

## Summary of Findings: American Medical Association's College Drinking Survey

This summary highlights the major findings of a comprehensive, nationally representative telephone study, of approximately 15 minutes in length, among 801 Americans 21 years of age and older. The poll was conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, Inc. for the American Medical Association's Office of Alcohol and other Drug Abuse. The margin of error for the sample is +/- 3.5% at the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile confidence interval level.

### Summary Statement

Belief in the principle of individual responsibility -- that a person is responsible for his or her own actions -- is firmly rooted in the psychology of most Americans, and deeply affects how we relate to both our fellow citizens and to our cultural and political institutions. It is contrary to our nature to place blame for an individual's failings or faults on external or environmental factors, and Americans applaud as heroes those who overcome adversity through individual strength of character.

This study casts serious doubt on this belief, at least when it comes to excessive and binge drinking by college students. Although Americans still hold college students responsible for their actions, they say that environmental factors are equally important: easy access to and abundance of cheap alcohol; pervasive advertising, promotions and sponsorships by beer and liquor companies; and the presence of so many bars and retail establishments that sell alcohol near college campuses.

This issue is not really about an academic debate on individual responsibility, however. The message sent by Americans -- especially parents of college and college-bound children -- is that it is time to stop holding our young people solely responsible for a very serious problem that is in large part beyond their control. Americans want policy makers to strengthen the enforcement of existing laws that restrict access of alcohol to underage drinkers, and create new common-sense laws that limit the availability and abundance of cheap alcohol to college students. Americans support such measures not only to protect our young people from the dangers of excessive drinking, but also to protect the communities that are negatively impacted by excessive drinking on college campuses.

The major **conclusions** of the study are as follows:

1. Both parents and adults are very aware of the problem of binge and excessive drinking by college students, and they express a high level of concern about this issue, which they consider to be a very serious problem.
2. Parents and adults believe that the broader environment plays a key role in excessive drinking. Easy access to and availability of cheap alcohol is one of parents top concerns about sending their children away to college, and parents and adults worry about the alcohol industry's promotions.
3. Americans want action now and support a broad range of public policy measures that would reduce excessive drinking.
4. There is a strong recognition that binge drinking disrupts and negatively affects the quality of life in communities adjacent to college campuses. Parents and adults believe they have a right to be involved in efforts to reduce excessive drinking by college students in their community, and they believe that community officials have a responsibility to do so.

## CONCLUSIONS

- 1. Both parents and adults are very aware of the problem of binge and excessive drinking by college students, and they express a high level of concern about this issue, which they consider to be a very serious problem.**

### High Level of Concern Expressed About Excessive and Binge Drinking

Nearly 3 in 4 parents of college and college-bound students (74%) and 72% of American adults<sup>1</sup> say they are aware of the problem of excessive and “binge” drinking by college students and they are clearly concerned about this issue and consider it to be a very serious problem.

- More than 9 in 10 parents (95%) and 87% of adults say they are concerned about excessive drinking of alcohol by college students. Seven in ten parents (72%) and 2 in 3 adults (65%) say they are “very” concerned about the problem.
- Excessive drinking by college students is identified a serious problem by nearly all parents (95%) and adults (87%). Two in three parents (64%) and nearly 6 in 10 adults (59%) say that it is a “very” serious problem.

### Parents and Adults are Very Concerned About Many Problems Associated With Excessive and Binge Drinking

A majority of both parents and adults cite drunk driving (84% parents, 80% adults), unprotected sex (55% and 52%) and alcohol poisoning (54% and 53%) as problems associated with excessive or binge drinking that they are “very concerned” about.

- More than 4 in 10 parents and adults also say that they are very concerned about blacking out (60% parents, 46% adults), academic failure (52% parents, 43% adults), non-consensual sex (47% both) and college students getting arrested for drunken behavior (40% both).

### Parents and Adults are Also Very Concerned About the Second-Hand Effects of Excessive or Binge Drinking

Nearly 9 in 10 parents (86%) and 79% of adults say they are concerned about the second-hand effects of excessive drinking at colleges, such as when students’ studies or sleep are interrupted by drunken parties. In fact, nearly 6 in 10 (59%) parents say they are very concerned about this problem.

