



Press Release

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CDC reports excessive alcohol consumption cost the U.S. \$224 billion in 2006

Most of the costs were due to binge drinking

The cost of excessive alcohol consumption in the United States in 2006 reached \$223.5 billion or about \$1.90 per drink, according to a new study by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(http://www.cdc.gov\)](http://www.cdc.gov). Almost three-quarters of these costs were due to binge drinking, consuming four or more alcoholic beverages per occasion for women or five or more drinks per occasion for men, the report said.

Excessive alcohol consumption, or heavy drinking, is defined as consuming an average of more than one alcoholic beverage per day for women, and an average of more than two alcoholic beverages per day for men, and any drinking by pregnant women or underage youth.

Researchers found the costs largely resulted from losses in workplace productivity (72 percent of the total cost), health care expenses for problems caused by excessive drinking (11 percent of the total cost), law enforcement and other criminal justice expenses related to excessive alcohol consumption (9 percent of the total cost), and motor vehicle crash costs from impaired driving (6 percent of the total cost). The study did not consider a number of other costs such as those due to pain and suffering by the excessive drinker or others who were affected by the drinking, and thus may be an underestimate. Researchers estimated that excessive drinking cost \$746 per person in the United States in 2006.

“This research captures the reality that binge drinking means binge spending and, left unchecked, the burdensome cost of excessive drinking will only go up,” said [CDC Director Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H \(http://www.cdc.gov/about/leadership/leaders/Frieden.htm\)](http://www.cdc.gov/about/leadership/leaders/Frieden.htm). “Unfortunately the hangover is being passed on to all of us in the workplace and the health and criminal justice systems. The cure is responsible individual behavior combined with the successful policies we used to decrease smoking in the United States.”

The researchers analyzed national data from multiple sources, including the [Alcohol-Related Disease Impact Application \(http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/DACH_ARDI/Default/Default.aspx\)](http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/DACH_ARDI/Default/Default.aspx), the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol-Related Conditions, and the [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](https://nsduhweb.rti.org/) [\(https://nsduhweb.rti.org/\)](https://nsduhweb.rti.org/), to estimate the costs resulting from excessive drinking in 2006, the most recent year for which data were generally available. A previous study by The Lewin Group, a private health care consulting firm in Falls Church, Va. experienced in the development of cost estimate studies, found that the cost of alcohol misuse in the United States was about \$185 billion in 1998.


“This landmark study highlights the enormous costs that excessive alcohol consumption inflicts on the individuals involved and on society in general,” said [Pamela S. Hyde, administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](http://www.samhsa.gov/about/bio_hyde.aspx) [\(http://www.samhsa.gov/about/bio_hyde.aspx\)](http://www.samhsa.gov/about/bio_hyde.aspx). “It also reinforces the importance of addressing behavioral health issues, including substance abuse, through our health care system.”

Overall, researchers found that about \$94.2 billion (42 percent) of the total economic costs of excessive alcohol consumption were borne by federal, state, and local governments while \$92.9 billion (41.5 percent) was borne by excessive drinkers and their family members. Government agencies paid most of the health care

expenses due to excessive alcohol use (61 percent), while drinkers and their families bore most of the cost of lost productivity (55 percent), primarily in the form of lower household income.

Excessive alcohol consumption, including high per-occasion alcohol consumption (binge drinking), and high average daily alcohol consumption is responsible for an average of 79,000 deaths in the United States each year.

“It is striking that over three-quarters of the cost of excessive alcohol consumption is due to binge drinking, which is reported by about 15 percent of U.S. adults,” said Robert Brewer, M.D., M.P.H., Alcohol Program Leader at CDC and one of the authors of the report. “Fortunately, there are a number of effective public health strategies that communities can use to reduce binge drinking and related harms, such as increasing the price of alcohol and reducing the number of places that sell and serve it.”

The study, “Economic Costs of Excessive Alcohol Consumption in the U.S., 2006,” is published online at <http://www.ajpmonline.org/>  (<http://www.ajpmonline.org/>), and in the November 2011 issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. The study is developed in collaboration with the CDC and the Lewin Group. The study was funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to the CDC Foundation.

For more information about the prevention of excessive alcohol use, visit the Alcohol and Public Health web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm> (<http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm>).

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