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 Virginia

In 2013, underage drinking cost the citizens of Virginia $1.0 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 $1,296 per year for each youth in the state or $3.21 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 Virginia totaled $334.72 million each year or $1.10 per drink. In contrast, a drink in Virginia retails for $0.85.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Total Costs (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth violence</td>
<td>$532.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth traffic crashes</td>
<td>$197.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-risk sex, Ages 14–20 years</td>
<td>$53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and public order crime</td>
<td>$3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth injury</td>
<td>$66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisonings and psychoses</td>
<td>$14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetal alcohol syndrome among mothers aged 15–20 years</td>
<td>$24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth alcohol treatment</td>
<td>$29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$982.5</strong> (e.g. $1.0 B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in Virginia 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 Virginia $25 million.

In 2012, 702 youth aged 12 to 20 years were admitted for alcohol treatment in Virginia, 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...
abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at age 21. We did not cost these adult problems.

**Alcohol Consumption by Youth in Virginia**

Underage drinking is widespread in Virginia. Approximately 225,000 underage customers drink each year in Virginia. In 2013, Virginia students in grades 9 to 12 reported the following:

- 55.3% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 18.2% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 27.3% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- 14.5% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

In 2012, underage customers consumed 8.3% of all alcohol sold in Virginia, totaling $258 million in sales (in 2013 dollars). These sales provided profits of $127 million to the alcohol industry. Ranking states based on the percentage of alcohol consumed underage, with 1 the highest, Virginia ranked number 35. This percentage is affected by both adult and youth drinking levels.

Annual sales of alcohol consumed by youth in Virginia averaged $1,148 per underage customer. Underage customers were heavier consumers than adults. They drank an average of 3.7 drinks per day; in contrast, legal customers consumed only 1.5.

**Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in Virginia**

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

- During 2012, an estimated 32 traffic fatalities and 1,379 nonfatal traffic injuries were attributable to driving after underage drinking.
- In 2012, an estimated 20 homicides; 7,400 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault; 15,400 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft; and 289,000 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 436 teen pregnancies and 12,537 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 Virginia averages $634. 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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