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College Drinking in Maryland: *A Status Report*

September 2013

A Report from



THE MARYLAND COLLABORATIVE
TO REDUCE COLLEGE DRINKING AND RELATED PROBLEMS

www.marylandcollaborative.org

About the Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems

The Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems began in 2012 with funding from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. The purpose of the Collaborative is to bring together Maryland colleges and universities toward a shared goal—to reduce excessive drinking among college students, by creating environments that support student and community health, safety, and success. Drs. Amelia Arria from the University of Maryland School of Public Health and David Jernigan from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health are the Co-leaders of this initiative.

More information about the Maryland Collaborative can be found at www.marylandcollaborative.org.

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SCHOOL OF
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background on the Maryland Collaborative

College students comprise a large and critical segment of America's future workforce. More than 270,000 undergraduate students attend college in Maryland (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), which houses some of the finest schools in the nation. The responsibility that Maryland colleges have to maximize the individual potential of every student is well recognized, as is the devastating impact of excessive drinking on student health, safety, and success.

Institutions of higher education in Maryland and across the country are grappling with the costs of high-risk drinking—in the form of economic costs to our communities as well as emotional costs to our families. The impact on individual lives is enormous. Each year, nationally, as a result of alcohol, more than 1,800 college students die—that is five per day; nearly 600,000 are injured; nearly 700,000 are assaulted by another student under the influence; and nearly 100,000 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009).

Excessive drinking during college can compromise one's health, safety, and well-being, and can attenuate academic achievement and economic productivity post-college. Approximately one in four college students report that drinking has adversely affected their academic performance.

College student drinking is a public health problem that is larger than just the colleges and universities. It is a problem for the entire state—parents, community members, law enforcement, landlords, responsible liquor licensees, and employers. Excessive drinking has radiating effects on the community ranging from noise and nuisance, to vandalism, assaults, drunk driving, injuries, and deaths.

From decades of scientific research studies, we know that excessive drinking among college students has multiple causes and contributing factors. It is a complex problem with many facets. Too often, students come to college with well-established drinking patterns already in place. Many students, but not all, come to college with an expectation that heavy drinking is part of the college culture. When college administrators and law enforcement personnel take action to intervene, those actions are too often seen as an infringement on what students believe should be normal behavior.

Science has shed light on how to prevent excessive drinking and intervene when problems become more serious. Fortunately, many of the resources needed for prevention reside here in Maryland, including some of the nation's top researchers and university leaders who have begun to successfully address the problem on their own campuses.

Moreover, the state of Maryland recognizes that college drinking is a significant public health problem that can compromise student success and place unnecessary burdens on our criminal justice and health care systems. In 2012, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), under the leadership of Secretary Sharfstein, declared reducing college student drinking a state

health priority. DHMH, through the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration (ADAA), funded the planning phase of an initiative to address that priority. Initially, the purpose was to begin a dialogue with key campus leaders about college drinking, understand the magnitude of the problem, describe the current strategies being used to address it, and assess how these strategies align with evidence from the growing science base of knowledge around effective interventions. Because college drinking problems transcend campus boundaries, it was also important to learn about the extent to which communities were involved in implementing solutions.

By the end of the first year, the “Maryland Collaborative” was created, governed by a Council of college presidents committed to making a significant and measurable difference in excessive drinking and related problems on college campuses in Maryland.

Public health professionals from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the University of Maryland School of Public Health were tasked with leading the effort. The first-year activities centered on building relationships and learning about the challenges and successes of the school and the communities that surround them.

This report details what was learned during this first year of planning. Information was gathered using a variety of methods, including discussions with community leaders, administrators, and staff from 38 schools in Maryland, and reviews and analyses of publicly-available administrative data. We learned about the current status of the problem, its radiating effects on Maryland communities, and the strategies being implemented to address the problem. A companion document was also created—*Reducing Alcohol Use and Related Problems among College Students: A Guide to Best Practices*—that describes the scientific evidence supporting specific types of interventions to reduce problems, at the level of both the individual and the broader environment (Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Related Problems, 2013). This document is available on our website, www.marylandcollaborative.org.

Key Findings

College student drinking is a complex problem that can only be reduced by simultaneously implementing efforts to change individual behavior with strategies to modify the campus and community environments that heavily influence student decisions to drink.

There is a high level of recognition that excessive drinking among students is a problem and adversely influences student health, safety, and functioning. College students in Maryland have drinking patterns similar to those of their counterparts across the country, with some indication of even heavier patterns and less utilization of services among the highest risk drinkers in Maryland.

Many schools are engaged in a variety of prevention and intervention activities, and campus leaders are eager to learn how to maximize the impact of their existing approaches and prevention activities. It is fully recognized that the issue does not only concern Maryland’s colleges, but also the communities surrounding the colleges, and ultimately the entire state is affected. There are several

community leaders who are interested in working with schools to address student drinking problems.

There is a scarcity of standardized methods being used to measure alcohol use and related problems. Yet there are many opportunities for gathering such information and implementing common methods across different sets of schools (e.g., community colleges, private colleges, public schools).

Below we summarize the strategies currently being used to address excessive drinking at both the individual-level and at the environmental level. We also provide recommendations for future action.

Individual-level Strategies

Schools are implementing a variety of strategies to address student drinking at the individual level. While some schools provide screening and brief intervention to identify and address students with alcohol problems, schools cite high cost, insufficient training, and a lack of adequate models as the greatest barriers to implementing these programs more widely. Education programs are the most commonly used strategy to address excessive drinking and are very popular among schools in Maryland as in other states. Education programs are offered to first-year students at 79% of 4-year schools but at only slightly more than half of 2-year schools (57%). While education has been shown to be ineffective when used alone, most colleges complement education with other strategies and policies. In general, colleges could benefit from enhanced evidence-based interventions to address student alcohol problems.

