

# UNDERAGE DRINKING IN VIRGINIA

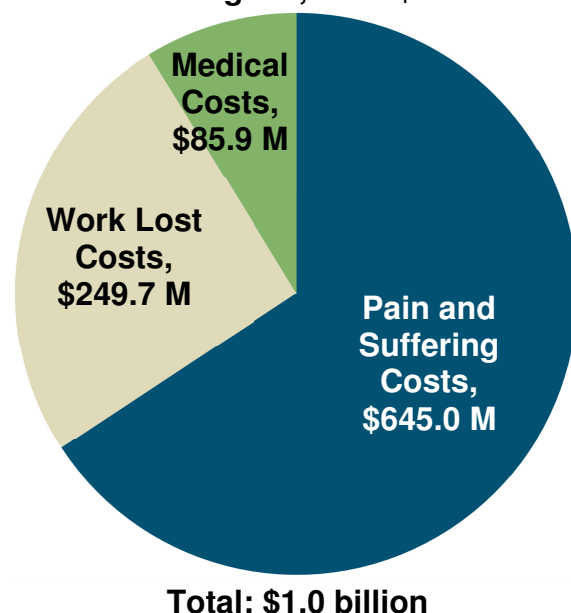
## The Facts

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.<sup>1</sup> 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  
Virginia, 2013 \$**



**Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem,  
Virginia, 2013 \$**

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

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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:<sup>4</sup>

- 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.<sup>1</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> Taylor DM, Miller TR. (2015). Methodology: Underage Drinking Fact Sheets. Calverton, MD: PIRE, <http://www.udetc.org/documents/Underage-Cost-Methods-082807.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Episode Data Set. (2013). *Substance Abuse Treatment by Primary Substance of Abuse, According to Sex, Age, Race, and Ethnicity, 2011*. Available [Online]: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/SAMHDA/studies/30462>

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<sup>3</sup> Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-110.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2013). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Available [Online]: <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx>. Or an equivalent state data system.