same solution was advanced by NCADD-NJ in two policy papers on youth drinking released earlier this year, although the New Jersey Legislature has shown little interest in the proposal.

Even before a panel appeared before Congress on Tuesday to present a summary of the report, the American Beverage Institute attempted to taint the findings by characterizing the panel as “neo-prohibitionist.” NCADD-NJ Director of Public Affairs John Hulick noted that the ABI's resorting to such a charge in trying to

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discredit the report only reveals how desperate the industry has become. “Describing this panel and the NAS report as neo-prohibitionist,” Hulick said, “shows that the ABI has decided to take the tack that the best defense is to go on the attack. Considering how they’ve marketed their product to youth, they most certainly have much to be defensive about. Alcohol remains drug of choice among youth, with twice as many young people drinking as using tobacco and five times as many using alcohol as marijuana. This country has expended enormous resources in its war on drugs, yet has done relatively little to confront the toll drinking has taken on young people (25 times more is spent to combat youth drug use than is dedicated to underage drinking). The NAS report, we hope, represents a shift, regardless of the alcohol industry’s distortions.”

Hulick also mentioned the hypocrisy of the industry’s response to the proposal to increase alcohol taxes by saying it would unfairly burden the working class. Such a claim, he said, could not be taken seriously when one considers that the price for a six pack for a domestic brand of beer has increased to more than five dollars. Last fall, for instance, Anheuser Busch, increased its prices and recorded an 8.7 percent increase in profits for the fourth quarter. “You don’t hear any talk from them about a burden on the working man when they decide to raise their prices. And where does that additional money go? Too often to develop new products such as alcopops and to run ad campaigns that target youth.”

The second of NCADD-NJ’s two policy papers on the issue outlined six steps that would help address the problem, including an increase in the state excise tax on alcohol. The tax increase proposal calls for some of new revenue to be used to fund a comprehensive youth drinking education program akin to the state’s Youth Anti-Tobacco Awareness Campaign, which proved a great success in reducing smoking by adolescents.

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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