

**Congressional Press Conference on
Underage Drinking and Alcohol Advertising
September 10, 2003**

**Remarks by:
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Underage drinking is reaching epidemic proportions among our nation's youth. We know that alcohol is the drug of choice among young people – and that children begin drinking when they are as young as 12 years old.

Alcohol use is a contributing factor in the leading causes of death among young people: Accidents, Vehicle Deaths, Homicides and Suicide.

Nearly 40,000 young people ages 15 to 24 die from one of these causes each and every year. And for those who alcohol doesn't kill – there can be devastating long-term effects.

Sadly, according to the latest National Survey on Drug Use and Health, underage drinking is still on the rise.

At the American Medical Association, we are extremely concerned about alcohol use among minors and its effects on the health and safety of our nation's children and teens. As physicians, we believe we have a responsibility to take a public health stand for our patients. I'm pleased to be here today representing the AMA, and I'd like to thank Congresswoman Roybal-Allard and Congressman Wolf for organizing this press conference on this critical public health issue.

The AMA has made preventing underage drinking and changing the environment that promotes and enables such drinking a high priority. To combat this problem, the AMA has created an Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse to develop and implement national programs to help eliminate underage drinking. We currently have two such programs up and running.

The first is *Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions* which works with community leaders to identify factors that contribute to underage drinking and create solutions.

The second project, *A Matter of Degree*, works with campus communities to reduce college student drinking by moving beyond traditional prevention efforts and addressing the social environment that influences individual decision making.

The report released today by the Institute of Medicine and the National Academy of Sciences is a timely and comprehensive study to develop a national strategy to reduce and prevent underage drinking.

This study provides a blueprint for a national campaign, and I'm proud to be here to support this program. We need to use all the tools and resources available to help our nation's youth abstain from drinking. We need to raise alcohol taxes to be used for health education, increase enforcement laws, and dedicate funds to a national public relations campaign to inform underage drinkers of the harms they can inflict on themselves and others by their actions.

I've practiced medicine for more than three decades, and seen first-hand the ravages of alcohol on young people and on their families. It's long past time we respond to underage drinking as seriously as we do drug and tobacco abuse.

Thank you for your time today.