# Smoking mirrors: Reduce Your Risk campaign highlights links between alcohol and cancer

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### It is well-known smoking causes cancer. We have heard this information for decades. It’s universally accepted. Common knowledge. What might surprise you is alcohol is also carcinogenic.

What was the issue?

There are things in this world that we naturally pair together.

For example, peanut butter and jam, socks and shoes, tennis and summer, and – these days – masks and QR codes.

What about cancer?

Cancer and –

Smoking? Sure, but…

It is well-known smoking causes cancer. We have heard this information for decades. It’s universally accepted. Common knowledge.

What might surprise you is alcohol is also carcinogenic.

So strong are its cancer-causing properties that alcohol is classed as a group 1 carcinogen by the World Health Organization – the highest-level category, meaning there is convincing evidence that the agent causes cancer.

Just like smoking.

So why don’t more people know about it?

Just like Big Tobacco did in the 70s and 80s, Big Alcohol has been pushing hard to muddy the waters around the messaging of this cancer-causing product.

“There have been a lot of mixed messages about the health impacts of alcohol, and this means many people are unaware that alcohol causes a range of cancers,” explains FARE CEO, Caterina Giorgi.

This rang true for Canberra locals who, when surveyed in May 2021, had a low awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer.

#### Why did it matter?

Most of us easily recall the line from the Quit Smoking campaign, “Every cigarette is doing you damage.”

But did you know too that every alcoholic drink you have increases your risk of developing cancer in the mouth, throat, breast, liver and bowel?

When surveyed, many adults in the ACT were unable to make the connection, nor were they able to correctly identify the[*Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol)(Alcohol Guidelines).

Only 27 per cent of ACT adults were aware of the link between alcohol and breast cancer, 46 per cent between alcohol and colon cancer, and 28 per cent between alcohol and cancers of the head and neck, highlighting a crucial need for trusted sources to raise awareness and empower people with the information they need to make informed decisions.

#### What did we aim to do?

With funding from the ACT Government’s Health Promotion Grants Program, FARE sought to address this knowledge gap in the Canberra community.

A public campaign across a combination of TV, radio, streaming services, GP surgeries, print and digital media aimed to increase people’s awareness of the updated Alcohol Guidelines, the link between alcohol and cancer, the types of cancers caused by alcohol, and to discuss their alcohol use with their doctor.

Appearing at bus shelters, on TV, and across radio and streaming services, and with a dedicated website, we set out to spread the message far and wide that alcohol and cancer go together, and that there’s one clear way to Reduce Your Risk.

#### What did we achieve?

The Reduce Your Risk campaign was the ACT’s first-ever campaign about the links between alcohol use and cancer, running from July to September 2021.

The campaign website, which included information for people about alcohol and cancer, what they can do to reduce their risk, tips and tricks for cutting down their drinking, and where to find help saw more than 20,000 website visits from people and health professionals over the campaign period.

The campaign had over 1.5 million advert impressions, including over 560,000 video views on social media and 184,000 on television.

This led to a dramatic increase in the number of Canberrans who became aware of the link between alcohol and cancer and those who could name one or more types of cancer caused by alcohol, including:

* colon or bowel cancer – increase from 46 per cent pre-campaign to 72 per cent post-campaign (+26 per cent)
* head and neck cancers – increase from 28 per cent pre-campaign to 63 per cent post-campaign (+35 per cent)
* breast cancer – increase from 27 per cent pre-campaign to 39 per cent post-campaign (+12 per cent).

The campaign also saw an increase in awareness of the updated Alcohol Guidelines and an increase of the number of people who could correctly identify the recommended daily or weekly maximum numbers of standard drinks to reduce the risk of alcohol-related disease or injury.

The Reduce Your Risk campaign was supported by the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program and recently won Silver at the 2021 Public Relations Institute of Australia Golden Target Awards in the Regional Communications Campaign category.

“It shows the importance of sharing the risks to help people make educated decisions,” says Caterina Giorgi.

So, now you know: alcohol and cancer go together.

[media release](https://fare.org.au/alcohol-and-cancer-go-together-reduce-your-risk/)

[read the full evaluation report](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Reduce-Your-Risk-Campaign-Evaluation.pdf)

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