

Where are we?

- In our state, alcohol use often begins at a very young age – more than 1 in 4 high school students had their first drink of alcohol before the age of 13.
- Youth who drink before they turn 15 are four times as likely to develop alcohol dependence as those who start drinking at 21.
- The number of young people who consume alcohol often or heavily is staggering. Almost one half – 48 percent – of Massachusetts high school students report current alcohol use; almost one third – 27 percent – report binge drinking in the past month (5 or more drinks at a time).
- Young people who binge drink are more likely to engage in other risky behaviors, including sexual intercourse, violence, other drug use, and drinking and driving.
- Underage drinking costs our state \$1.4 billion a year – this includes medical care, work loss and pain and suffering.

Where are we going and how do we get there?

While underage alcohol problems are significant and serious in Massachusetts, something is being done.

This guide provides proven strategies that you can take, activities communities can accomplish, and policies that leaders can implement.

Working together and building on the good work already being done, we can impact underage drinking – a major public health, economic and safety issue in our state.

What can you do?

As an individual citizen, you can make a difference.

Here's how:

- Youth often get alcohol from adults. Serving or making alcohol available to those under 21 is illegal in Massachusetts and there are significant penalties.
- Educate neighbors, community and local, state and federal leaders. Ask them to support policies that reduce underage alcohol problems.
- Support those in your community who have identified strategies to reduce underage alcohol problems.
- Talk to children about the dangers associated with alcohol and other drugs. Parents and other adults play an influential role in their children's behavior and decisions about alcohol.
- Find out about underage drinking in your community. Learn what your community is doing and what actions need to be taken.

Involve Youth!
They are part of
the solution.



What Can Your Community Do?

Support strategies to reduce underage alcohol problems in your community.

Here's how:

- Talk to community organizations, business and education leaders, and policymakers about underage alcohol problems.
- Encourage enforcement of existing policies – this offers a good opportunity for community groups, law enforcement and business leaders to work together.
- See that local ordinances exist to limit access and availability of alcohol to youth in your community.
- Work with community leaders to restrict or ban alcohol sales, sponsorship, and advertising at youth, family and school events, including athletic events and other venues.
- Find out if your school participates in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Use the data to understand the scope of underage alcohol problems in your community.
- Support proven prevention programs in your schools and community to reduce underage alcohol and other drug problems.
- Work with local media to publicize the work being done in your community, including the results from local compliance checks.
- Find out if your school has a comprehensive alcohol policy and make sure it is enforced consistently.
- Find out if your school has a media literacy program aimed at helping students become informed consumers and a student assistance program to support prevention, intervention and treatment initiatives.

Support Prevention
Efforts.

Focus on positive
activities for
youth to keep them
safe and healthy.

What Can the State Do?

In May of 2005, the State released its Substance Abuse Strategic Plan. The plan offers recommendations, many of which are being implemented, to address the issue of underage drinking. There is more to be done.

Here's how:

- Support liquor enforcement programs, including Cops in Shops, Operation Tag a Keg, Safe Spring and Graduation and Reverse Sting Operations all designed to effectively enforce minimum legal drinking age laws for all establishments that sell or serve alcohol.
- Support the continued development of a system for collecting and sharing data on underage drinking and associated problems.
- Support the statewide media campaign focusing on adults and their responsibilities for reducing underage alcohol problems.
- Continue to use evidence-based education and prevention programs, as the basis for a community plan for prevention.
- Encourage colleges and universities to work closely with local communities to collaboratively address underage alcohol problems.
- Provide training opportunities for interested parties on the effectiveness of consistent enforcement of state laws intended to reduce underage alcohol use.
- Fund rigorous evaluation of all programs aimed at reducing underage alcohol problems.
- Support keg registration and party host liability laws – important public policies to reduce underage drinking.
- Continue to use special Under 21 licenses and IDs which are clearly identifiable through their vertical orientation and prominent Under 21 lettering designed to support retailers in detecting fake IDs.
- Implement a training program for sellers and servers of alcohol – a proven strategy for limiting access for underage youth.
- Continue to provide comprehensive alcohol and other drug prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery programs for our children and youth.

This guide represents a unique effort of individuals, community organizations and state agencies committed to reducing underage alcohol problems.

This brochure, supporting materials and information on the research, best practices, policy options and actions that you can take can be found online at www.mass.gov/dph/bsas.

Resource materials that provide parents and caregivers with strategies and tips on talking with children about alcohol and other drugs can be ordered through the Massachusetts Health Promotions Clearinghouse at www.maclclearinghouse.com.

The recommendations in this guide are based on research and identified best practices, including the Institute of Medicine report *“Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility.”*

We would like to thank the state of New Hampshire for their generosity and the NEW FUTURES organization for allowing us to utilize the information contained in their brochure entitled *“Road Map to Success: Reducing Underage Alcohol Problems in New Hampshire.”*

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services

250 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02108

Working together
to reduce underage
drinking

A Strategy to Keep
Massachusetts Kids
Alcohol-Free

Prevent • Treat • Recover ▶ For Life

Prevent • Treat • Recover ▶ For Life