

Mr. Curie, distinguished members of the Interagency Coordinating Committee to Prevent Underage Drinking. Thank you for the opportunity to present our views today. My name is George Hacker, and I direct the Alcohol Policies Project at the Center for Science in the public Interest. For more than 20 years, CSPI has worked to reduce alcohol problems, collaborating with thousands of organizations and individuals around the country to promote prevention-oriented strategies to improve public health and safety and help save lives.

We commend the agencies represented here today for their commitment to address serious problems related to underage drinking. We hope this meeting evolves into long-overdue coordination and collaboration within the federal government to develop a coherent and comprehensive strategy to reduce the harms from underage and other abusive drinking in this nation. Unlike illicit drugs, for which the Office of National Drug Control Policy develops and implements an annual, comprehensive government-wide strategy, there is no credible national plan to combat alcohol problems, by far the greater health and safety drag on our nation. That is a huge gap that must be filled.

I want to leave you today with two messages that are critical to your work. First, we believe strongly that an effective national strategy to confront underage drinking cannot be developed without addressing adult abusive drinking as well. Undefined "moderation" and "responsibility" messages in alcohol ads are clearly insufficient. The societal context for alcohol, as noted by the National Academy of Sciences in its report on underage drinking, has important implications for efforts to address underage drinking issues. Other nations, including Ireland, the United Kingdom, and France have made that connection, and we should too.

Second, as recommended by the National Academy of Sciences, we urge you to support the development of a highly visible, well-researched, adult-oriented national media campaign on alcohol as the centerpiece of a comprehensive strategy to combat underage drinking.

Such a campaign will enhance the work of every agency represented here today.

It will:

- elevate underage drinking prevention as a public health and safety priority;
- project a clear, consistent federal voice on underage drinking and demonstrate government commitment to reducing its widespread harms;
- promote actions by adults to discourage and inhibit underage drinking, and;
- discourage adult conduct that facilitates or condones underage drinking.

Your agencies offer a wealth of expertise and authority to tackle the nation's underage drinking and other alcohol problems. Federal collaboration to address underage drinking can help end the fragmentation that now exists among the many goals, strategies, and programs that your agencies have undertaken. Coordination can bring coherence to efforts to reduce underage and societal alcohol problems. I strongly urge you to follow the NAS blueprint and view your mission in this broad context.