- More than 6 in 10 parents (62%) and 59% of adults say that excessive drinking that compromises students’ academic performance, such as kids missing classes because of hangovers or flunking out of a school, is a major problem.

---

<sup>1</sup> In this summary “parents” refers to Americans who have children in college, high school students who plan to go to college, or both. Americans and/or adults refers to all U.S. adults 21 years of age or older.

**2. Parents and adults believe that the broader environment plays a key role in excessive drinking. Easy access to and availability of cheap alcohol is one of parents top concerns about sending their children away to college, and parents and adults worry about the alcohol industry’s promotions.**

Parents and adults believe that excessive and binge drinking is not just about individual responsibility and that is counter-productive to place the blame solely on young people because of the many and varied environmental factors that strongly influence alcohol consumption by college students.

Not Fair to Just Blame College Students for Excessive Drinking

Americans say that college students are naïve about the risks of excessive drinking and are susceptible to environmental influences.

- Nearly 9 in 10 parents (89%) and 86% of adults agree that college students who drink excessively really do not appreciate or fully understand the risks of their drinking, such as the risk of fatal car accidents, increased risk of HIV infection and date rape.

The Environment Receives Much of the Blame for Excessive Drinking by College Students

Parents and adults place much of the blame for excessive drinking on the environment: easy access to alcohol, drink specials, happy hours, ladies' nights and industry advertising and promotions. In fact, 3 of the top 4 factors that most contribute to excessive drinking by college students are environmental (ranked by percentage important):

<b>Important Factors that Contribute to Excessive Drinking</b>	<b>Parents - %</b>	<b>Adults - %</b>
Lack of individual responsibility on the part of college students.	93	96
Easy access to and availability of alcohol at the many bars and retail establishments surrounding campus.	93	85
The cheap cost of beer and shots and promotions such as all you can drink specials, happy hours and ladies’ nights.	80	77
Advertising and the many promotions and sponsorships by beer and liquor companies on or near college campuses and at bars.	79	68

Parents and adults are clearly worried about the large number of bars that are nearby college campuses: a majority of both parents (52%) and adults (62%) agree that the high density or large numbers of bars and retail establishments that sell alcohol is one of the major reasons college students – including those underage – drink heavily. And parents and adults believe that measures should be taken to stop bars from serving underage drinkers and to curb excessive drinking by all college students.

- More than 9 in 10 parents (91%) and 83% of adults strongly agree that bars in college communities should be required to train servers to identify intoxicated persons.

- Nearly 9 in 10 parents (88%) and 95% of adults strongly agree that bars in college communities should be required to identify underage drinkers, such as recognizing underage IDs.
- Nearly all parents (95%) and 3 in 4 adults (74%) strongly agree that enforcement officials should do more to stop illegal sales to underage persons.
- Nearly 9 in 10 parents (85%) and 3 in 4 adults (78%) strongly agree that communities in college towns, not states, should have control over local laws that govern the distribution and sales of alcohol to protect against excessive and binge drinking by college students.

#### Easy Access to and Availability of Alcohol is One of **Parents** Top Concerns

After unprotected/unwanted sex (61% very concerned) and academic performance (44%), what concerns parents most about sending their children away to college is easy access to and abundant availability of alcohol (40%). In fact, 6 in 10 parents agree that easy access to and abundant availability of cheap alcohol on campus communities is one of their top 2 or 3 concerns about sending their children away to college.

- Parents of both college and college-bound boys (40% very concerned) and girls (41%) are equally concerned about easy access to and abundant availability of alcohol.
- Excessive drinking (40%) ties for third as the top concern of parents sending their boys away to college.

There is a clear recognition on the part of **parents** of college and college-bound students that campus communities influence excessive drinking.

- More than 8 in 10 parents (81%) say they feel more comfortable sending their children to college that have strong policies to deter underage, excessive and binge drinking.
- Nearly 9 in 10 parents (88%) say that campus administrators are not doing enough to curb underage and binge drinking.

