

# The American Issue

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## Adolescent Substance Use: America's #1 Public Health Problem

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NEW YORK, NY, June 29, 2011 – Nine out of 10 Americans who meet the medical criteria for addiction<sup>1</sup> started smoking, drinking, or using other drugs before age 18, according to a national study released today by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA\*) at Columbia University.

Adolescent Substance Use: America's #1 Public Health Problem reveals that adolescence is the critical period for the initiation of substance use and its consequences. The CASA report finds 1 in 4 Americans who began using any addictive substance before age 18 are addicted, compared to 1 in 25 Americans who started using at age 21 or older.

### Adolescent Substance Use at Epidemic Levels:

The CASA report underscores the fact that addiction is a disease with adolescent origins. The underdeveloped teen brain makes it likelier that teens will take risks, including using addictive substances that interfere with brain development, impair judgment and heighten their risk of addiction.

The CASA report reveals that:

- 75 percent (10 million) of all high school students have used addictive substances including tobacco, alcohol, marijuana or cocaine; 1 in 5 of them meets the medical criteria for addiction.
- 46 percent (6.1 million) of all high school students currently use addictive substances; 1 in 3 of them meets the medical criteria for addiction.

“Teen substance use is our nation's number one public health problem. Smoking, drinking and using other drugs while the brain is still developing dramatically hikes the risk of addiction and other devastating consequences,” said Jim Ramstad, Former Member of Congress (MN-3) and a CASA board member who also chaired the report's National Advisory Commission.

The CASA report noted that alcohol is the preferred addictive substance among high school students:

- 72.5 percent have drunk alcohol;
- 46.3 percent have smoked cigarettes;
- 36.8 percent have used marijuana;
- 14.8 percent have misused controlled prescription drugs; and
- 65.1 percent have used more than one substance.

“Addiction is a disease that in most cases begins in adolescence so preventing or delaying teens from using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs for as long as possible is crucial to their health and safety,” said Susan Foster, CASA's Vice President and Director of Policy Research and Analysis. “We rightfully worry about other teen health problems like obesity, depression or bullying, but we turn a blind eye to a more common and deadly epidemic that we can in fact prevent.”

### American Culture Drives Teen Substance Use

The report finds that American culture, broadly defined, actually increases the risk that teens will use addictive substances. A wide range of social influences subtly condone or more overtly encourage use, including acceptance of substance use by parents, schools and communities; pervasive advertising of these products; and media portrayals of substance use as benign or glamorous, fun and relaxing. These cultural messages and the widespread availability of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and controlled prescription drugs normalize substance use, undermining the health and futures of our teens.

Forty-six percent of children under age 18 (34.4 million) live in a household where someone 18 or older is smoking, drinking excessively, misusing prescription drugs or using illegal drugs. Less than half (42.6 percent) of parents list refraining from smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, using marijuana, misusing prescription drugs or using other illicit drugs as one of their top three concerns for their teens; almost 21 percent say that marijuana is a harmless drug.

The report also finds that many teens with other challenges such as a family history including a genetic predisposition, a co-occurring health problem, or a victim of trauma are at even higher risk of substance use and addiction.

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[http://www.marininstitute.org/site/images/stories/6-10-11\\_LA\\_BusBench\\_DPW\\_PR\\_final.pdf](http://www.marininstitute.org/site/images/stories/6-10-11_LA_BusBench_DPW_PR_final.pdf)

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### ***Victory on Stopping Bus Bench Alcohol Ads in Los Angeles Coalition to Ban Alcohol Ads from Public Property Rallies in Los Angeles to Persuade Board of Public Works***

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (June 10, 2011) – The Coalition to Ban Alcohol Ads from Public Property organized a lively grassroots rally in Los Angeles City Hall Plaza this morning to send a message to the L.A. Board of Public Works that promoting alcohol on city-owned bus benches was a really bad idea. The Board heard the concerns and agreed by asking for a full ban on all alcohol ads in the new contract. The contractor, Martin Outdoor Media, LLC quickly agreed. ***There will be no alcohol ads on 6,000 L.A. city-owned bus benches.*** This will reduce youth exposure to messages that are feeding an epidemic of underage alcohol consumption and harm.

