

Task Force addresses underage drinking

Legislative Act 629 of 2007 created the Arkansas Task Force on Substance Abuse Prevention, whose purpose was defined as:

- ♦ Evaluating the current substance abuse prevention delivery system
- ♦ Assessing community awareness
- ♦ Identifying and assessing available financial resources to support substance abuse activities
- ♦ Identifying all current substance abuse prevention programs in each county
- ♦ Making recommendations to improve and increase sustainable substance abuse prevention services.

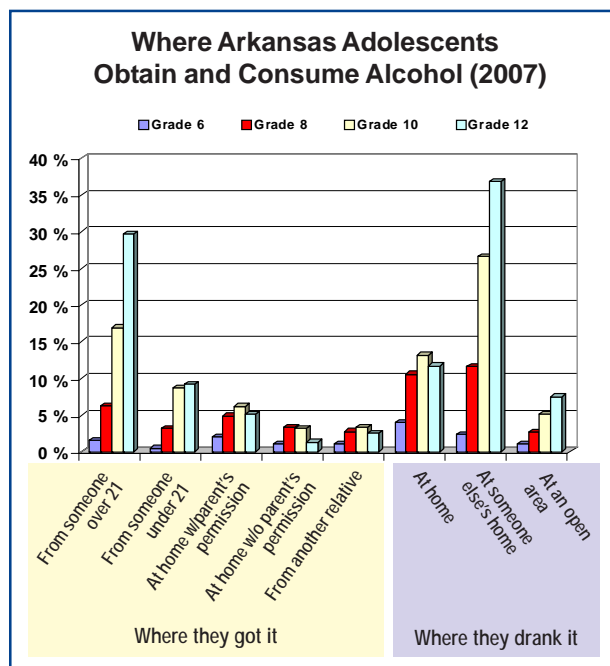
Annual Report Strategies

After initially identifying the prevalence, consequences, availability of data and the available resources, the Task Force determined that its initial efforts be directed to underage drinking. In September 2008, the Task Force submitted its first Annual Report. Included in the report are six no-cost or low-cost strategies to address underage drinking. These strategies are:

- **Maintain 21 as the minimum legal drinking age.** Numerous studies indicate that increasing the minimum legal drinking age from 18 to 21 has reduced by half the alcohol-related crash fatalities for youths aged 15 to 20. A recent national initiative promoted lowering the legal drinking age to 18. The Task Force believes that it is imperative to maintain 21 as the minimum legal drinking age.
- **Strengthen the Social Host Liability Law.** Data indicate that most youths obtain alcohol from adults and drink in private residences. The Task Force recommends revising current laws to include liability for knowingly allowing underage drinking on one's property. Data from the 2007 APNA indicate that most youths drink at home or at a friend's home (see chart).
- **Tax and regulate alcopops as distilled spirits.** Alcopops are sweet malt beverages that

generally contain higher alcohol levels than beer. Current ABC rules regulating these beverages should be enforced.

- **Obtain statewide participation in the Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment (APNA) survey.** Current participation is optional. Deliberate steps should be taken to ensure that all schools statewide participate.
- **Increase penalties for providing alcohol to minors.** Current penalties should be increased to reflect the seriousness of the consequences of underage drinking and to further deter this behavior (see chart).
- **Expand data collection and reporting requirements for all juvenile alcohol-related arrests and incidents.** Accurate data are necessary to correctly assess need, plan appropriate interventions and evaluate impact.



Coming next month:
Alcopops

The complete Annual Report, Task Force membership and additional substance abuse prevention information can be found at http://www.arkansas.gov/dhs/dmhs/adap_survey.htm.