

# Underage Drinking in Virginia

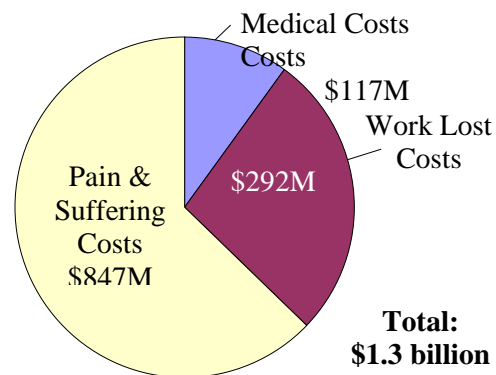
## *The Facts*

Tragic health, social, and economic problems result from the use of alcohol by youth. Underage drinking is a causal factor in a host of serious problems, including homicide, suicide, traumatic injury, drowning, burns, violent and property crime, high risk sex, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol poisoning, and need for treatment for alcohol abuse and dependence.

### *Problems and Costs Associated with Underage Drinking in Virginia*

Underage drinking cost the citizens of Virginia \$1.3 billion in 2007. These costs include medical care, work loss, and pain and suffering associated with the multiple problems resulting from the use of alcohol by youth.<sup>1</sup> This translates to a cost of \$1,691 per year for each youth in the State. Virginia ranks 45<sup>th</sup> highest among the 50 states for the cost per youth of underage drinking. Excluding pain and suffering from these costs, the direct costs of underage drinking incurred through medical care and loss of work cost Virginia \$409 million each year.

**Costs of Underage Drinking  
Virginia 2007**



**Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem, Virginia 2007**

Problem	Total Costs (in millions)
Youth Violence	\$780.8
Youth Traffic Crashes	\$214.2
High-Risk Sex, Ages 14-20	\$89.3
Youth Property Crime	\$55.8
Youth Injury	\$44.8
Poisonings and Psychoses	\$9.0
FAS Among Mothers Age 15-20	\$24.4
Youth Alcohol Treatment	\$37.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,255.5</b>

Youth violence and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in Virginia represent the largest costs for the State. However, a host of other problems contribute substantially to the overall cost. Among teen mothers, fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) alone costs Virginia \$24.4 million.

Young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence and are two and a half times more

likely to become abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at age 21.<sup>2</sup> In 2007, 1,071 youth 12 - 20 years old were admitted for alcohol treatment in Virginia, accounting for 9% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the State.<sup>3</sup>

## *Alcohol Consumption by Youth in Virginia*

Underage drinking is widespread in Virginia. Approximately 307,000 underage youth in Virginia drink each year. In 2005, according to self-reports by Virginia students in the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades:<sup>4</sup>

- 59% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 24% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 32% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasion in the past 30 days.
- 16% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (i.e. binge drinking) in the past 2 weeks.

In 2007, underage drinkers consumed 12.8% of all alcohol sold in Virginia, totaling \$461 million in sales. These sales provided profits of \$226 million to the alcohol industry.<sup>1</sup>

## *Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in Virginia*

Underage drinking in Virginia leads to substantial harm due to traffic crashes, violent crime, property crime, unintentional injury, and risky sex.

- During 2007, an estimated 44 traffic fatalities and 1,900 nonfatal traffic injuries involved an underage drinking driver.
- In 2006, an estimated 50 homicides; 14,500 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery and assault; and 38,300 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft involved an underage drinking perpetrator.
- In 2006, an estimated 8 alcohol involved fatal burns, drownings, and suicides involved underage drinking.
- In 2006, an estimated 3,100 teen pregnancies and 14,200 risky sexual acts by teens involved alcohol.

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, TR, Levy, DT, Spicer, RS, & Taylor, DM. (2006) Societal costs of underage drinking *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 67(4) 519-528.

<sup>2</sup> Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the Nation Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-110.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS). (2007). *Substance Abuse Treatment by Primary Substance of Abuse, According to Sex, Age, Race, and Ethnicity*.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Community Youth Survey (2005). Virginia Commonwealth University. Available at: <http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/documents/reports/OSAS-CommunityYouthSurvey2005.pdf>