Working Together

The role of the community in reducing underage drinking
The environment in which young people live, go to school, and participate in activities affects their choices about whether or not to drink. The adults in their families, their schools, their churches, and their social groups can all have an influence.

The Surgeon General’s Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking - A Guide to Action for Communities provides information and recommendations.

Specific activities that can be implemented in communities include:

- Regular compliance checks – Work with liquor enforcement officers or local law enforcement to check stores, bars or restaurants for sales to underage youth.
- Shoulder taps - A program to discourage adults from purchasing alcohol for underage youth.
- Sticker shock campaign – The placing of stickers on alcohol at stores that warn about the penalties of furnishing alcohol to underage youth.
- Policy advocacy on topics like alcohol advertising, community events, etc.

Understanding Adult Misuse of Alcohol
Your family, culture, religious affiliation, and social circles or environment are just some of the factors that affect how you view and use alcohol. While alcohol laws and policies can help moderate behavior, prevalent social beliefs and behaviors are a strong factor in how people use alcohol.

Expectations about the social benefits of alcohol are reinforced through advertising and other media. Movies and television depict alcohol use as a way to retreat from your sorrows, as a means for a good time, and as a tool for social success.

The societal costs of adult misuse of alcohol can be extensive. These may include:

- Health/medical costs due to injury or medical treatment for health-related consequences
- Legal costs
- Lost productivity, loss of job
- Premature death
- Family disintegration
- Homelessness
- Treatment costs

Encouraging responsible use of alcohol
Changing community norms to encourage responsible use of alcohol and discourage misuse is a long-term, difficult task. However, ways to move toward these changes include:

- Establish “community values” statements to include responsible use of alcohol and expectations regarding alcohol use at community events
- Work with your local government to limit alcohol outlet density in your community
- Provide more opportunities for recreational activities that do not center on alcohol use
- Support the enforcement of laws pertaining to alcohol use
- Partner with local organizations and the media to promote responsible alcohol use
Working Together
Community partnerships involving government agencies, law enforcement, schools, businesses, faith communities, service organizations, non-profit agencies, and citizens can have a positive impact. Many communities in Washington State already have coalitions addressing some of the issues described here. You can find more information about coalitions and activities in your area by going to www.StartTalkingNow.org.