



# Wisconsin

## Tackling Teen Drinking in Barron County

**“Alcohol use is seen as a normal way of life in our communities. In order to change this norm, all of us need to work together to combine our resources and efforts.”**

—*Laura Sauve, Barron County Safe & Stable Families Coalition*

### Public Health Problem

What can happen when you mix high school students, alcohol, a holiday weekend, and out-of-town parents? Multiple lives tragically altered forever. On July 4, 2009, this lethal combination led to the death of a 17-year-old girl and serious criminal charges for two teenagers. In response, leaders in Barron County, Wisconsin, were forced to ask themselves a tough question: “Was this an isolated incident, or do we need to take charge of the permissive environment that promotes teenage alcohol use?”

Teen alcohol use is a serious public health problem nationwide. Even before the 2009 tragedy, community leaders in Barron County, a rural area of 45,000 residents, decided that they had to tackle the problem of underage drinking head-on. In 2008, the county school district used CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to ask students in grades 6–12 about their alcohol use.

School officials were shocked to learn that drinking levels among the 3,318 students surveyed were well above state and national averages for adults. One-third (33%) of students in grade 12 reported binge drinking (defined as 5 or more drinks for men, or 4 or more drinks for women, in a couple of hours) in the past 30 days. By comparison, 23% of Wisconsin adults and 16% of U.S. adults reported binge drinking.

### Taking Action

To address the problem of underage drinking, community leaders knew they had to combine their resources and work together. The Barron County Department of Health & Human Services used FY 2009 funding from CDC’s Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant to collaborate with a local community group called the Barron County Safe & Stable Families Coalition. The coalition includes 98 members from all sectors of the community.

When the members looked at the YRBS data, they saw several major factors associated with the high levels of teen alcohol use. These factors included a low perceived risk of harm, liberal social and community norms, and easy access to alcohol.

Once they had a better grasp of the problem, coalition members began to tackle it by

- Setting up town hall meetings to get residents involved.
- Adopting the Strategic Prevention Framework, a community-based approach designed to ensure that substance abuse prevention programs produce results. This framework was created by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and is recommended by the National Institutes of Health.

### Healthy People 2010 Objective

Community health promotion programs

### PHHS Block Grant Funding

Represents 10%–49% of total program costs



### PHHS Block Grant Coordinator

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## Taking Action (continued)

- Launching a media campaign for adults who provide alcohol to minors called Parents Who Host Lose the Most: Don't Be a Party to Teenage Drinking.
- Training local schools on how to use two evidence-based curricula, *Project Northland* and *Class Action*, designed to prevent alcohol use among youth.
- Creating and distributing a best practices brochure for community festivals that serve alcohol.
- Increasing enforcement of laws regarding alcohol sales to minors and adults who provide alcohol to minors.

## Impact

Early results of the community's efforts are promising. In its first year, the partnership between the Barron County Safe & Stable Families Coalition and the county health department reported the following accomplishments:

- More residents are supporting social and policy changes that will help to prevent and reduce alcohol use among teens in their community.
- The county sheriff's department began enforcing the existing laws that prohibit adults from providing alcohol or stores from selling alcohol to minors.
- When the sheriff's department initially checked local stores for compliance in August 2009, 11 of 23 retailers were selling to minors. A month later, the number had dropped to 2 of 17 retailers checked. In addition, during July–December 2009, 30 citations were given to adults for providing alcohol to minors—up from 28 citations during the previous 3.5 years.
- The county leveraged its PHHS Block Grant to get two new grants totaling more than \$1 million for the next 2–5 years. This new funding will help Barron County address the leading health concern identified in its 2009–2013 community health improvement plan, which is alcohol, drug, and tobacco abuse.

For more information on the PHHS Block Grant, go to [www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant](http://www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant)

For more information on Healthy People, go to [www.healthypeople.gov](http://www.healthypeople.gov)



## PHHS Block Grant Supports Wisconsin's Healthy People 2011 Priorities

The PHHS Block Grant provides flexible funding that states can use to prevent and control chronic diseases, respond quickly to outbreaks of infections and waterborne diseases, and address their specific public health needs. State can align their programs with any of the 265 health objectives in *Healthy People 2010*.

Wisconsin uses its funds to address 14 health objective priorities, including

- Performance standards for essential public health services.
- Emergency medical services.
- Rape or attempted rape.
- Health improvement plans.
- Monitoring environmental diseases or conditions.

For a complete list of funded health objectives, go to [www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/hp2010.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/hp2010.htm)