Training for faculty, clinical personnel, and other “helpers” in the campus community is an area that schools can expand upon. More than half (58%) of public 4-year schools provide training to their faculty on how to refer students for help on campus who they believe might have an alcohol problem. In contrast, few schools provide faculty training focused on alcohol policies, enforcement procedures, or how to identify high-risk drinkers. Campus professionals can benefit from additional training and other resources to recognize and respond appropriately to high-risk students. New opportunities for screening might exist as well, especially in terms of systems to identify and intervene. For example, academic assistance centers might be considered as a place to implement screening of students who are chronically missing class or struggling academically.

Pre-matriculation outreach to parents is nearly universal among 4-year schools while far fewer 2-year schools provide any alcohol education to parents of incoming first-year students (57% provide “None”). Parent involvement could be expanded and enhanced through education programs that reach beyond first-year efforts. Additionally, schools can gain better understanding of each other’s experiences and from the research to re-examine their policies on parental notification. Currently, 21% of schools notify parents after two or more on-campus alcohol violations.

Environmental-level Strategies

There is much more that colleges could be doing to address the larger environments in which students make their decisions about drinking. Alcohol is easily available on- and off-campus across the state. While some individual schools prohibit alcohol use on campus, schools vary widely with respect to the degree to which they are involved with community partners to address local drinking problems and environments. Opportunities exist in the future to create campus-community partnerships, as well as to broaden the membership of existing campus alcohol task forces.

While most schools provide information about campus alcohol policies in student handbooks, a few (18%) also integrate this information into classes. On campus, school policies vary with respect to the degree to which alcohol is allowed at events. Eighty percent of schools that allow alcohol on campus prohibit it at residence hall parties and social events, and 35% prohibit alcohol at more informal student gatherings in residence halls.

When alcohol is permitted, most (70%) schools require responsible beverage service training for servers, but less than half (44%) have written policies limiting free or low-priced drinks. More than two-thirds of schools have policies in place limiting alcohol marketing on campus.

At least four schools have worked with local authorities to address problematic service practices in off-campus alcohol outlets; the same number also worked to influence pricing practices. Thirteen of the 38 schools work with a local law enforcement agency to enforce state and local alcohol laws, using strategies such as compliance checks and party patrols.

Recommendations

Based on our findings in this report, we have divided our recommendations into three categories: process, individual, and environmental. Regarding process, we recommend that schools:

- ***Establish a campus-based alcohol “task force” that includes parents and alumni as well as faculty, staff, and students.***
- ***Set up and evaluate the work of campus-community coalitions that can leverage the capacities of law enforcement, local liquor boards, neighbors, retailers, and other stakeholders with powerful influences on the alcohol environment surrounding the campus.***

To address excessive drinking and related problems on college campuses at the individual level, we recommend that schools:

- ***Establish a highly-coordinated campus system using evidence-based screening instruments to recognize and intervene with high-risk students before they commit an alcohol violation or experience a serious alcohol-related problem.***

- *Train individuals working in key settings (residence halls and academic assistance, health, and counseling centers) to screen, identify, and refer high-risk students.*
- *Adopt written policies and procedures on how faculty and staff should respond to alcohol-related violations.*
- *Train residence hall staff how to recognize and respond to alcohol problems.*
- *Establish stronger partnerships with community-based practitioners and organizations that can help manage students with the most severe alcohol problems.*
- *Consider adopting Medical Amnesty and Good Samaritan policies, but realize these policies are not intended to reduce excessive drinking but to help avoid severe consequences.*
- *Improve outreach to and engagement of parents by facilitating participation in discussions with their child about drinking and extend these discussions past the freshman year.*

As an important and necessary complement and support to these individual-level activities, we recommend that colleges and universities consider the following environmental strategies as well:

- *Offer substance-free housing and consider prohibiting drinking at all residence hall events.*
- *In addition to prohibiting alcohol use at sporting events, consider banning or restricting alcohol at tailgating activities.*
- *Consider stronger policies to restrict alcohol availability at Panhellenic events and engage Panhellenic leadership in planning and implementing evidence-based approaches.*
- *Establish and expand restrictions on alcohol marketing on campus.*
- *Build and strengthen campus-community coalitions to address alcohol outlet density, sales, service, and pricing practice, and to work with local landlords to address noise and nuisance issues.*
- *Improve communication with students about alcohol policies and make better use of campus authority to have sanctions be consistent for on- and off-campus violations.*

Finally, establishing a measurement system to both understand the nature and magnitude of the problem and to evaluate the impact of interventions will be a critical component of the overall strategy to reduce excessive drinking among Maryland college students.

Conclusion

Colleges face significant barriers in reducing excessive drinking and related problems. Perhaps the most significant barrier is the utter complexity of the problem, which in turn calls for a coordinated, community-level response. We are fortunate that several schools in Maryland have already begun blazing that trail through their commitment to campus-community-based coalitions. Building on their experience, and on the substantial science base showing what actions are most likely to be effective, Maryland schools are poised to implement a science-based public health approach to reduce the problems associated with college drinking. Promoting best practices, providing a forum for information-sharing, learning from each other's experiences, and providing training and technical assistance across the state, the Maryland Collaborative can serve as a unique model and lead the nation in efforts to reduce college drinking and in turn, promote student health, safety, and success.

Because we are all affected by the problem of college drinking, we all—parents, administrators, students, faculty, staff, community members, law enforcement, public health workers, and treatment providers—must be part of the solution to address college drinking.