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Greater Alcohol Availability Associated with Increase in Violent Crime, Car Crashes, and Drinking-Related Deaths

Report examines relationship between alcohol outlet density by community and alcohol-related harms

LOS ANGELES – Excessive consumption of alcohol is a major public health problem among teenagers and adults in Los Angeles County. According to a report released by the Department of Public Health today, each year 2,500 people in the county die from alcohol-related causes, with the loss of approximately 78,000 years of potential life. It is the second-leading cause of premature death and disability in the county.

The report, “Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms in Los Angeles County,” examines the density of alcohol outlets in 117 cities and communities across the County and highlights the relationship between alcohol outlet density and alcohol-related harms.

“Excessive alcohol consumption, which includes binge drinking and heavy drinking, not only has devastating personal effects, but also takes a tremendous toll on families and communities,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “Increased alcohol availability contributes to abuse, leads to serious medical illnesses and impaired mental health. Drinking too much also results in increased motor vehicle crashes and violent crime, family disruptions, and impaired performance at work and school - costing Los Angeles County nearly \$11 billion dollars a year.”

Key findings from the report include:

- 16 percent of county adults are binge drinkers, and one in five Los Angeles-area high school students reported binge drinking at least once in the past month
- Communities with a high density of restaurants, bars or stores selling alcohol were much more likely to have increased rates of violent crime
- Communities with a high density of outlets where patrons can consume alcohol were three times more likely to have increased rates of alcohol-involved vehicle crashes
- Communities with a high density of outlets where alcoholic beverages are sold for consumption elsewhere were five times more likely to have increased rates of alcohol-related deaths

“Alcohol is the most frequently used drug among teenagers and is a leading cause of death from injuries among people under the age of 21,” said John Viernes, Jr., Director of Substance Abuse Prevention and Control, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. “Preventing and reducing underage drinking, which increases the risk of alcohol-related problems later in life, is especially important. We would like to work closely with communities to take preventive actions at the community level.”



The report lists several strategies communities can use to reduce alcohol-related consequences including:

- Implementing and enforcing local ordinances to limit alcohol outlet density.
- Restricting the availability and accessibility of alcohol to minors.
- Reducing youth exposure to alcohol advertising.
- Ensuring compliance with responsible sales and serving practices.
- Providing education to youth on the hazards of alcohol and the legal and social consequences of use.
- Improving access to mental health and substance abuse services.

For a full copy of the report, "Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms in Los Angeles County", log onto the Public Health website at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth.

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