



Parent-Focused National Media Campaign Backgrounder

Issue

Underage drinking continues to be one of our nation's most significant public health problems, and its associated problems have profound consequences not just for underage drinkers, but also for their families, their communities, and society. Nearly \$24.3 billion (about 10 percent) of the total \$249 billion economic cost of excessive alcohol consumption is related to underage drinking, much of it due to premature mortality of underage youth.¹ Alcohol continues to be the most widely used substance among America's youth, and a higher proportion use alcohol than use tobacco, marijuana, or other drugs.² Alcohol use, especially heavy use, at a young age appears to permanently impair brain function by affecting the actual physical development of the brain structure as well as brain functioning. Negative effects include decreased ability in planning, executive functioning, memory, spatial operations, and attention.³

The benefits of reducing underage drinking are substantial, including saving lives and dollars and promoting the health of young people. Delaying the age at which young people begin drinking will reduce their chances of developing an alcohol use disorder and of experiencing other negative consequences.



The STOP Act and "Talk. They Hear You."® Campaign

To address underage drinking and its related consequences, Congress passed the Sober Truth on Preventing (STOP) Underage Drinking Act, Public Law 109-422, popularly known as the STOP Act (December 2006). The STOP Act was created to engage communities and parents to be responsible for preventing underage drinking. The policy calls for modified enforcement of drinking laws, steps to reduce alcohol's availability to teenagers,

increased research on underage drinking, improved monitoring of alcohol advertising to youth, and an adult-oriented media campaign. In response, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) created the “Talk. They Hear You.” Campaign, an adult-oriented campaign that provides parents and caregivers of children under the age of 21 resources, tips, and tools to start and continue conversations with their children about underage drinking prevention.

About the Campaign

“Talk. They Hear You.” launched in 2013, and features a suite of resources for parents/caregivers to increase awareness of the prevalence and risks of underage drinking; equip them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to prevent underage drinking; and increase their actions to prevent underage drinking. The Campaign also works directly with hundreds of local, state, and national organizations, providing tips and tools to help them implement the campaign in their communities.

The Campaign is grounded in research and was developed using a nuanced understanding of public health issues, rigorous methodologies, evidence-based communications models, and a continuous improvement process. All products are focus group tested to ensure they deliver the right messages to the target audience.

The suite of products includes TV, radio, and print public service announcements; a campaign website (www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov); posters, postcards, partner toolkit, original soundtracks; point-of-sales products; and a mobile app.

Subject Area Expansion

Amid the nation’s opioid crisis and changes in state laws regarding marijuana in a growing number of states across the country, in 2017, the “Talk. They Hear You.” Campaign received separate funding to expand content to include information on alcohol and other substances. Recognizing the dynamic national context, SAMHSA is expanding the “Talk. They Hear You.” Campaign so parents can be prepared to talk to their children about alcohol and other drugs, including prescription pain medications and marijuana.



References

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