Alcohol and American Society: A Complex Relationship

Alcohol has long been an integral part of American culture, tightly woven into the fabric of society. Most adults who drink alcohol drink moderately and responsibly without complications, and some can even derive modest health benefits.

At the same time, alcohol-related problems among adults and adolescents—which result from drinking too much, too fast, or too often—are among the most significant public health issues in the United States and internationally. For example,

- Each year in the United States, more than 88,000 people\(^1\) die from alcohol-related causes, making it the fourth leading preventable cause of death in our country.\(^2\)
- Excessive alcohol consumption costs the United States about $249 billion per year.\(^3\)
- In the United States, approximately 15.1 million adults ages 18 and older had an alcohol use disorder in 2015.\(^4\)
- More than 10 percent of U.S. children live with a parent with alcohol problems, according to a 2012 study.\(^5\)
- Globally, alcohol misuse is the fifth leading risk factor for premature death and disability.\(^6\)

NIAAA’s Valuable Contribution

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), a component of the National Institutes of Health, is the lead Federal agency for research on alcohol and health. NIAAA is the largest funder of alcohol research in the world, with an integrated and multidisciplinary program that includes genetics, basic and clinical research, neuroscience, epidemiology, prevention, and treatment.

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\(^1\) Taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website.
\(^2\) Data from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).
\(^3\) Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) report, 2014.
\(^4\) From the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) report, 2016.
\(^5\) Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website.
\(^6\) From the World Health Organization (WHO) report, 2018.
NIHAA’s research focuses on health topics that touch the lives of almost every family and community across America:

- Why some people develop an alcohol use disorder
- How the consequences of harmful drinking affect individuals and society
- How underage drinking impacts neurobiological development in adolescents
- How we can improve prevention, treatment, and recovery programs
- How and why some individuals derive modest health benefits from drinking alcohol

Importantly, the Institute’s demanding scientific approach generates results that are unbiased, methodologically sound, and trustworthy—making NIAAA the definitive source for science-based information about alcohol and health for individuals, communities, policymakers, and medical practitioners.

In the alcohol prevention and treatment field, there are more life-saving tools available today than ever before, thanks largely to the determined and uncompromising efforts of the talented researchers supported by NIAAA.

Looking forward, NIAAA will continue to work toward a greater understanding of alcohol’s effects on health and society—an understanding that will help more people live long and healthy lives.

For more information, please visit: www.niaaa.nih.gov


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