



www.achconline.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Donnis Reese

248-802-6789

donnis@achconline.org

**Restricting Drinking Until Age 21
Saves lives and Prevents Health Risks**

National media outlets have reported a movement to reduce the minimum drinking age in the U.S. Parade magazine, on MSNBC and Fox News have published reports of those seeking to discredit the law and its effectiveness. Prevention groups, including community coalitions, across America are responding with information about the need to reduce underage drinking, and the importance of the minimum drinking age law.

Donnis Reese, Executive Director of ACHC (Alliance of Coalitions for Healthy Communities) says there is ample evidence that minimum legal drinking age laws have saved lives across America. "There is much published, credible research that shows the positive effect of the increase in the minimum drinking age to 21.¹²³ A review of the research from 1960 – 2000 shows most studies report an inverse relationship between the minimum drinking age and both alcohol consumption and traffic crashes.⁴ Other well-documented studies are available on MADD's website, www.why21.org.

Sean Flynn, author of "Should the Drinking Age Be Lowered?" Parade, August 12, 2007, suggests that reducing the minimum age for drinking alcohol would

¹¹ Grobe, Joe; and Nygaard, Peter, In *Preventing Harmful Substance Use: The Evidence Base for Policy and Practice*, West Sussex, John Wiley & Sons (2005, Edited by T. Stockwell; P. Gruenewald; J. Toumbourou; and W. Loxley.

² LaScala, E. A.; Gruenewald, P.J.; and Ponicki, W. R., *Alcoholism, Clinical and Experimental Research*, vol. 31, Pgs. 804-13 (2007)

³ Press Release by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, *Lowering the drinking age increases car crashes among youth, study finds* a report of a study based on data from New Zealand. Available at www.pire.org.

⁴ Wagenaar, A.C. & Toomey, T. L., (2002) "Effects of Minimum Drinking Age Laws: Review and Analyses of the Literature from 1960 to 2000, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, Suppl. 14*, 206-226.

reduce youth alcohol abuse. He cites a website that references research by James MacKillop and Stephen A. Lisman. These researchers have concluded that telling underage drinkers they won't have access to alcohol only increases their motivation to drink. Given the high rates of underage drinking, Flynn concludes that lowering the minimum drinking age may reduce harmful alcohol use by young people.

Media attention for reducing the minimum age is being promoted by The National Youth Rights Association. This group is campaigning to eliminate any law restricting the right of youth to drink alcohol, as well as other parental and school restrictions. They cite a study that documents their view, by linking the reader to a 2001 paper presented in the proceedings of the American Economic Association. This paper reports the research of the author who concludes that the positive effect of 21 as the minimum drinking age may be lessened when other factors are considered. However, this research was not noted to be published in any research journal, nor replicated by another other research group.

The facts about the risk of underage drinking are well-substantiated:

- Youth who use early are more likely to have alcohol or drug problems later in life.⁵
- The brain continues to develop into the early/mid 20's, and alcohol use damages memory and learning abilities as well as other deficits.⁶
- Underage drinking is associated with other health issues such as unsafe sexual activity and violence.^{7, 8}
- Underage alcohol use is more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined.^{9, 10}

Communities can take action to reduce underage drinking when persons organize to mobilize for community change. For more information go to www.achconline.org and find about a community coalition in your area.

⁵ Ralph W. Hingson, ScD, MPH; Timothy Heeren, PhD; Michael R. Winter, MPH, "Age at Drinking Onset and Alcohol Dependence", *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2006;160:739-746.

⁶ <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/9416.html>

⁷ The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, "Substance Use and Risky Sexual Behavior: Attitudes and Practices Among Adolescents and Young Adults," Survey Snapshot (February 2002)

⁸ R. Hingson, T. Heeren, M.R. Winter, and H. Wechsler, "Early Age of First Drunkenness as a Factor in College Students' Unplanned and Unprotected Sex Attributable to Drinking," *Pediatrics* 111 (2003): 34-41.

⁹ Grunbaum, J.A.; Kann, L.; Kinchen, S.A.; et al. Youth risk behavior surveillance: United States, 2001. *MMWR: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 51(SS04): 1-62, 2002.

¹⁰ Young, S.E.; Corley, R.P.; Stallings, M.C.; et al. Substance use, abuse and dependence in adolescence: Prevalence, symptom profiles and correlates. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 68(3):309-322, 2002.

