



Campaign to Prevent the Abuse of Alcohol

This year—1982—may be the turning point in public attitudes toward the abuse of alcohol by three particularly vulnerable groups of people. Let me explain the grounds for such an optimistic prediction. Last January the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism began a public education campaign to increase the awareness of the potential problems of alcohol abuse among young people, pregnant women, and adult women.

There are good reasons for focusing on these groups.

- Each year 8,000 teenagers and young adults are killed in drinking-driving accidents, and 40,000 are injured. Surveys show that 25 percent of high school seniors drink once a week and 60 percent of high school seniors drink once a month.
- At present, the estimated newborn prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome is between 1,500 and 2,000 births per year. As little as two drinks daily can lead to decreased birth weights and increased risks of miscarriage. Women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy need to know that there is no known safe drinking level for pregnant women.
- More than 60 percent of adult women drink and more than 90 percent of college-age women drink. Women in the youngest age group

have the highest proportion of heavy drinkers. Twice as many women problem drinkers as men problem drinkers report abuse of other drugs.

To get these facts across to people, the Institute has enlisted the help of the alcohol authority of each State and of national voluntary organizations and their local chapters. The organizations include the National Council on Alcoholism, the YWCA, American Red Cross, National Association of Junior Leagues, Campfire, Inc., American Women in Radio and Television and, through the Department of Agriculture's Extension Service, the 4H clubs. The resources, energies, and expertise of the members of these organizations are powerful forces for influencing attitudes concerning the abuse of alcohol.

Finally, the campaign will be greatly strengthened, I believe, by the adoption of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health block grant. All 57 States and Territories and the District of Columbia will have completed that action by September 30, 1982. The block grant approach means that, in each State, alcoholism programs can be fitted into a spectrum of community health services. Alcoholism detection and treatment programs can be most effective where they are part of a total community concern for adolescent and family health. Information, skills, and resources can be shared by programs.

Only through the carefully coordinated efforts of Federal, State, and local people in this prevention campaign will there be substantial changes in the way that alcohol is used by important groups in our society.

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