*“The City of Los Angeles has a responsibility to its citizens to not provide a venue for advertising of alcohol on property owned by the citizenry,”* said John O. Whitaker, Jr., CATC, A.W.A.R.E./Tarzana Treatment Centers. *“Children should never be exposed to alcohol advertising. For most addicts, alcohol was their first mind-altering substance and it is known to be a gateway drug to the rest. The earlier the exposure to alcohol advertising, the earlier addicts or potential addicts are likely to drink and then use. Banning alcohol ads on city owned property is a fantastic step in the right direction.”*

The Los Angeles Department of Public Health recently recommended that “reducing alcohol advertising in public spaces and in areas commonly seen by minors,” would help discourage underage drinking. Yet the originally proposed 10-year bus bench contract with Martin Outdoor Media inexplicably allowed the company to place alcohol ads on public property. *“The banning of alcohol ads is not about contracts and profits or freedom of speech. Alcohol, a toxic and poisonous substance that has been shown to cause disease and death due to health problems, should not be advertised in public view,”* stated Ruben Rodriguez, executive director Pueblo y Salud. *“The City of LA has the responsibility and the right to protect the health and safety of its residents. We call upon the City to ban all alcohol advertising on City-owned property.”* L.A. is plagued by over \$10.8 billion in alcohol-related harm every year. More than 2.3 million underage youth drink alcohol each year in California. Underage drinking costs the state a staggering \$7.3 billion annually. Youth violence, crime, car crashes, and high-risk sex are the most noticeable results.

*“Throughout this country there are laws to protect the safety of our youth, including making sure that the youth that use public transportation on a daily basis, are not exposed to this type of advertising,”* said Hugo Pacheco, Community Leadership Coalition. *“Yet local politicians, unwilling to take the necessary steps to eliminate non-essential spending, are hoping to gain additional revenue by selling off advertising rights to previously protected public property venues. Ultimately the taxpayers will have to pay the exorbitant costs associated with curing the negative results of those who have been influenced to touch the products.”* By acknowledging the research-based data on the dangers of exposing youth to alcohol-ads, and calling for a full ban, the Board of Public Works decision will now move the contract to the Mayor and City Council for final approval.

*“The Los Angeles MTA does not allow any alcohol advertising on its buses, trains and other transit facilities,”* said Jorge Castillo, advocacy and outreach organizer from Marin Institute. *“We thank the Board of Public Works and Martin Outdoor Media for reaching this similar agreement. Now we will focus on persuading the Los Angeles City Council and the Mayor to also adopt this wise policy, and approve the Martin Outdoor Media contract with a full prohibition on any alcohol ads on city-owned bus benches.”*

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO: <http://noalcoholads.org/> and [www.marininstitute.org](http://www.marininstitute.org)

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### A Costly Epidemic

The CASA report declares teen smoking, drinking, misusing prescription drugs and using illegal drugs to be a public health epidemic presenting clear and present dangers to millions of American teens, and severe and expensive long range consequences for our nation.

In addition to the heightened risk of addiction, consequences of teen substance use include accidents and injuries; unintended pregnancies; medical conditions such as asthma, depression, anxiety, psychosis and impaired brain function; reduced academic performance and educational achievement; criminal involvement and even death.

The report finds teen substance use is the origin of the largest preventable and most costly public health problem in America today. Immediate costs per year of teen use include an estimated \$68 billion associated with underage drinking and \$14 billion in substance-related juvenile justice costs. Total costs to federal, state and local governments of substance use, which has its roots in adolescence, are at least \$468 billion per year - almost \$1,500 for every person in America<sup>2</sup>.

“The combination of adolescence, an American culture that glorifies and promotes substance use, and easy access to tobacco, alcohol and other drugs creates a perfect storm for our teens and for taxpayers,” said Ramstad. “We no longer can justify writing off adolescent substance use as bad behavior, as a rite of passage or as kids just being kids. The science is too clear, the facts are too compelling, the health and social consequences are too devastating and the costs are simply too high.”

#### The CASA report contains a full list of recommendations that include:

- Educating the public that teen substance use is a public health problem and addiction a medical problem that in most cases originates in adolescence.
- Preventing or delaying the onset of substance use through effective public health measures.
- Identifying teens most at risk through routine screenings.
- Intervening early to prevent further use and consequences as with any other public health problem.
- Providing appropriate medical treatment to teens for substance use disorders.

“The problem is not that we don't know what to do, it's that we are failing to act,” noted Foster. “It is time to recognize teen substance use as a preventable public health problem and addiction as a treatable medical disease, and to respond to it as fiercely as we would to any other public health epidemic threatening the safety of our children.”

For more information visit [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org).

<sup>1</sup> Meet medical criteria for nicotine dependence or alcohol or other drug abuse or dependence.

