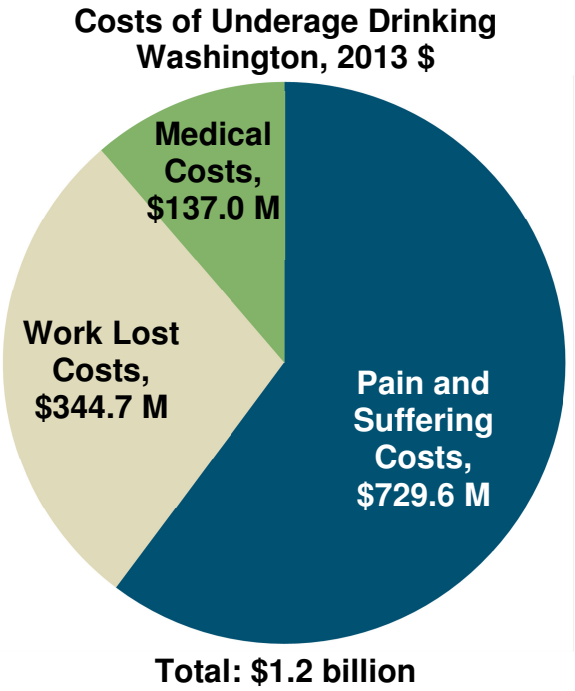
UNDERAGE DRINKING IN WASHINGTON

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 Washington

In 2013, underage drinking cost the citizens of Washington $1.2 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 $1,949 per year for each youth in the State or $3.98 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 Washington totaled $478.11 million each year or $1.57 per drink. In contrast, a drink in Washington retails for $0.91.

Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem, Washington, 2013 $

Problem	Total Costs (in millions)
Youth violence	$626.8
Youth traffic crashes	$203.9
High-risk sex, Ages 14–20 years	$58.1
Property and public order crime	$6.8
Youth injury	$72.0
Poisonings and psychoses	$14.3
Fetal alcohol syndrome among mothers aged 15–20 years	$25.7
Youth alcohol treatment	$59.0
Total	**$1,218.3 (e.g. $1.2 B)**

Youth violence (homicide, suicide, aggravated assault) and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in Washington 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 Washington $26 million.

In 2012, 1,197 youth aged 12 to 20 years were admitted for alcohol treatment in Washington, accounting for 10% 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.[3] We did not cost these adult problems.

Alcohol Consumption by Youth in Washington

Underage drinking is widespread in Washington. Approximately 194,000 underage customers drink each year in Washington. In 2012, Washington students in grades 9 to 12 reported the following:[4]

- 59.1% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 27.8% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.[5]
- 28.9% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- 17.6% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

In 2012, underage customers consumed 9.3% of all alcohol sold in Washington, totaling $275 million in sales (in 2013 dollars). These sales provided profits of $135 million to the alcohol industry.[1] Ranking states based on the percentage of alcohol consumed underage, with 1 the highest, Washington ranked number 29. This percentage is affected by both adult and youth drinking levels.

Annual sales of alcohol consumed by youth in Washington averaged $1,420 per underage customer. Underage customers were heavier consumers than adults. They drank an average of 4.3 drinks per day; in contrast, legal customers consumed only 1.6.

Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in Washington

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

- During 2012, an estimated 16 traffic fatalities and 1,086 nonfatal traffic injuries were attributable to driving after underage drinking.
- In 2012, an estimated 13 homicides; 10,200 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault; 23,400 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft; and 438,000 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 439 teen pregnancies and 22,557 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 Washington averages $943. 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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[1] Taylor DM, Miller TR. (2015). Methodology: Underage Drinking Fact Sheets. Calverton, MD: PIRE, http://www.udetc.org/documents/Underage-Cost-Methods-082807.pdf

[2] 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

[3] 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.
[4] Healthy Youth Survey 2012 Analytic Report. Washington State Department of Health, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Social and Health Services, Department of Commerce, and Liquor Control Board, December 2013.
[5] Healthy Youth Survey 2010 Analytic Report. Washington State Department of Health, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Social and Health Services, Department of Commerce, Family Policy Council and Liquor Control Board, June 2011.