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Excessive Alcohol Use in Eau Claire County

High Costs – Serious Health Consequences

Eau Claire, WI – March 13, 2013–The first-ever comprehensive report detailing the costs of excessive alcohol use in Wisconsin was just released by Health First Wisconsin. The Burden of Excessive Alcohol Use in Wisconsin report estimates that excessive alcohol use costs \$6.8 billion a year in Wisconsin or approximately \$1,200 a person. In Eau Claire County, the cost is \$160 million a year – over \$1,600 a person.

“The costs of alcohol overuse in our county are simply astounding. There’s not a week that goes by where we don’t hear about an alcohol-related tragedy,” stated Francie Peardon, Community Advocacy Director of the Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention in Eau Claire County. “This report gives us the data on how pervasive alcohol problems are – those we hear about and those we don’t.”

Excessive alcohol use is a long-term public health problem in Eau Claire County and throughout the State. Excessive alcohol consumption includes:

- Binge drinking (5+ drinks per occasion for men; 4+ drinks for women)
- Heavy drinking (2+ drinks per day for men; 1+ for women)
- Underage drinking (any alcohol consumption by youth under age 21) and
- Any alcohol consumption by pregnant women.

Although many people in Wisconsin drink safely and responsibly, we unfortunately have a long history of unsafe alcohol use. Since 2000, Wisconsin has experienced among the highest rates in the nation of binge, heavy, and underage drinking as well as drinking before driving. Eau Claire County has a higher rate of binge drinking (30%) than Wisconsin (23%) or the US (16%). Excessive and dangerous drinking behaviors have led to staggering high costs, placing a tremendous burden on our businesses, health care, law enforcement and the criminal justice system. We all likely know someone that has been personally impacted by alcohol misuse. This report now documents that we are all paying for this misuse.

In 2003, the Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention (a coalition of coalitions) began efforts to tackle the problem in Eau Claire County. The Reality Check 21 Partnership was formed to reduce underage drinking among Eau Claire County youth 12-17 years old. The UW Eau Claire Center for Alcohol Studies initiated programs to reduce high-risk drinking among college students. There continues to be a strong community commitment to seeing healthy change in alcohol use. In 2001, the rate of alcohol use among high school students was 71%. Today, it's 51%. Parents, schools, law enforcement, and other community partners have been working collaboratively on a variety of research-based strategies through these partnerships.

“We have a daunting problem in Eau Claire County and the costs of excessive alcohol use are taking a toll on our businesses and taxpayers,” added Dave Duax, Eau Claire City Council member. “I hope this report brings people together to rein in Wisconsin’s alcohol culture and excessive drinking. We can meet this challenge - our safety and health depend on it.”

If you want more information on the report, please go to:

<http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/publications/other/burden-of-excessive-alcohol-use-in-wi.pdf>

For more information about efforts in Eau Claire County, contact Francie Peardon at the Eau Claire City-County Health Department, 715.839.4718.

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