

UNDERAGE DRINKING IN THE UNITED STATES

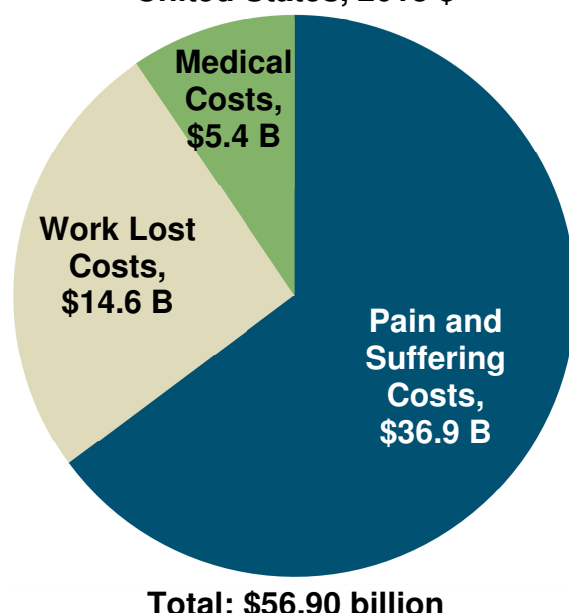
The Facts

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 the need for treatment of alcohol abuse and dependence.

Problems and Costs Associated with Underage Drinking in the United States

In 2013, underage drinking cost the citizens of the United States \$56.9 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.¹ This translates to \$1,903 per year for each youth in the United States or \$3.75 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 the United States totaled \$20.01 billion each year or \$1.32 per drink. In contrast, a drink in the United States retails for \$0.93.

**Costs of Underage Drinking
United States, 2013 \$**



**Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem,
United States, 2013 \$**

Problem	Total Costs (in millions)
Youth violence	\$32,637.40
Youth traffic crashes	\$8,581.00
High-risk sex, Ages 14–20 years	\$3,836.30
Property and public order crime	\$230.20
Youth injury	\$2,650.40
Poisonings and psychoses	\$687.10
Fetal alcohol syndrome among mothers aged 15–20 years	\$1,503.00
Youth alcohol treatment	\$1,826.40
Total	\$56,943.50 (e.g. 56.90 B)

Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in the United States represent the largest costs for the country. However, a host of other problems contribute substantially to the overall cost. Among teen mothers, fetal alcohol syndrome alone costs the United States \$3 million.

In 2012, 39,817 youth aged 12 to 20 years were admitted for alcohol treatment in the United States, accounting for 6% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the country.² 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 21.³ We did not cost these adult problems.

Alcohol Consumption by Youth in the United States

Underage drinking is widespread in the United States. Approximately 10,437,000 underage customers drink each year in the United States. In 2013, the United States students in grades 9 to 12 reported the following:⁴

- 66.2% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 18.6% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 34.9% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- 20.8% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

In 2012, underage customers consumed 9.90% of all alcohol sold in the United States, totaling \$14.08 billion in sales (in 2013 dollars). These sales provided profits of \$6.9 billion to the alcohol industry.¹

Annual sales of alcohol consumed by youth in the United States averaged \$1,349 per underage customer. Underage customers were heavier consumers than adults. They drank an average of 4 drinks per day; in contrast, legal customers consumed only 1.6.

Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in the United States

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

- During 2012, an estimated 1,236 traffic fatalities and 30,336 nonfatal traffic injuries were attributable to driving after underage drinking.
- In 2012, an estimated 949 homicides; 555,800 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault; 827,800 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft; and 15,503,000 public order crimes including vandalism, disorderly conduct, loitering, and curfew violations were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2011, an estimated 275 alcohol-involved fatal burns, drownings, and suicides were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2013, an estimated 27,939 teen pregnancies and 860,523 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 the United States averages \$1,728. Such comparisons require caution. In part, they may reflect differences in crime and crash rates, problem-reporting to police, and co-occurring drug use.

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¹ Levy, D.T., Miller, T.R., & Cox, K.C. (2003). Underage drinking: societal costs and seller profits. Working Paper. Calverton, MD: PIRE.

² Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Episode Data Set. (2013). *Substance Abuse Treatment by Primary Substance of Abuse, According to Sex, Age, Race, and Ethnicity, 2011*. Available [Online]: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/SAMHDA/studies/30462>

³ 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 National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-110.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2013). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Available [Online]: <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx>. Or an equivalent state data system.