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New Study Finds Troubling Links Between Alcohol Marketing Tactics and Increased Underage Drinking

*Groundbreaking study demonstrates causal link between marketing and youth alcohol use
With proven health risks, advocates call for heightened focus on protecting young lives*

(Austin, TX – February 25, 2020) – With the release of a new national study on alcohol marketing and underage drinking, the U.S. Alcohol Policy Alliance today called for increased national and local efforts to protect our nation’s youth. The study, published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, uses widely accepted scientific standards to conclude that youth exposure to alcohol marketing is causally related to youth drinking behavior. With this finding, the Alliance is calling for heightened scrutiny and regulation of the alcohol industry’s marketing practices, which – voluntary and unenforceable – have overexposed youth.

In addition, the Alliance will launch a series of interactive dialogues that will drive action at the local level. A number of communities have seen success at tackling this issue and protecting kids. In New York City, both the Metropolitan Transit Authority and Mayor’s Office implemented bans of all alcohol advertising on public transit and city owned property. And in Watsonville, California a youth-led campaign improved enforcement of existing advertising restrictions that protected kids from alcohol ads. As a result of the campaign, the city achieved 100% compliance with the laws within three years, saw a drop in instances of binge drinking, and saw an increase in the average age of onset of drinking. The report’s findings clearly back up the need for these measures, and the Alliance will work to engage more communities in similar efforts to protect youth.

“With this report, science has spoken – there is a proven association between aggressive marketing practices and underage alcohol use,” said **Nicole Holt, Chair of the U.S. Alcohol Policy Alliance and CEO of Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth**. “This should sound the alarm, loud and clear: We need to protect kids from exposure to alcohol marketing. There should be no more excuses – we need to see attention, federal and local investment, and enforcement on this issue nationwide.”

“Whether at the federal or local level, it is imperative we are taking active steps to reduce youth exposure to alcohol marketing – which clearly leads to an increase in underage drinking,” said **Cedric McClester of the Building Alcohol Ad-Free Transit (BAAFT) Campaign and the Forward South Bronx Coalition**. “We’re proud of the national leadership New York has shown on this issue and hope others follow this lead. But more needs to be done. Kids are being disproportionately targeted and affected by the alcohol industry and we need engagement and action from our national leaders. Across the country, we must work together to protect our kids, no matter what city they live in.”

“This research is incredibly valuable, particularly because it supports those of us who are out doing the work in our communities to protect our youth,” said **Brenda Armstrong, Prevention Program Manager at the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency**. “Even more importantly, it will help encourage even more communities to seek and take action as well.”

Currently, the alcohol industry lacks adequate governmental oversight and regulation regarding its advertising and marketing practices. Industry is largely left to self-regulation and voluntary participation in any rules and regulations. However, because industry is more focused on protecting its own interests and has actively fought increased regulation, youth have been left vulnerable and as this study has concluded, more kids have engaged in underage drinking and binge drinking.

Rather than focusing on protective measures, companies spend massive amounts of money on ads in efforts to strengthen branding and drive sales. Studies have shown that youth see more ads for alcohol than products that are legal and safe for them to consume. And according to the World Health Organization's 2014 Global Status Report, the more alcohol ads kids see, the more likely they are to drink, to start drinking at an earlier age, and to drink more. Youth exposure to the alcohol industry's marketing campaigns demonstrate a need for policies and enforcement to protect youth.

As such, the Alliance is calling for urgent action at both federal and local levels. Specifically:

- Increased governmental regulation that will require the industry to abide by practices that are appropriately designed to **protect youth**;
- A series of reports by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Office of the Surgeon General, and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine that will **drive smart, effective public policies** on marketing and alcohol consumption;
- A renewed focus from the U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism on the issue will result in **important research** on alcohol marketing and vulnerable populations; and
- **Local communities taking steps to protect youth from marketing** in places such as mass transportation, stores, and areas immediately surrounding schools.

The Alliance's first interactive session will take place next month and will be open to all prevention advocates. During these sessions, participants will learn about policies, research, and strategies, and how to put them into action in their local communities to address this issue.

Underage drinking remains one of the most dangerous – but common – health risks to youth. The health consequences are particularly significant to youth and adolescents because they are at an important stage of brain development. Drinking during this critical growth period can lead to lifelong damage in brain function, memory, and coordination. Additionally, drinking at a younger age makes it more likely an adolescent will develop addiction or substance abuse problems later in life.

Nearly 100,000 deaths are caused by alcohol each year, and alcohol poisoning is the cause of more than 2,000 deaths per year. Underage drinking is also a serious problem nationwide – by age 15 one-third of all teens have had at least one drink; by age 18, that number rises to 60 percent.

About the U.S. Alcohol Policy Alliance

The U.S. Alcohol Policy Alliance was organized in 2014 by advocates across the country and is an organization of state and local groups and individuals working on alcohol policy, independent of commercial interests. It is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization.

About the Study

The study, "Alcohol Marketing and Youth Drinking: Is There a Causal Relationship?" was published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, Supplement 19, and was funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. The issue can be found at <http://jsad.com>