ABSTRACT

United States teenagers have the highest crash rate of any group in the nation. The data tell us that there are eight identified leading causes of teen injuries and deaths associated with vehicle collisions: Driver inexperience; driving with teen passengers; nighttime driving; not using seat belts; distracted driving; drowsy driving; reckless driving; and impaired driving (CDC, 2014). Alaska data tell a similar story. The leading causes of crashes for Alaskan teen drivers are: driver inattention, unsafe speed, failure to yield and driver inexperience (Alaska Injury Prevention Center, 2012).

In partnership with the Alaska Injury Prevention Center, this practicum project created a resource guide identifying best practices in teen driving interventions connected to three of these areas: distracted driving, seat belt use and drinking and driving. The Strategies to Support Safe Teen Driving in Alaska resource guide is intended as a tool for community partners to access information about interventions for distracted driving, seat belt use and drinking and driving for Alaska teens and to work to put those interventions into action in their local communities.

Project research efforts included a synthesis review of available intervention reports, including a multi-step filtering process that distilled available program literature down to a final collection of strategies based on best available evidence. These resulting strategies were categorized into a taxonomy identifying currently available approaches, and were also classified into levels of promise associated with certainty of effectiveness and potential population impact.

Upon evaluation of intervention types within a Promise Table structure, the strategies found to be most promising were all public policy efforts surrounding graduated drivers’ licensing programs, a minimum legal drinking age at 21, cell phone restrictions while driving and seat belt requirements. In addition, the community role of creating partnerships to prevent unsafe teen driving behaviors, as well as the parental role of boundary setting and monitoring their teen’s driving behavior, were found to have equal levels of promise. Of most significance was the finding identifying the importance of executing teen driving strategies with diverse influences, including all levels of the Social Ecological Model’s influence (i.e. public policy, community, organizational, interpersonal and intrapersonal).

Additional priority areas included attention to matters of community culture, public policy, enforcement and parental influence. Resulting recommendations include multiple public policy enhancements in the state of Alaska, including graduated driver’s license program modifications, enhancement of the state’s zero-tolerance policy and broad scale restrictions of driver cell-phone use.