

## Five Steps to Changing Behavior

Want to alter student drinking patterns—or many other health-related behaviors, for that matter? Follow five basic steps, HSPH experts say.

This five-step formula has been critical to successful tobacco-control campaigns, including the “Make Smoking History” campaign launched in Massachusetts in 1992. The state’s efforts were led by its former public health commissioner, Howard Koh, and his colleague, Gregory Connolly. They are now, respectively, HSPH’s Fineberg

Professor/director of the Division of Public Health Practice and a professor in the Division. By 2003, overall cigarette consumption had fallen 48 percent, from 117 to 60 packs per adult, as people’s view of smoking turned from “cool” to “socially unacceptable.”

Prior to that, HSPH helped transform Americans’ view of what is acceptable when it comes to drinking and driving. In 1988, HSPH’s Jay Winsten, an associate dean and the Frank Stanton Director for the

Center for Health Communication, popularized the concept of the “Designated Driver,” the adult who abstains at a party so that he or she can drive friends home safely.

As HSPH’s Henry Wechsler notes, alcohol and tobacco differ, in that alcohol in moderate doses is generally legal and safe for adults. (In moderation, it can even be healthful for some, other School researchers report). Nonetheless, Wechsler says, these five basic principles still apply.

### SMOKING

### DRINKING

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#### STEP 1. MAKE IT MORE EXPENSIVE

Raise cigarette taxes. Use some of the new revenue for tobacco control and public health programs.

Regulate discounts in pricing. Prohibit 25-cent beers and so-called happy hours and ladies nights. Raise taxes on these units of alcohol, which are often purchased by underage drinkers. Use some of the new revenue for alcohol-control efforts, particularly those related to binge and underage drinking.

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#### STEP 2. MAKE IT HARDER TO DO THROUGH LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER CONTROL POLICIES

Enforce laws prohibiting sales to minors. Enact laws to create smoke-free workplaces, restaurants, hospitals, schools and other public areas.

Enact and enforce comprehensive drinking-age laws, including restrictions of purchasing, possessing, or consuming alcohol under age 21. Regulate access: Limit new alcohol licenses in and near campuses; impose stiff penalties on students who provide alcohol to underage students. Control irresponsible marketing practices: Limit container size (no pitchers, buckets, or all-you-can drink promotions). Require that kegs, half-kegs, and “beer balls” be registered in the buyer’s name to encourage responsible drinking.

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#### STEP 3. LAUNCH PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS ABOUT HEALTH-HARMING EFFECTS BASED ON EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH, AND TEST THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

Stress dangers not only to smokers, but also to nonsmokers through “second-hand” or “passive” consumption. Use public-service TV, print, and radio campaigns to reach people of all ages.

Emphasize harm incurred by bingers (academic failure; death, and injury by car crashes and alcohol poisoning) as well as to others (sexual assaults, other violence, noise, accidents, car crashes). Use public-service TV, print, and radio campaigns to reach students and the general public. If possible, persuade producers to insert story lines on the effects of binge drinking into TV shows and movies, as was done for HSPH’s Designated Driver campaign.

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#### STEP 4. PROVIDE STRONG SUPPORT FOR BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

Offer free or low-cost smoking-cessation programs, a quit line, and web-based counseling.

Provide education and information. Offer free, confidential counseling and health care. Establish alcohol-free dorms. Make alternative beverages available.

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#### STEP 5. TRANSFORM PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD THE BEHAVIOR

Apply 1-4 locally and at state and federal levels to make smoking “socially unacceptable”—harmful to all of society, not just the individual.

Apply 1-4 locally and at state and federal levels to make binge drinking “socially unacceptable”—harmful and disruptive to other students and society, not just the individual.