



## JANUARY 2015 NEWSLETTER

### Making the Case for Greater Investment in Prevention By Pamela Erickson

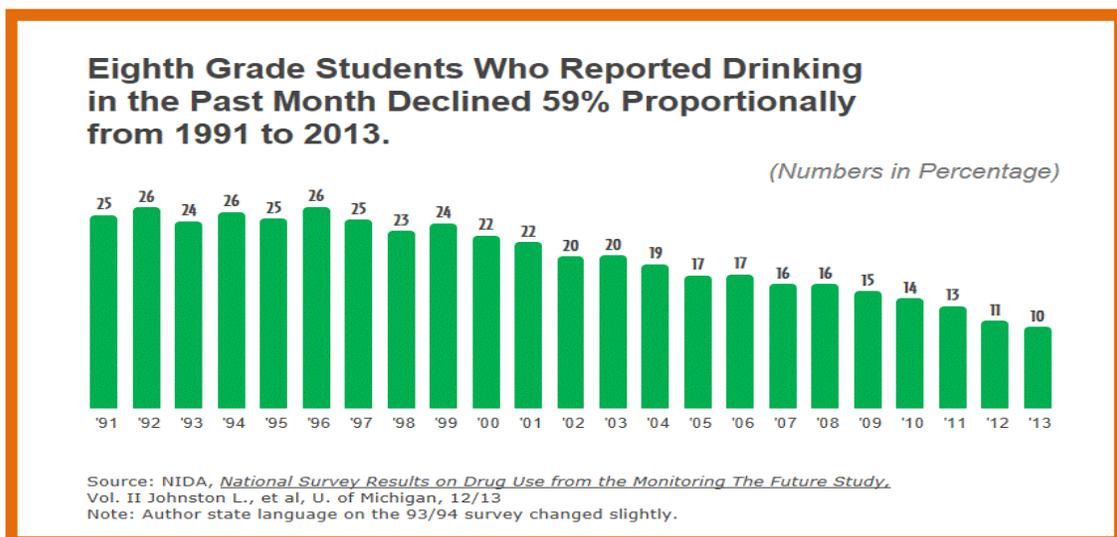
Last month I encouraged all of us to celebrate our success in reducing underage drinking rates, drug use and risky behaviors. Now I challenge all of you to use that success to obtain greater funding for prevention. It should be clear that preventing addiction and the many social problems related to alcohol abuse is more cost-effective than treating these problems after the fact. Our prisons are populated with inmates who committed crimes under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. Our families are devastated by the 10,000 annual drunk driving deaths. While we have made great strides in addiction treatment, it is an expensive process and relapse is common.

So I am challenging all of us to make the case for greater investment in prevention. Here are some points:

#### 1. Marshall the evidence to clearly demonstrate the benefits:

It's always hard to calculate the value of prevention when you can never actually know that your actions prevented something from happening. But, we must try.

- Can we estimate or quantify the outcome of reduced underage drinking rates in terms of lives saved, crimes prevented, and addiction avoided?
- Can we identify what worked best for such a dramatic reduction?



For more information, see [www.healthyalcoholmarket.com](http://www.healthyalcoholmarket.com)  
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**2. Refine and refocus the strategies:**