#### Alcohol Industry is Viewed as a Strong Environmental Influence

Parents and adults clearly view actions by the alcohol industry that encourage drinking by college students as an important environmental influence. Nearly 8 in 10 parents (77%) and 2 in 3 adults (64%) agree with the statement that *we should stop holding young people solely responsible for heavy drinking and put some of the blame where it belongs -- on the alcohol industry.*

Parents of college and college-bound students are more likely than adults in general to express a high level of concern about actions taken by the alcohol industry that they believe encourages alcohol use among college students.

- More than 7 in 10 parents (72%) and 48% of adults are very concerned about Spring Break Promotions and more than half (56%) of parents and 31% of adults are very concerned about the alcohol industry's sponsorship of college events.

- Forty percent or more of parents are very concerned about TV beer ads (44%), alcohol ads that glamorize alcohol use (42%) and bar crawls (40%).

**3. Americans want action now and support a broad range of public policy measures that would reduce excessive drinking.**

Parents and adults support a broad range of measures that could be enacted by city or other officials that would help reduce excessive drinking by college students. The table below provides those measures that garner the highest support among registered voters.

- Other than measures that deal directly with underage drinking, registered voters most strongly support (59%) limiting the number and location of bars close to college campuses. This is a clear recognition that access to availability of alcohol is viewed as a major contributor to underage drinking.

<b>Support Among Registered Voters for Measures to Reduce Excessive Drinking (% Support)</b>	<b>Strongly Support</b>	<b>Total Support</b>
Strengthen enforcement of laws prohibiting sales to minors.	84	92
Restrict the age of entry to college bars to those who are 21 and older.	75	80
Increase penalties on retail establishments that serve underage and intoxicated drinkers.	69	89
Increase legal liability on bars that serve underage drinkers and intoxicated persons.	64	81
Limit the number and location of bars close to college campuses.	59	78
Ban alcohol advertising in college sports.	58	77
Not allow college newspapers to accept ads from companies and retail establishments that promote excessive drinking through cheap or discounted drink specials.	57	73
Give local communities in college towns control over alcohol licensing and zoning to protect against excessive and binge drinking by college students.	49	72
Limit drink specials at bars that offer alcohol drinks at reduced rates.	44	71
Increase licensing fees so it is more expensive for bars to open up near college campuses.	48	70
Not allow local newspapers to accept ads from companies and retail establishments that promote excessive drinking through cheap or discounted drink specials.	48	65
Ban happy hours at bars that offer 2 for 1 or all you can drink specials.	46	68
Restrict hours of service for retail establishments that sell alcohol.	42	65

- 4. There is a strong recognition that binge drinking disrupts and negatively affects the quality of life in communities adjacent to college campuses. Parents and adults believe they have a right to be involved in efforts to reduce excessive drinking by college students in their community, and they believe that community officials have a responsibility to do so.**

Although the focus of parents' and adults' concerns about excessive and binge drinking is on the health and well-being of college students, Americans also express concern about the effect excessive and binge drinking has on the community.

- More than 8 in 10 parents (83%) and 3 in 4 adults (75%) are concerned about the second-hand effects of excessive drinking on communities, such as loud and rowdy behavior and neighborhood crime. Nearly 6 in 10 parents (58%) and nearly half of adults (49%) are very concerned.
- Nearly 8 in 10 parents (78%) and 3 in 4 adults (76%) agree that binge drinking negatively affects the quality of life and public health of communities. Large majorities of both parents (58%) and adults (55%) strongly agree with this sentiment.

Parents and adults believe they have a right to be involved in efforts to reduce excessive drinking by college students in their community, and they believe that community officials have a responsibility to do so.

- More than 9 in 10 parents (91%) and nearly 9 in 10 adults (87%) say that homeowners, public officials, local politicians and school officials have a right to be involved in efforts to curb or reduce binge or excessive drinking by college students in their community.
- Nearly 9 in 10 parents (87%) and adults (87%) say that community officials have a responsibility to get involved in efforts to curb or reduce binge or excessive drinking by college students in their community.