

Media Release

AUSSIE ALCOHOL POLL: ALARMED, HARMED AND THIRSTY FOR CHANGE

26 March, 2014: The 2014 Annual Alcohol Poll which examines what Australians drink and what they think about alcohol has once again highlighted the nation's growing concerns about alcohol harms and their mixed feelings and complex relationship with alcohol.

An increasing and overwhelming majority of Australians (78%) believe Australia has a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse, more than one in three Australians (37%) have been affected by alcohol-related violence, and 4.2 million Australians continue to drink to get drunk.

However, it's not all bad news with the poll highlighting some positive changes in consumption patterns and significant increases in the already high levels of support for policy measures to reduce alcohol harms.

Now in its fifth year, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education's (FARE) *Annual Alcohol Poll: Attitudes and Behaviours*, has again expanded in scope to further explore consumption patterns, negative behaviours, social expectations, and perceptions of safety.

In 2014 there is even greater acknowledgement of the harms from alcohol, with 78 per cent of people recognising Australia has a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse. For the first time, violence (81%) was considered to be the problem that Australians were most concerned about.

Australians don't see the issue getting better any time soon, with 76 percent believing alcohol-related problems will get worse or at best remain the same over the next five to ten years.

Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of Australians (79%) believe more needs to be done, up five per cent from 2013, and, in a growing vote of no confidence, 64 per cent of Australians believe Governments are not doing enough to reduce harms, an increase of eight per cent from the previous year.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says increased awareness and heightened concerns about the issue comes as no surprise.

"We are starting to see a greater awareness and a better understanding in the Australian community of the many ways in which alcohol can harm not only the drinker, but also those around them. Repeated alcohol-related tragedies across Australia, and a renewed focus and interest from the media, means we are reminded on an almost daily basis of the negative and far-reaching consequences of alcohol use and abuse," Mr Thorn said.

When looking at the amount of alcohol consumed by Australian drinkers, some of the poll findings were more positive. The proportion of drinkers consuming one or two standard drinks on a typical occasion has increased significantly, up from 47 per cent in 2013 to 55 per cent in 2014, while the proportion of drinkers consuming three to five standard drinks slipped five per cent down to 28 per cent, its lowest level since polling commenced in 2010.

Mr Thorn says the Poll highlights that there remain significant and concerning levels of consumption that need to be addressed.

"The Annual Alcohol Poll shows us that we still have 15 per cent of drinkers consuming six or more drinks per occasion. We also have 36 per cent of drinkers, 4.2 million Australians, drinking to get drunk, so while we are seeing some positive behavioural shifts, the reality is that we still have too many Australians engaging in dangerous drinking practices," Mr Thorn said.

For the first time, this year's poll asked drinkers what negative behaviours they had engaged in after drinking. Almost half of all drinkers (48%) had vomited, one in five (22%) had driven a car, while just under one in five (18%) had passed out.

Drinkers were also asked for the first time whether they have ever consumed alcohol in a social situation because it was expected of them even though they hadn't planned to drink, with over a third (35%) of drinkers reporting having done this, and Gen Y drinkers (44%) more likely to have succumbed to the social pressure to drink.

FARE's Director of Policy and Research, Caterina Giorgi says the Annual Alcohol Poll taps into our feelings about alcohol and continues to generate some interesting, and at times, contradictory findings.

"On the one hand, the Annual Alcohol Poll tells us that the majority of Australians are comfortable with their own drinking, yet the poll also tells us that almost one quarter (24%) of Australian drinkers couldn't stop drinking once they had started, 3.6 million Australians felt guilt or remorse after drinking, and almost one quarter (22%) couldn't remember what had happened the night before. Australians also see alcohol as the drug that causes the most harm, yet at the same time, awareness and understanding of the *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol*, at 13 per cent is appallingly low as is the awareness of the link between alcohol and serious health conditions such as stroke (47%), and breast cancer (17%)," Ms Giorgi said.

One thing that remains clear in 2014 is the overwhelming level of support for key evidence-based strategies to reduce alcohol harms.

Mr Thorn says 67 per cent of Australians support a ban on alcohol advertising on weekdays and weekends before 8:30pm, 66 percent support the introduction of health warning labels on alcohol products, up 5 percent from the 2013 Poll, and 81 per cent of Australians believe pubs, clubs and bars should close at 3am or earlier.

"The community's support for effective evidence-based policy solutions that would reduce alcohol harms is unwavering and continues to build each year as Australians grow increasingly aware of the extent of the problem and recognise the reluctance of governments to address the issue," Mr Thorn said.

Michael Thorn (@MichaelTThorn) and Caterina Giorgi (@catgiorgi) are available for interview.

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Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) FARE is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Through its national grants program and commissioned research, FARE has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. FARE works with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit FARE's website: www.fare.org.au