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NATIONWIDE SURVEY FINDS OVERWHELMING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR RESTRICTING DRINKING ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES, TRAINING FOR BAR OWNERS, AND TIP LINES TO REPORT ILLEGAL USE AND SALES

Survey Reveals Public Support for Limitations on Alcohol Ads in Media, Increased State Control of Liquor Sales

Minneapolis, MN (December 6, 2002) – An overwhelming majority of Americans support alcohol control policies that restrict public drinking, penalize adults who provide alcohol to minors, require training for alcohol beverage servers and bar owners, and use tip lines to report illegal alcohol use and sales, according to a new national survey. Of more than 5,700 adults surveyed, 85% or more say they approve of such policies, regardless of their personal political beliefs or party affiliation.

“The level of support for public policies to control alcohol sales and use is remarkable,” says Dr. Alexander C. Wagenaar, lead author of the survey report and director of the Alcohol Epidemiology Program at the University of Minnesota, School of Public Health. “We continue to see an American public that demands that policy-makers and law enforcement and health officials actively control the sale and use of alcohol.”

The 2001 *Youth Access to Alcohol Survey* is a national opinion survey assessing the knowledge of, attitudes toward, and levels of public support for a variety of alcohol-related public policies. The survey updates a 1997 survey that measured support for 28 similar alcohol policies. Seven of the 28 received statistically significant increases in support over time (4% to 33% increases); eight received significant decreases in support over time (3% to 8% decreases). The greatest increases in support from 1997 to 2001 were for leniency on youth offenders (33% increase) and state control of liquor sales (18% increase). The greatest decrease in support from 1997 to 2001 was for raising alcohol taxes for general, unspecified governmental use (8% decrease).

The survey was supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Data were collected by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. and analyzed by researchers in the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis. The survey results are available online at www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol.

Across numerous categories, the public strongly agrees with rules that affect the sale and consumption of alcohol. When asked, respondents showed majority support for 29 of 33 alcohol policies in 2001.

Policies that generated high levels of public support include:

- Restrictions on Drinking on City Streets – 93%
- Server Training Requirements – 90%
- Bar Owner Training Requirements – 89%
- Restrictions on Drinking on College Campuses – 88%
- Telephone Tip Lines to Report Illegal Use and Sales of Alcohol – 88%
- Punishment of Adults Providing Alcohol to Minors – 87%
- Alcohol Tax Increase for Prevention Purposes – 81%
- Restrictions on Drinking at Sports Stadiums – 74%
- Ban on Youth-Oriented Packaging of Alcohol – 70%

There are also high levels of support for limiting alcohol advertising. The majority of the respondents support eliminating the advertising of alcohol on television (67% support banning liquor ads and 59% support banning beer & wine ads). In addition, 61% support prohibiting billboard ads for alcoholic beverages.

Respondents were least supportive of banning happy hours (38%), increasing taxes on alcoholic drinks with the money used for general government purposes (34%), and banning beer keg sales to individuals (31%).

The levels of public support for alcohol controls were essentially the same for Democrats and Republicans, and the same for self-identified conservatives, moderates and liberals. "These are issues with an amazing consensus across the political spectrum," notes Wagenaar.

The survey also asked respondents about drinking norms. Research on college students shows that students tend to overestimate how much their peers drink and that this may increase actual alcohol consumption among youth. Results from this survey show that most adults believe that alcohol consumption is more widespread than it actually is. Eighty-eight percent of respondents believed that half or more of adults drink regularly. Actually, only about 30% of adults drink regularly (once per week or more).

"It may be that the widespread advertising and marketing of alcoholic beverages is distorting drinking norms," Wagenaar points out.

Mathematica interviewers contacted 5,736 adults, aged 18 and over, from April 2001 to November 2001. Surveys were administered by telephone to a random sample of participants in 48 states and the District of Columbia. The sampling error is plus or minus 2.5%.

The Alcohol Epidemiology Program is a research program within the School of Public Health's Division of Epidemiology at the University of Minnesota, directed by Alexander C. Wagenaar, PhD. The mission of the Alcohol Epidemiology Program is to conduct scientific research on effective community and policy interventions to reduce alcohol-related health and social problems. For information on current projects and resources to help states and communities prevent alcohol-related problems see their website at www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, based in Princeton, N.J., is the nation's largest philanthropic organization devoted exclusively to health and health care. It concentrates its grantmaking in four goal areas: to assure that all Americans have access to basic health care at a reasonable cost; to improve care and support for people with chronic health conditions; to promote healthy communities and lifestyles; and to reduce the personal, social, and economic harm caused by substance abuse—tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs. For more information, check the website at www.rwjf.org.

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