



National Safety Council

Position/Policy Statement

~~Under 21 Drinking and Driving~~ **Minimum Drinking Age of Alcohol Drinking Age**

~~In 1984, the Uniform Drinking Age Act was passed mandating all states to adopt 21 as the legal drinking age. By 1988, all states had set 21 as the minimum legal drinking age. {Last sentence edited and moved below} This law has been responsible for saving about 900 lives per year and a reduction of alcohol consumption among America's youth.~~ The National Safety Council supports the minimum drinking age of 21 **years** and opposes any attempt to lower this age and reaffirms the need for Federal sanctions for states that violate this provision.

Comment:

~~The bipartisan *Uniform Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984* required withholding an escalating percentage of Federal-aid highway funds for States in which the minimum drinking age is under 21. By 1988, all states had set their minimum legal alcohol drinking age of alcohol at 21 years.~~

~~The current drinking age of 21 years reduces alcohol-related traffic fatalities for those of lesser age, and others, as well as alcohol-related injuries and violence. It reduces the potential for developing alcohol abuse and dependency, and other alcohol-related health issues such as with the brain, heart, and liver. The current drinking age has continued majority public acceptance and support from the public, as well as from public health and law enforcement agencies.~~

~~Alternatively, most countries have an alcohol drinking age less than 21 years. Few prohibit alcohol consumption entirely or have a partial systemic prohibition (e.g., specific holiday). Teaching drinking behavior at a lower age may be more effective, and better incorporate parental and school teacher guidance. The illegal nature of alcohol can create enticement, peer pressure, and risky environments in underage individuals for underage drinking. Important legal decisions can be made at age 18 years such as military and jury service and, political voting, and deciding on their alcohol consumption at a higher age is inconsistent and disproportionate. There is a legally-reduced personal freedom of choice of lifestyle, decisions about one's body, and being able to accept responsibility for one's actions in consuming alcohol. Alcohol.org (American Addiction Centers, Inc.) informs that, "1 in 5 American parents believe the drinking age should be lowered from 21".~~

Organizations that support maintaining the current minimum alcohol drinking age law of 21 years include the: American Medical Association (AMA), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Office of The Surgeon General of the United States (OSG), along with the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), National Safety Council (NSC), Responsibility.org, and Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD). ~~Other Organizations rather~~ that believe in lowering the drinking age including the Amethyst Initiative and National Youth Rights Association (NYRA).

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) in 2023 reports reported on the prevalence of underage alcohol use (NSDUH, 2022: ages 12 to 20 years) that: (i) in the past month: 1.7% reported heavy alcohol use, 8.2% binge drinking, and 15.1% alcohol use; (ii) in the past year: 28.3% reported use; and (iii) while in their lifetime: 32.3% reported use. Prevalence of High-Intensity Drinking (MTF, 2022) was noted with in 2.4% of 12th grade students. NIAAA informs on consequences of underage alcohol use that,

- *“Research indicates that alcohol use during the teenage years can interfere with normal adolescent brain development and increase the risk of developing alcohol use disorder. In addition, underage drinking contributes to a range of acute consequences, such as injuries, sexual assaults, alcohol overdoses, and deaths—including those from motor vehicle crashes.”⁵*
- *“Alcohol is a factor in the deaths of thousands of people younger than age 21 in the United States each year. This includes:*
 - *1,573 from motor vehicle crashes⁶,*
 - *1,121 from homicides⁷,*
 - *190 from alcohol overdose, falls, burns, and drowning⁷,*
 - *718 from suicides⁷.”*

The Center for Alcohol Policy reported the results of informs from a 2023 survey, ~~conducted by New Bridge Strategy on~~ of 1001 adults of age 21 years and older. ~~distributed proportionally throughout the U.S., that the top three concerns, with 8 to 10 in a scale of 0 to 10 (very important), were:~~ Their recommended top considerations for alcohol regulation included: reducing drunk driving (80%), protecting public health/safety (73%), and reducing underaged drinking (69%). Their conclusion included, *“attitudes among adult Americans remain the same: the long-standing regulatory system in the U.S. works, and people like it.”* ... *“Americans want alcohol laws to prioritize safety.”*

References

American Addiction Centers, Alcohol.org (2023).
Drinking Age,
Jan. 17,
<https://alcohol.org/guides/drinking-age/>

Britannica, ProCon.org (2019, 2022).
Pro and Con: Lowering the Drinking Age,
Apr. 2, Sep. 8,
<https://www.britannica.com/story/pro-and-con-lower-the-drinking-age>
<https://drinkingage.procon.org/>

Center for Alcohol Policy (2023).
National Alcohol Regulation Sentiment Survey,
<https://www.centerforalcoholpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Center-for-Alcohol-Policy-2023-Survey-Report.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2022).
Underage Drinking,
<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) (2023).
Alcohol's Effects on Health: Underage Drinking in the United States (ages 12 to 20),
<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/alcohol-facts-and-statistics/underage-drinking-united-states-ages-12-20#:~:text=According%20to%20the%202022%20National,one%20drink%20in%20their%20lives.&text=This%20includes%3A,32.3%25%20in%20this%20age%20group>

Quigley, J., Ryan, S.A., Camenga, D.R., Patrick, S.W., Plumb, J. & Walker-Harding, L. (2019).
Alcohol Use by Youth, Policy Statement (2019).
Pediatrics, 144 (1), e20191356, 1-6.
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1356>

Ryan, S.A., Kokotailo, P., Camenga, D.R., Patrick, S.W., Plumb, J., Quigley, J. & Walker-Harding, L. (2019).
Alcohol Use by Youth
Pediatrics, 144 (1), e20191357, 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1357>

U.S. Congress, 98th, H.R.4892 (1983-1984).
Uniform Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/98th-congress/house-bill/4892/all-actions?overview=closed#tabs>
Included within Public Law 98-363, July 14, 1984,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/98th-congress/house-bill/4616/text>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2007).
The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44360/>

ADID Members Draft Edits – March 1, 2024

This position statement reflects the opinions of the National Safety Council but not necessarily those of each member organization.

Approved by Board of Directors, October, 19, 1982
Modification Approved by Board of Delegates, September 19, 2008