<sup>2</sup> From CASA's 2009 report, *Shoveling Up II: The Impact of Substance Abuse on Federal, State and Local Budgets*.

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### UNLOCKING THE MOLECULAR MYSTERY OF HOW ALCOHOL DAMAGES THE BRAIN

Although alcohol is the most widely used drug in the world, researchers have only recently begun to really understand on a molecular level just how it damages the brain. In June 2011, at the annual meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism, held in San Antonio, Texas, one group of researchers discussed new findings that will be published in the September 2011 issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.

Rebecca J. Howard, a postdoctoral fellow from the University of Texas at Austin's Waggoner Center for Alcohol & Addiction Research, and Gregg Homanics, professor of anesthesiology, pharmacology and chemical biology at the University of Pittsburgh, are two researchers who spoke about these new findings. They explained that neuroscientists understand very well how drugs such as marijuana or cocaine affect the brain, but it's quite a different story when it comes to alcohol.

Scientists know that drugs such as marijuana, cocaine and heroin attach or bind to particular proteins on the surface of brain cells and change how those cells function. Howard compared this protein binding action to the way a key fits into a lock. With alcohol, the “lock-and-key” binding process is very different than with other drugs, because it binds to lots of various proteins in the brain.

Howard explained it this way. “One major problem in studying alcohol binding to brain proteins is that the alcohol key does not fit very tightly into any particular protein lock,” she said. “Understanding the exact shape of that lock and key helps us to understand how individuals with special mutations may be affected differently by drugs.” That includes alcohol.

Homanics commented on the importance of figuring out which brain proteins are affected by alcohol. “There is now overwhelming evidence that specific alcohol binding sites exist on a variety of brain protein targets,” he said. “This is significant because we can now focus on defining these sites in greater detail, ultimately at the level of each atom involved.”

As researchers continue to focus their study on how alcohol affects the various proteins in the brain, it can ultimately help in the development of new medicines and therapies for people who abuse alcohol. “Great progress is being made in understanding how alcohol exerts its effects on the brain at the molecular level,” Homanics said. “Understanding how alcohol affects brain proteins on a molecular level is essential if we are to effectively develop rational treatments to combat alcohol use disorders.”

Sources: “Understanding alcohol's damaging effects on the brain,” *ScienceDaily.com*, June 16, 2011.

“How alcohol damages the brain,” *RedOrbit.com*, June 17, 2011.

<http://freshstory.org/blogs/freshstory.php?p=146&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1#more146>

**American Council on Alcohol Problems  
2376 Lakeside Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35244**

**TO:**

**PURPOSE:** American Council on Alcohol Problems is the channel of cooperation through which state temperance organizations, national religious bodies and similar concerned groups and individuals in America can unite to deal with the problems caused by alcohol and other drugs.

ACAP provides the forum and the mechanism through which concerned persons can find common ground on alcohol and other drug problems and address these issues with a united voice. It is the successor organization to the American Temperance League and the Anti-Saloon League established in 1895. Membership of ACAP presently is made up of 30 local temperance organizations, 22 national Christian denominations, and other fraternal organizations that support ACAP's philosophy of abstinence.

(ACAP is classified by the IRS as a 501 (c)(3) tax-deductible charity.)

Checks should be made payable to:

**American Council on Alcohol Problems**

**ACAP Officers**

**President: Jim Butler, CA**

**President-elect: Mark Creech, NC**

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**Join us for the 2011 Annual Meeting of the American Council on Alcohol Problems  
September 20-21, 2011 / Raleigh North Carolina**

Rev. Mark Creech, Executive Director of the Christian Action League of North Carolina, is hosting the Annual Meeting of the American Council on Alcohol Problems in the beautiful city of Raleigh. He is planning an exciting slate of speakers. Please mark you calendars to join us for fellowship and educational speakers as well as many activities in the city of Raleigh. Please see the following website to plan your vacation itinerary. <http://www.visitraleigh.com/visitors/> or call 1-800-849-8499. If you would like to register for the meeting or would like more information, please call Cheryl Corley at 205-989-8177.



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**Teen Drug Use At Epidemic Levels: Smoking Is Main Gateway / [www.medicalnewstoday.com](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com)**

Almost a quarter of all youth that begin smoking, drinking or using drugs of any kind before the age of 18 go on to become severely addicted to some sort of drug in adulthood according to a new study released by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA). As a matter of fact, 90% of drug addictions begin in high school.

Researchers from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, or CASA, found that nine out of 10 American addicts started smoking, drinking or using drugs before the age of 18 and one in four of those people become addicted to some sort of drug.