



Alliance of Coalitions for Healthy Communities

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Communities will come together For Town Hall Meetings on Underage Drinking

Local communities will join hundreds of communities nationwide to alert residents of the new research on the risks of underage drinking and to empower the community to take action to prevent it. The Federal government's Interagency Coordinating Committee is supporting Town Hall Meetings to take place in communities across America. In Oakland County, a Town Hall Meeting will be held in three communities

Village of Holly, Tuesday March 25 6:30 p.m. at the Sherman Middle School at 14470 N. Holly Road, Holly, MI 48442. Sponsored by the Holly Area Youth Coalition.

Hazel Park, Monday March 31 6:30 p.m. at the Days Inn, 1 W 9 Mile Road, Hazel Park, MI 48030. Sponsored by Southeast Oakland Coalition

Madison Heights, Monday March 31, 6:30 p.m. in the Breckenridge Room, Madison Heights Public Library, 240 West 13 Mile Rd., Madison Heights, MI 48071 Sponsored by Madison Heights Community Family Coalition.

Alcohol use among children and adolescents starts early and increases rapidly with age. Nationally, a higher percentage of youth use alcohol than use tobacco or illicit drugs, making underage drinking a leading public health problem. To help educate young people and caring adults about the risks associated with underage drinking, the Federal government's Interagency Coordinating Committee for the Prevention of Underage Drinking (ICCPUD) is supporting a series of Town Hall Meetings to take place in communities across America.

Community coalitions across Oakland County are beginning their underage drinking prevention campaign. As members of the Alliance of Coalitions for Healthy Communities (ACHC), they have shared local data, studied county-wide reports and reviewed national strategies. Then they collaborated to develop their vision of reducing underage drinking in their communities and implementation of their objectives. "We live in communities where too many youth experience the harmful consequences of underage drinking" said Theresa Mungioli, President of ACHC, "and we're committed to reduce that number."

According to student reports in 2005, the percentage of twelfth grade youth in Oakland County who drank in the past month is larger than the national average. Local youth experience easy access to alcohol: 95.2% of twelfth grade students say alcohol is fairly easy or very easy to get. Youth report that they most frequently get alcohol from their own homes, parties or a friend's house.

In addition, coalition leaders are very concerned that youth don't realize the harmful consequences of drinking alcohol. Over 34% of 12th grade students reported drinking five or more drinks in a row in the two weeks before the survey, and only 54.4% of all 12th grade students perceived such large amounts of alcohol to cause great harm or risk. "We haven't communicated the short-term and long-term harmful consequences of underage drinking," stated Donnis Reese, Executive Director of ACHC. "We need to increase awareness of the real physical and legal harm, and change our environment so it's easier for youth to make healthy decisions."

ACHC Member Coalitions have two goals for the 2008 underage drinking prevention campaign:

1. Reduce youth access to alcohol.
2. Increase awareness of harmful consequences of underage drinking.

A recent survey of Oakland County parents shows that most parents are telling their children that they don't approve of underage drinking, and are monitoring their children's access to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. "As we come together, we can change community standards so youth can make healthier choices," Reese continues, "This is a community health issue, and each community can create the needed change. The Town Hall meetings are designed to help communities decide about their next steps."