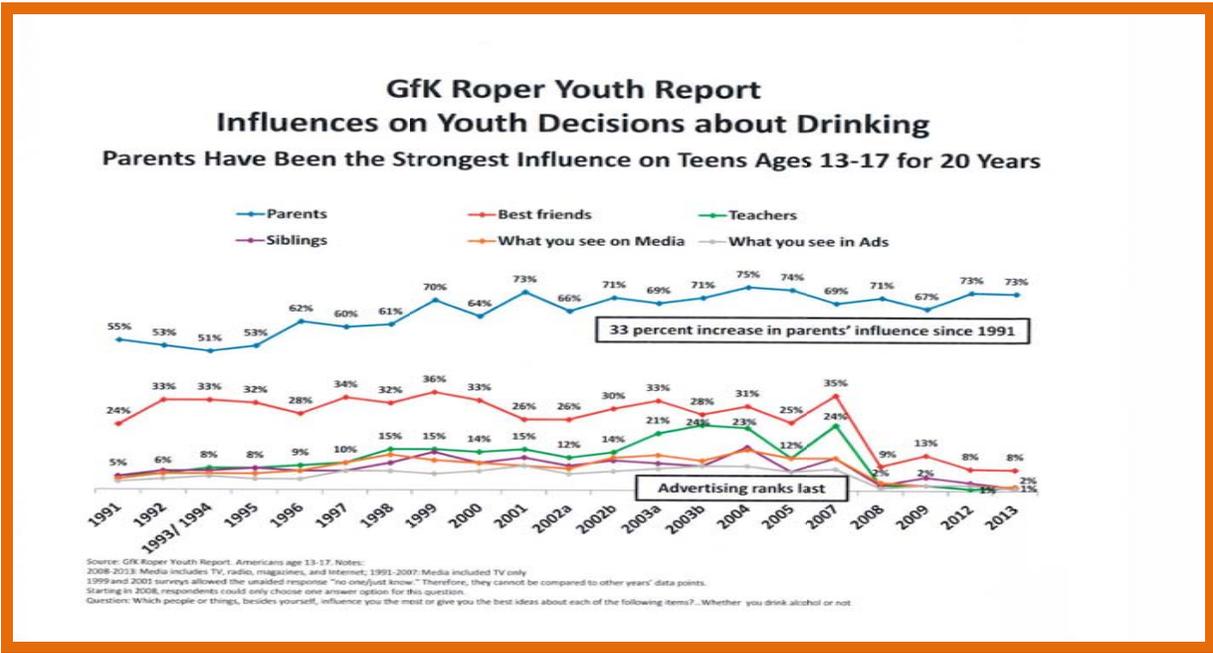
Policy-makers need our help in deciding where to spend scarce public funds. But they need a well-conceived, yet concise strategy that portrays the evidence, the costs and the benefits. In developing such a strategy, we should ask ourselves if we can streamline and refine our efforts in a way that allows us to shift some resources to areas where we need more change. For example, binge drinking rates among older youth and college students are still very high. We know that excessive drinking is associated with low grades and educational failure. Can we estimate the cost of such failure for parents and our society at large? We also know that a record of DUI, alcohol fueled violence, and other problems will harm a person's ability to get and keep good employment and even impacts the ability to rent an apartment.

There remains plenty of alcohol use on the nation's college campuses, with about three quarters (76 percent) of college students indicating drinking at least once in the past 12 months and more than half (58 percent) saying they had gotten drunk at least once in that period.

*University of Michigan News,  
September 14, 2014*

**3. Engaging parents**

One of the lessons we learned is how powerful parents can be when they teach and supervise their children. According to the GfK Roper Youth Report, parental influence has not only increased, but other influences has decreased! How can we encourage parents to do more of the things that keep kids—even older kids—away from drugs and alcohol?



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#### **4. Alcohol regulation is prevention, but must be “translated” to policy makers:**

Alcohol regulation focuses on the “strong strategies” that the world’s top alcohol researchers recommend in “Alcohol, No Ordinary Commodity.” These are “restrictions on affordability, availability, and accessibility, as well as drink-driving deterrence measures.” (p.242) Research has shown that regulations which reduce the widespread availability of cheap alcohol products reduces consumption and its associated social problems. Efforts to contain outlet density can reduce neighborhood problems and reduce the burden on law enforcement. Drunk driving measures have cut the death rates on our highways. We must confront efforts to deregulate with the evidence of success in reducing problems with these strong strategies. Regulators should also look at their efforts to find ways to streamline and focus resources on the most successful strategies.

*“Policymakers have neither the time nor the training to read, digest, and base their decisions upon the research finds reported in the scientific literature.”  
Alcohol No Ordinary Commodity”, p. 254.*

But we can’t simply hand research pieces and scientific journals to our decision-makers. They haven’t the time or inclination to decipher these things. We must do it for them, preferably in a concise and clear way.

**This is an exciting time ripe with new possibilities. I invite all of you to take up the challenge and make the case for a much greater investment in prevention.**

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