

## Media Release

# ALCOHOL POLL FLAGS FUTURE DISEASE

**18 April 2013:** A new poll has found that many Australians continue to drink to excess, remain largely unaware of the risks associated with alcohol consumption, and predicts an upsurge in future chronic disease.

The Poll found young people particularly at risk of future chronic harms, with almost two thirds of drinkers aged 18 to 34 years drinking alcohol to get drunk, and 17 per cent of Australians consuming six or more standard drinks per occasion.

Now in its fourth year, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education's (FARE) Annual Alcohol Poll: Attitudes and Behaviours, provides an in-depth look at the nation's relationship with alcohol, revealing alcohol consumption trends, and measuring support for a range of alcohol policies.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says the Poll findings are alarming and point to the continuing failure by governments, both State and Commonwealth, to introduce effective alcohol reform policies.

"There is a culture of extreme drinking in Australia, and there is no question, that without government action, the risky drinking patterns identified again in the Poll will result in increased chronic diseases in the future," Mr Thorn said.

Conducted by Galaxy Research, this year's Poll included World Health Organization (WHO) Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) questions designed to identify people with harmful patterns of alcohol consumption, and revealed that almost one quarter (23%) of drinkers, or 2.6 million people, had not been able to stop drinking once they'd started.

The Poll found that general awareness of the risks associated with alcohol misuse was further declining in 2013.

Only a very small number of Australians (11%) were aware of the content of The Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol.

In addition, the Poll also found that over half of Australians (52%) are not aware that alcohol can cause cancer while only 18 per cent of Australians have been asked about their alcohol consumption by their doctor in the last twelve months.

Todd Harper, Chief Executive, Cancer Council of Victoria says the lack of awareness is a concern and blames both the alcohol industry for propagating myths and misunderstandings, and governments for failing to deliver effective public education campaigns.

“We continue to have large numbers of Australians drinking at dangerous levels. At the same time, this poll also shows us that the vast majority of Australians don’t even know what those safe levels are. The lack of awareness of the risks from alcohol use and misuse is a real problem, when in turn, the only messages Australians are hearing about alcohol are being peddled by a self-interested industry,” Mr Harper said.

There was also a lack of awareness of the harms associated with alcohol misuse among young people, with 30 per cent of Australians not aware that it harmful to give alcohol to anyone the age of 18 years.

The Poll also found that over a third (35%) of Australians failed to correctly identify that pregnant women should not consume any alcohol while pregnant in order to avoid harm to the fetus, while more than a quarter (26%) failed to correctly identify that drinking alcohol while breastfeeding is harmful to the baby.

Michael Thorn says the Poll once again highlighted that despite the high level of risky drinking and general ignorance of the health consequences, a majority of Australians do continue to support measures that would effectively reduce alcohol harms, and he urged government to show leadership on public health.

“It is the responsibility of government to educate, inform and protect the public and Australians are demanding leadership in this area. I call on all governments to act now to deliver a comprehensive public education campaign on alcohol, and to assist and encourage health professionals to talk to Australians about their alcohol use,” Mr Thorn said.

### **Key findings**

- 52% of Australian adults are aware of The Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol (the Guidelines), but relatively few (11%) are aware of the content. This represents a significant decline from 61% of people who had some awareness in 2012.
- A majority (65%) of Australians believe that pregnant women should not consume any alcohol in order to avoid harm to the fetus.
- 47% of all adult Australians are aware of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and related disorders.
- 55% of Australians correctly agree that Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a lifelong disability
- 48% of Australians correctly believe that alcohol can cause cancer. 19% of people correctly believe that one in five breast cancers are due to alcohol.
- 31% of Australians believe that young people (under 18 years old) should be introduced to alcohol rather than be restricted from it altogether.
- 25% of Australians believe that it is okay for pregnant women to drink small amounts of alcohol without harming their baby.
- Only 18% of Australians have been asked questions by their doctor about their alcohol consumption in the previous 12 months.

**Michael Thorn and Todd Harper are available for interview.**

**Media Contact: Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710**

**Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Since 2001, FARE has invested over \$115 million in research and community projects to minimise the impact of alcohol misuse on Australians. 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](http://www.fare.org.au)

**Cancer Council Victoria** is an independent, not-for-profit organization that plays a leading role in reducing the impact of all cancers on all people. Since our establishment in 1937, has developed an international reputation for our innovative work in cancer research, prevention and support. Our prevention programs strive to reduce the incidence of cancers attributable to tobacco, UV radiation, alcohol, obesity and infection, particularly in high-risk populations. We do this by: Advocating for evidence-based policy reform; Educating the community about reducing cancer risk; Educating health professionals about effective cancer prevention; Increasing cancer screening and vaccination; and, Gathering evidence on the health and economic benefits of cancer prevention.