Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Informing Families, Protecting Youth: The Case for Clearer Alcohol Guidelines in 200 Words

Adolescent Health & Well-Being

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Alcohol remains the most commonly used substance among youth, yet the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA) have historically lacked explicit guidance on its risks for children and adolescents. Without clear recommendations, families may underestimate the harms of early alcohol exposure, and public health efforts to prevent underage drinking are weakened.

Alongside my PolicyLab colleagues, we recently submitted comments to the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Agriculture (USDA) on two draft reports related to alcohol and health. These reports will inform the 2025-2030 *DGA* and our comments, summarized below, articulate how the guidance can reflect research on youth and family health.

Research shows that even low levels of alcohol consumption during adolescence can disrupt brain development, increase the risk of alcohol use disorder and chronic diseases in adulthood, and contribute to alcohol-related injury and fatalities. As a result, alcohol is a leading cause of preventable death in young people, underscoring the need for early prevention strategies.

The 2025-2030 DGA presents an opportunity to unequivocally state that no level of alcohol is safe for individuals under 21. Additionally, standardized alcohol labeling—including details like comprehensive nutritional information, serving sizes and health warnings—would equip consumers with the knowledge to make informed decisions regarding alcohol intake.

As HHS and USDA review these reports, along with federal input and public comments, we urge them to ensure the updated DGA reflects the best available science. This process provides a critical moment to strengthen public health messaging around alcohol and underage drinking, particularly for youth and families.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Communications Manager ***Laura Cavello****.*