

Let's Ask The Experts

More Laws Won't Prevent Alcohol Abuse

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(NAPSA)—When it comes to reducing alcohol abuse, there are two schools of thought. The first argues for more laws, suggesting that more tough laws will deter those from abusing alcohol beverages. The second approach argues that more laws only get in the way of allowing existing laws to function properly.

Increasingly, there is a shift away from adding more laws to refocusing resources on enforcing existing laws, using more and better educational efforts, and creating incentives as a means to encourage responsible behavior. And, these approaches are beginning to pay off.

While it's difficult to pinpoint what triggered this shift in thinking, there's no doubt debates from the courthouse to the statehouse are now contemplating choices that up until a few years ago would have not been seriously considered.

For example, legislators in Minnesota recently decided it was time to start from scratch in developing an entirely new legislative framework to address drunk driving.

While it's too early to determine if this will become a trend, it's clear that legislators in Minnesota realized that passing dozens—if not hundreds—of laws can inadvertently create loopholes, cause delays in prosecuting drunk drivers and have other unintended consequences which make reducing drunk driving more difficult.

Taking a completely different approach, a new program was announced recently in Florida to address underage drinking. This approach uses incentives rather

than punishments. Specifically, if a teen remains alcohol-free until they turn age 21, they will receive a reduction in the price of college tuition.

Not surprisingly, response to this program has been overwhelmingly positive, because parents and teens themselves say a cheaper college education is a major motivator.

But there are those who believe even tougher legislation is required to control undesirable behavior such as underage drinking without fully considering the unintended consequences of such heavy-handed tactics.

City officials upset about incidents of public drunkenness may consider banning the sale of large containers of alcohol beverages. However, these bans typically cause the alcohol abuser to purchase a six pack instead of a single large container of beer, making a problem worse without doing anything to address the real need of providing alcohol treatment to abusers.

What has been consistently shown to work in reducing alcohol abuse, however, are efforts to increase parental involvement with teens to prevent underage drinking; improved enforcement of existing laws; use of rewards instead of punishments to incent desired behavior; and consistent and steady educational efforts.

It is efforts like these which have helped reduce drunk driving by 41 percent since 1982 and reduce teen drinking by 47 percent over the same time period. And, we're committed to making sure that policy leaders are aware of the benefits of these approaches so they can fully consider all options when determining how best to address alcohol abuse.

To learn more, visit the Web site at www.beeresponsible.com.