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 Washington

In 2013, underage drinking cost the citizens of Washington $1.2 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 $1,949 per year for each youth in the State or $3.98 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 Washington totaled $478.11 million each year or $1.57 per drink. In contrast, a drink in Washington retails for $0.91.

#### Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem, Washington, 2013 $

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Total Costs (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth violence</td>
<td>$626.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth traffic crashes</td>
<td>$203.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-risk sex, Ages 14–20 years</td>
<td>$58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and public order crime</td>
<td>$6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth injury</td>
<td>$72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisonings and psychoses</td>
<td>$14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetal alcohol syndrome among mothers aged 15–20 years</td>
<td>$25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth alcohol treatment</td>
<td>$59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,218.3 (e.g. $1.2 B)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in Washington 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 Washington $26 million.

In 2012, 1,197 youth aged 12 to 20 years were admitted for alcohol treatment in Washington, accounting for 10% 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 Washington**

Underage drinking is widespread in Washington. Approximately 194,000 underage customers drink each year in Washington. In 2012, Washington students in grades 9 to 12 reported the following:

- 59.1% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 27.8% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 28.9% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- 17.6% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

In 2012, underage customers consumed 9.3% of all alcohol sold in Washington, totaling $275 million in sales (in 2013 dollars). These sales provided profits of $135 million to the alcohol industry. Ranking states based on the percentage of alcohol consumed underage, with 1 the highest, Washington ranked number 29. This percentage is affected by both adult and youth drinking levels.

Annual sales of alcohol consumed by youth in Washington averaged $1,420 per underage customer. Underage customers were heavier consumers than adults. They drank an average of 4.3 drinks per day; in contrast, legal customers consumed only 1.6.

**Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in Washington**

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

- During 2012, an estimated 16 traffic fatalities and 1,086 nonfatal traffic injuries were attributable to driving after underage drinking.
- In 2012, an estimated 13 homicides; 10,200 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault; 23,400 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft; and 438,000 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 439 teen pregnancies and 22,557 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 Washington averages $943. 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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