

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH  
AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

August 21, 2003

Editor "Your Views"  
The Daily Oklahoman  
PO Box 25125  
Oklahoma City, OK 73125

RE: Thursday, August 21, The Daily Oklahoman page A-1: *Teens want to make cold ones uncool*  
and *Wreck kills two Clayton teens, injures driver*

To the Editor:

It was sadly ironic that next to an August 21<sup>st</sup> story about teens attempting to curb the senseless cycle of pain and death resulting from underage access to alcohol, was a tragic example of what underage drinking takes from our community: young lives. Two Oklahoma teens are dead and another is seriously injured. Families are devastated. A community is in mourning. Unfortunately, these are not the only young people who will die this year due to alcohol.

The abuse of alcohol is a very real public health concern, particularly as it involves young people. Twenty percent of the alcohol consumed in Oklahoma is done so by minors. Year after year the statistics prove to us that lives are ruined, that youthful potential is lost. Underage drinking is not unique to Oklahoma, but it is certainly an epidemic which ravages our state. Access to alcohol must be stopped. Attitudes about drinking must be changed. Making alcohol available to minors is the equivalent of dealing drugs. There must be tougher penalties for those who break the law. Our young people obviously have recognized this, and are committing themselves to being part of the solution. Isn't it time for us as responsible adults and community leaders to also address the obvious, and take whatever steps necessary to immediately end these very preventable tragedies?

We must talk with and listen to our young people. We must provide opportunities for early intervention and treatment to aid those struggling with alcohol related issues. The pain and suffering of families who have lost loved ones to alcohol is immeasurable. My deepest sympathy goes out to these individuals. It is a hope that we can prevent others from having to experience the same loss.

Sincerely,



Dr. Terry Cline, Commissioner  
ODMHSAS