



MEDIA RELEASE

NATION'S ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION A KEY TO REDUCING CANCER DEATHS

25 September 2017: New research has found that reducing alcohol consumption at the population level would lead to a reduction in cancer deaths in Australia.

The study found that there would be a significant preventive effect on liver, head and neck cancer deaths, particularly among men and older age groups as a result.

Published today by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) and Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), the report, *Alcohol consumption and liver, pancreatic, head and neck cancers in Australia: Time-series analyses*, provides the first suggestive evidence that a decrease in population level drinking could reduce the prevalence of liver, head and neck cancer mortality in Australia.

The long-term use of alcohol has long been recognised as a risk factor for cancer, and the relationship has been widely addressed in individual-level studies. However, the relationship of alcohol consumption and cancer mortality at a population level have rarely been examined.

The study revealed that across a 20-year period, a one litre decrease in annual alcohol consumption per capita was associated with reductions of 11.6 per cent in male and 7.3 per cent in female head and neck cancer mortality, and a 15 per cent reduction of male liver cancer mortality.

Lead author, CAPR's Dr Jason Jiang sought to understand whether or not the trend of population-level alcohol consumption is related to the trend of population-level cancer mortality – a question not answered by individual-level studies.

CAPR Deputy Director, Dr Michael Livingston says the results suggest that a change in alcohol consumption per capita is significantly and positively associated with change in male liver cancer mortality.

"Alcohol is a major contributor to Australia's burden of disease. The epidemiological evidence provided over the last several decades shows that alcohol contributes to the development of specific cancers. This study demonstrates that reductions in per-capita alcohol consumption would lead to lower rates of mortality for liver and head and neck cancers," Dr Livingston said.

Compared with other age groups, stronger and more significant associations were found between per capita alcohol consumption and head and neck cancer mortality among both males and females aged 50 and above compared to younger age groups – reflecting the long-term effects of alcohol consumption on the development of cancer in the human body.



“This study has extended our understanding of the role that alcohol plays with respect to liver, pancreatic, head and neck cancers in Australia, and the importance of addressing the nation’s alcohol consumption levels,” Dr Jiang said.

The *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risk from Drinking Alcohol* suggests that an adult should drink no more than two standard drinks on any day to reduce the lifetime risk of harm attributed to alcohol.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says that the population-level study adds further weight to what we know about the links between alcohol and cancer.

“There is no doubt that alcohol-related cancers would be significantly reduced if more of the population reduced their alcohol consumption and followed the national drinking guidelines, yet a lack of recognition of the links between alcohol and cancer remains,” Mr Thorn said.

“The study exposes the need for improved public health education campaigns, better public health policies on alcohol, and more promotion of the guidelines – to reduce the toll of cancer-related diseases and deaths in Australia.”

Media notes:

Dr Michael Livingston, Dr Jiang and Mr Thorn are available for interview.

Contact: Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710

The **Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR)** is an innovative, world-class research facility examining alcohol-related harms and the effectiveness of alcohol-related policies. The Centre, which receives funding from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and La Trobe University, is led by Professor Robin Room. To find out more visit www.capr.edu.au

La Trobe University is an Australian public institute founded in 1964. In 1967, 552 students enrolled at La Trobe University, the third university to open in Victoria. It has grown to accommodate more than 30,000 students including approximately 7,600 international students from over 90 countries. It now has a network of campuses with 21,000 students at our Melbourne campus and over 5,900 at our campuses in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura, Melbourne City, and Shepparton.

The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges. To find out more visit www.fare.org.au.