

# MAPC

Massachusetts Alcohol Policy Coalition

## WHY AN ALCOHOL TAX?

- In Massachusetts, alcohol causes 1 in 20 deaths per year -- 3,098 deaths (nearly 60 per week), including 41 deaths among people under 21.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2020-2021, the leading causes of alcohol-attributable deaths in Massachusetts were alcohol-attributable poisonings (525), alcoholic liver disease (493), cancers (361) and liver cirrhosis (231).<sup>1</sup>
- Alcohol is the number one drug among Massachusetts high school students, 22.5% drinking in the past 30 days, and 11.4% reporting binge drinking.<sup>2</sup>
- Alcohol use in high school diminishes young people's chances of success – it is associated with lower GPAs, greater self-reported difficulties in school, and poorer class attendance and ability to complete homework assignments.<sup>3, 4</sup>
- Excessive alcohol use – underage drinking, adult binge and heavy drinking, and use by pregnant people – cost Massachusetts \$5,634,600,000 in 2010, the last year for which an estimate is available, an average of \$861 per person. At the state level, 77% of these costs are linked to binge drinking.<sup>5</sup>
- Alcohol abuse and dependence was the 4th largest cause of ER readmissions in the Bay State 2020 and 2021.<sup>6, 7</sup>
- In 2022, more than one-third (34%) of all motor vehicle deaths in Massachusetts involved a drunk driver.<sup>8</sup>
- Alcohol use is a major factor in health disparities: as much as 27% of all socioeconomic differences in mortality are explained by alcohol use.<sup>9</sup>
- Massachusetts last raised the alcohol excise tax in 1980;<sup>10</sup> since then, because of inflation, have lost 75% of their value.<sup>11</sup> The taxes are now less than a nickel a drink, compared to costs of at least \$1.93 per drink, of which \$.77 was paid directly by government.<sup>5</sup>
- Massachusetts has the lowest beer and wine taxes of any New England state; nationally, its beer tax is 7<sup>th</sup> lowest, distilled spirits tax ranks 13<sup>th</sup>, and its wine tax is 12<sup>th</sup> lowest.<sup>12-14</sup>
- If Massachusetts raised its alcohol tax, most of it – 73.4% -- would be paid for by excessive drinkers, primarily binge, heavy and underage drinkers.<sup>15</sup> An increase of as little as a dime per drink could raise close to \$300 million to support alcohol and other drug prevention and treatment, mental health services, domestic violence prevention, and comprehensive services for children and families in K-12 schools.

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