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 the need for treatment of alcohol abuse and dependence.

**Problems and Costs Associated with Underage Drinking in Wisconsin**

In 2013, underage drinking cost the citizens of Wisconsin $0.9 billion. These costs include medical care, work loss, and pain and suffering associated with the multiple problems resulting from the use of alcohol by youth. This translates to $1,617 per year for each youth in the state or $3.16 per drink consumed underage. Excluding pain and suffering from these costs, tangible costs of underage drinking including medical care, criminal justice, property damage, and loss of work in Wisconsin totaled $322.24 million each year or $1.15 per drink. In contrast, a drink in Wisconsin retails for $0.85.

Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in Wisconsin 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 alone costs Wisconsin $20 million.

In 2012, 778 youth aged 12 to 20 years were admitted for alcohol treatment in Wisconsin, accounting for 4% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the state. 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. We did not cost these adult problems.

**Alcohol Consumption by Youth in Wisconsin**

Underage drinking is widespread in Wisconsin. Approximately 195,000 underage customers drink each year in Wisconsin. In 2013, Wisconsin students in grades 9 to 12 reported the following:

- 65.9% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 14.6% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 32.7% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- 18.4% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

In 2012, underage customers consumed 7.8% of all alcohol sold in Wisconsin, totaling $239 million in sales (in 2013 dollars). These sales provided profits of $117 million to the alcohol industry. Ranking states based on the percentage of alcohol consumed underage, with 1 the highest, Wisconsin ranked number 39. This percentage is affected by both adult and youth drinking levels.

Annual sales of alcohol consumed by youth in Wisconsin averaged $1,225 per underage customer. Underage customers were heavier consumers than adults. They drank an average of 4.0 drinks per day; in contrast, legal customers consumed only 2.1.

**Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in Wisconsin**

Underage drinking in Wisconsin leads to substantial harm due to traffic crashes, violent crime, property crime, unintentional injury, and high-risk sex.

- During 2012, an estimated 17 traffic fatalities and 838 nonfatal traffic injuries were attributable to driving after underage drinking.
- In 2012, an estimated 11 homicides; 7,600 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault; 12,600 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft; and 236,000 public order crimes including vandalism, disorderly conduct, loitering, and curfew violations were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2011, an estimated 7 alcohol-involved fatal burns, drownings, and suicides were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2013, an estimated 382 teen pregnancies and 12,904 teens having high-risk sex were attributable to underage drinking.

For comparison with other states, in U.S. rather than state prices, the harm from underage drinking per youth in Wisconsin averages $875. Such comparisons require caution. In part, they may reflect differences in crime and crash rates, problem-reporting to police, and co-occurring drug use.

*Produced by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) with funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), March 2015.*

---

