

## Underage Drinking and Driving: A Local and National Concern

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2000, alcohol-related auto crashes in the United States cost the public an estimated \$114.3 billion, including \$51.1 billion in monetary costs and an estimated \$63.2 billion in quality of life losses<sup>1</sup>. While drunk driving among any age group remains a concern for communities across the country, this behavior among youth (under 21) is of special concern, since traffic fatalities are the number one cause of death for teens<sup>2</sup>.

The NHTSA cites 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws<sup>3</sup> as a key factor in bringing down the nation's rate of death for this age group, with 826 lives saved in 2007<sup>4</sup>. However, despite these laws, alcohol remains the most commonly used substance by America's teens (according to national household surveys), and the vast majority of underage drinkers obtain alcohol from non-commercial sources and drink it in their home or someone else's home<sup>5</sup>.

Locally, underage drinking is on the radar of both program and policy leaders as an issue of concern. Specifically, San Diego County statistics summarized in the San Diego County Report Card on Children and Families 2007 (authored by The Children's Initiative and available at [www.sdcountyreportcard.org](http://www.sdcountyreportcard.org)), reveal that:

- the number of DUI arrests for youth under 18 has not decreased significantly since 2005;
- the rate of fatal and non-fatal crashes involving drivers between the ages of 16 and 20 who were under the influence of alcohol or other drugs per 100,000 population was higher in San Diego County (105 per capita) in 2005 compared to the State of California (84 per capita); and
- in 2005, San Diego County had the second highest number of alcohol-related collisions involving young drivers in the state, second only to Los Angeles County.

In addition, data from the SANDAG Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program reveal that in 2007, 40 percent of juveniles booked into Juvenile Hall (and interviewed) reported that over the past year they had ridden in a car with a driver who had been drinking or who had used drugs, and 15 percent reported driving a car themselves while under the influence (data available at [www.sandag.org](http://www.sandag.org)).

### RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS UNDERAGE DRINKING AND DRIVING IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

- Set-up sobriety checkpoints in communities with high incidences of DUI accidents.
- Develop multi-faceted, community-based prevention approaches.
- Educate parents about the risks and liabilities of "supervised" drinking.

SOURCE: *San Diego County Report Card on Children and Families 2007*.

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<sup>1</sup> NHTSA (2002). *Impaired Driving in the U.S. Cost Fact Sheets*. Available on-line at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).

<sup>2</sup> MADD (No Date). *Underage Drinking and the 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) Law Fact Sheet*. Available on-line at [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org).

<sup>3</sup> In July 1984, federal legislation set the national minimum legal drinking age of 21, which by 1988 was adopted by all states.

<sup>4</sup> NHTSA (November 2008). *Lives Saved in 2007 by Restraint Use and Minimum Drinking Age Laws*. Available on-line at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).

<sup>5</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2008). *Underage Alcohol Use: Findings from the 2002-2006 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health*. Available on-line at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).