



Drug and alcohol abuse are costing Floridians \$43 billion a year

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Injury, illness, crime, and other adverse events related to alcohol and drug abuse are costing Florida more than \$43 billion a year —the equivalent of a third of the state’s budget, according to [a new study](#) released November 12.

More than \$21 billion annually is lost due to alcohol use and \$22.6 billion are incurred due to drug use.



“For a long time we have suspected and known that the economic impact of drug and alcohol is felt in every community, on every roadway, and in every hospital,” said Florida Substance Abuse & Mental Health Corporation (SAMH) Executive Director Ellen Piekalkiewicz. “The devastation is not just economic, but also deeply personal.”

Piekalkiewicz, Florida Alcohol & Drug Abuse Association (FADAA) Executive Director Mark Fontaine, and other leaders in the Florida’s fight against alcohol and drug abuse, previewed the study at a press conference in Tallahassee.

Piekalkiewicz: Unveils new study The [study](#) — the first of its kind done in Florida — was conducted by the SAMH Corp, FADAA and Spectrum Programs, Inc. of Miami. Dr. Rhonda Bohs of Spectrum was the lead researcher.

According to Piekalkiewicz, the yearly impact of alcohol use alone is reflected in nearly 6,300 deaths, 69,000 incidents of illness, and 82,000 traffic collisions. And the impact of drug use is evidenced by nearly 4,500 deaths, 11,000 ER visits and nearly 162,000 incidents of crime

In just one hour, the consequences of drug and alcohol use will cost Floridians nearly \$5 million, she said. Each hour in Florida:

- \$1,016,564 will be spent due to injuries caused by alcohol.
- \$392,000 will be spent for alcohol-attributable crimes.
- \$11,806.75 will be spent as a result of hospitalizations due to drug use.

“This needs to be addressed as a public health issue and less of a criminal justice issue,” Fontaine said in a follow-up radio interview. He noted that while much public attention has been focused on the 131 deaths so far this year in Florida due to the H1N1 virus, “this public health crisis costs 11,000 lives every year in Florida.”



Fontaine
Fontaine

Bruce Grant, the new director of the Governor’s Office on Drug Control Policy, noted that nationally state governments spent 15.7 percent of their budgets to address substance abuse and addiction, up from 13.3 percent in 1998.

“If substance abuse and addiction were its own state budget category, it would rank second behind spending on elementary and secondary education,” he said.

Stephanie Colston, director of the Department of Children & Families Substance Abuse Program Office, said that Florida faces a particularly tough challenge as it has higher rates of youth alcohol use than the national average. A 2009 study by DCF put the economic burden of underage drinking at more than \$3 billion.

Harvey Bennett from Florida TaxWatch said the study provided valuable information for crafting policy and strategies to address this critical issue. “At more than \$43 billion, the annual economic impact of drug and alcohol abuse in Florida is more than the combined annual profit of General Electric and Microsoft,” he noted.

Criminal justice system impact

The study estimates that crime accounts for 16% or \$3.4 billion of the total economic impact of alcohol use.

There were 2,607 incarcerations as a result of crimes committed due to alcohol use, for an estimated cost to taxpayers of \$425,645,691. The majority of crimes involved were assault followed by murder and robbery. Victim costs resulting from alcohol-attributable crimes totaled \$3 million.

The total cost of crime attributable to drug use is \$2.3 billion. The 2,512 incarcerations of offenders whose crimes are drug-related cost slightly more than \$1 million or 47%. Victim costs comprised the remaining 53%, involving 161,957 crimes.

Approximately two-thirds of Florida’s 100,000 prison inmates have significant drug and alcohol problems. Only a small fraction of those who needed substance abuse treatment received it while in prison, according to studies by the Florida Department of Corrections and the Legislature.

“Inmates are going into and out of prison who have had little to no treatment—even though studies have show recidivism is decreased with treatment,” Piekalkiewicz said during the radio interview. “We need the Governor and Legislature to commit to treatment for those who are in prison and coming out of prison.”

Solutions are available

“The negative impact of drug and alcohol use is preventable and treatable,” Fontaine said. “The good news is that we know what needs to be done...we just need to step-up and get it done,” Fontaine said.

Among the solutions outlined by Fontaine were improved funding for effective substance abuse prevention and treatment programs at the state and local level. He and Piekalkiewicz also urged adoption of legislation that would reduce underage drinking.

Fontaine also said that Florida has no revenue from excise taxes being investing in prevention and treatment—only toward enforcement. But, he said, “Prevention and treatment offers the best investment for Florida’s dollars.”

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