

21 MINIMUM DRINKING AGE EFFECTIVENESS

In July 1984, Congress and President Ronald Reagan enacted legislation that set the national minimum legal drinking age to 21. MADD applauds the work of Senators Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ), Elizabeth Dole (R-NC), as well as Congressman Michael D. Barnes (D-MD) and the late Representative James J. Howard (D-NJ), in passing the lifesaving 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA), which has helped show significant declines in fatalities on and off the road.

[Read MADD's press release on the anniversary of the 21 MLDA.](#)

- An estimated **25,000 lives have been saved** by the 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA).
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates the 21 MLDA has reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13 percent and has saved an estimated 25,509 lives since 1975.
- In 2006, an estimated 890 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws.

It is interesting that so many people labor to discredit the 21 minimum drinking age law – one of the most studied and most proven public health measure ever taken.

In 2003, the Centers for Disease Control looked at 49 high-quality peer-reviewed studies of the effects of changing the [minimum drinking age law](#). Almost every study found that increasing the minimum drinking age to 21 saved lives (an average decrease of 16 percent) and that lowering the minimum drinking age to 18 or 19 caused an average increase in crashes of eight to 10 percent.

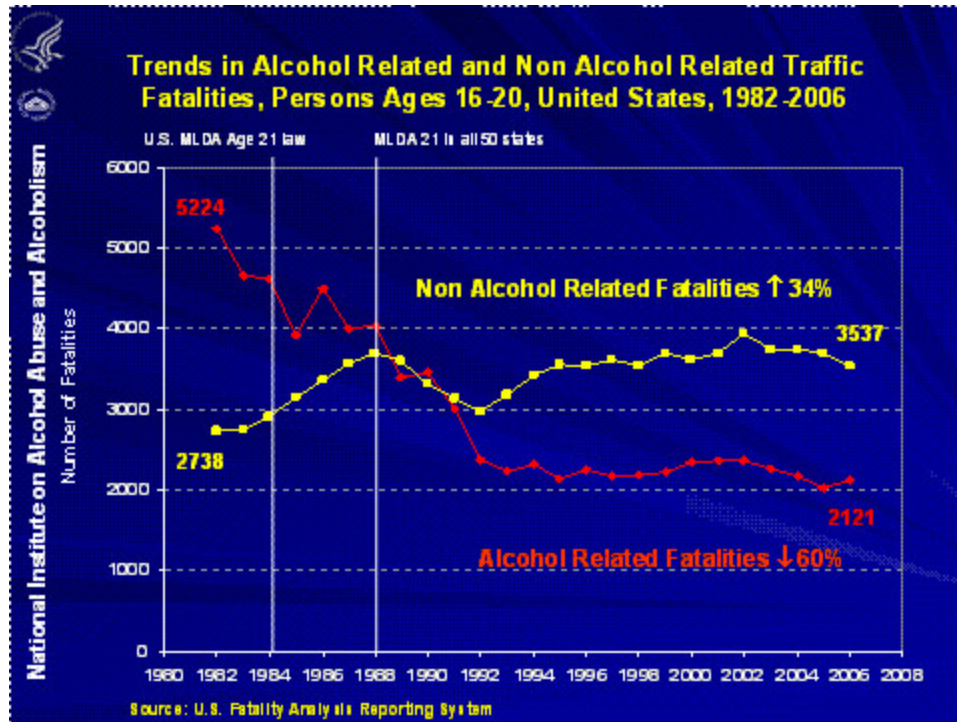
The US General Accounting Office looked at similar data in 1987 of the states that passed 21 MLDA laws and found "raising the drinking age has a direct effect on reducing alcohol-related traffic accidents among youths affected by the laws, on average, across the states" and that "raising the drinking age also results in a decline in alcohol consumption and in driving after drinking for the age group affected by the law." (GAO 1987) These studies use different measures of crashes, fatalities and alcohol – some look at single-vehicle nighttime crashes as a strong proxy for drunk driving crashes, but all came up with the same conclusion – the **21 MLDA law saves lives**.

The 21 minimum drinking age also helps those not directly effected by the law.

NHTSA found that between 1982 and 1998, there were 61 percent fewer drinking drivers involved in fatal crashes under age 21 and a 56 percent decrease among 21-24 year olds. This is against a backdrop of a decrease of only 24 percent among 25-55 year olds. There were a number of safety improvements during this time – better roads, better laws, safer cars, etc. – but because the people most directly affected by the law had the greatest decreases, NHTSA concluded "*unequivocally that MLDA 21 laws reduce youth drinking and driving, as measured by traffic crash involvements.*"



**SUPPORT
21**



The 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age saves lives.

Clearly, the 21 minimum drinking age law is having the intended effect of saving lives on the road way. NHTSA estimates about **900 lives are saved by the law per year**. The next time someone argues otherwise, ask them what data they are looking at, because the 21 MLDA law is one of the most studied and most effective laws in public safety.

Youth drinking rates decline.

Moreover, youth drinking rates have also declined since the 21 age law went into effect. The 2006 Monitoring the Future study shows declining alcohol consumption among American youth, although, alcohol consumption continues to be widespread among today's youth. A look at all of the research on the minimum drinking age from 1960 to 2000 found that the bulk of the evidence shows that 21 minimum drinking age laws decrease underage consumption of alcohol. (Wagenaar and Toomey, 2002) Even over the last 15 years, after the passage of the 21 minimum drinking age laws, the percentage of 8th, 10th and 12th graders who drank alcohol in the past year decreased 38 percent, 23 percent and 14 percent. (Monitoring the Future, 1991-2006)

Thus, we need to fix the law when it is weak and enforce it when it is not being enforced to increase its effectiveness, not undercut it.

Studies

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