

Position Statement Template

Submission Date: 6/27/2005

Committee: Chronic Disease
05-CD-01

Title: Increase Funding and Support for Alcohol Epidemiology Activities in States

Statement of the Problem:

Excessive alcohol consumption accounts for 75,000 deaths and \$184 billion in economic costs in the U.S. each year, and is strongly associated with a wide range of acute and chronic health effects, including unintentional injuries (e.g., motor vehicle crashes and drownings); violence; fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS); chronic liver disease and cirrhosis; gastrointestinal cancers; cerebrovascular disease; and various mental disorders. Heavy episodic or binge drinking (≥ 5 drinks on 1 or more occasions), a particularly dangerous pattern of alcohol consumption, is reported by about 30% of current drinkers in the U.S., and is strongly associated with many health risk behaviors and adverse outcomes, including alcohol-impaired driving, unprotected sexual activity, and acute alcohol poisoning. Furthermore, almost half of all U.S. high school students report past-month alcohol consumption, and over 90% of this consumption involves binge drinking.

Given the burden of alcohol-related problems in the U.S., there is strong justification for public health surveillance of alcohol-related conditions and alcohol consumption, including both underage and binge drinking. Unfortunately, however, very few state health departments actively support work on alcohol epidemiology. This lack of state capacity in alcohol epidemiology reflects both a lack of resources, and a failure to effectively use existing resources to support alcohol epidemiology and population-based strategies to prevent excessive alcohol consumption.

The CDC is currently providing leadership and support for the development of state-level capacity in alcohol epidemiology. The CDC currently funds a state alcohol epidemiologist in two states, and has been developing tools to support states' work on the surveillance and control of excessive drinking. Recent work by the CDC in this area includes the development of an Alcohol and Public Health website (www.cdc.gov/alcohol), which provides a useful reference for states; the release of a web-based version of Alcohol-Related Disease Impact (ARDI) software, which supports states in estimating alcohol's impact; the development and funding of a binge drinking module for the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance (BRFSS), which supports states in better characterizing this important risk factor; and funding for the development of a new chapter on the Prevention and Control of Excessive Drinking and Related Harms for the Guide to Community Preventive Services, which will support states' prevention efforts. These resources provide states with much-needed support in developing epidemiologic capacity to address alcohol-related health problems.

This is an opportune time for CSTE to support the CDC's efforts to build capacity in the area of alcohol epidemiology and to support the prevention of excessive alcohol consumption.

Statement of the desired action(s) to be taken:

1. Request that the CDC increase funding for its initiatives to support alcohol epidemiology activities in states.

Public Health Impact:

The funding of the CDC's efforts to support state capacity will help state health departments develop sustainable capacity in alcohol epidemiology. This capacity will, in turn, enhance our understanding of alcohol problems in states, and support the development and implementation of population-based programs and policies (e.g., enforcement of the minimum drinking age and increasing alcohol excise taxes) to reduce excessive alcohol consumption.

Coordination:

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