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 Montana**

In 2013, underage drinking cost the citizens of Montana $0.3 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 $2,747 per year for each youth in the state or $4.20 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 Montana totaled $98.99 million each year or $1.65 per drink. In contrast, a drink in Montana retails for $0.86.

Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in Montana 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 Montana $5 million.

In 2012, 346 youth aged 12 to 20 years were admitted for alcohol treatment in Montana, accounting for 7\% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the state.\(^2\) 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

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**Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem, Montana, 2013 $**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Total Costs (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth violence</td>
<td>$102.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth traffic crashes</td>
<td>$85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-risk sex, Ages 14–20 years</td>
<td>$15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and public order crime</td>
<td>$0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth injury</td>
<td>$12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisonings and psychoses</td>
<td>$2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetal alcohol syndrome among mothers aged 15–20 years</td>
<td>$5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth alcohol treatment</td>
<td>$15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>$252.6</strong> (e.g. $0.3 B)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at age 21.\(^3\) We did not cost these adult problems.

**Alcohol Consumption by Youth in Montana**

Underage drinking is widespread in Montana. Approximately 37,000 underage customers drink each year in Montana. In 2013, Montana students in grades 9 to 12 reported the following:\(^4\)

- 70.5% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 19.9% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 37.1% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- 23.5% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

In 2012, underage customers consumed 9.5% of all alcohol sold in Montana, totaling $52 million in sales (in 2013 dollars). These sales provided profits of $25 million to the alcohol industry.\(^1\) Ranking states based on the percentage of alcohol consumed underage, with 1 the highest, Montana ranked number 26. This percentage is affected by both adult and youth drinking levels.

Annual sales of alcohol consumed by youth in Montana averaged $1,397 per underage customer. Underage customers were heavier consumers than adults. They drank an average of 4.5 drinks per day; in contrast, legal customers consumed only 2.1.

**Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in Montana**

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

- During 2012, an estimated 9 traffic fatalities and 423 nonfatal traffic injuries were attributable to driving after underage drinking.
- In 2012, an estimated 2 homicides; 1,700 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault; 2,300 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft; and 43,000 public order crimes including vandalism, disorderly conduct, loitering, and curfew violations were attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2011, an estimated 1 alcohol-involved fatal burn, drowning, or suicide was attributable to underage drinking.
- In 2013, an estimated 105 teen pregnancies and 2,871 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 Montana averages $1,259. 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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