# Third of Men (TOM)

# Are you TOM? Supporting Canberra men to reduce their drinking

## What was the issue?

**“Look, I never really thought of myself as a big drinker. I’m generally fairly physically fit. There’s a lot of activities I do that are outdoors. I surf as often as I can, I skate a lot. I ride mountain bikes. I’m quite active.”**

Scott is 51 years old and a pretty ‘typical Aussie bloke’. He’s an electrical foreman from Canberra who enjoys keeping active and getting out on his mountain bike with his mates when he's not doing his trade.

And there’s something else that he has in common with many other Canberra men — how alcohol is engrained in many parts of his life.

“With being a tradesman, there’s a well-established culture of drinking. That’s how we generally wind down. On a Friday, for instance, at the end of work, we will go to the nearest establishment and have a couple of beers. A lot of work gets discussed while you’re drinking, and it’s not necessarily unproductive, but of course, there’s always alcohol.”

Despite not seeing himself as a big drinker, Scott wanted to cut down on his drinking.

“I was starting to question the amount I was drinking, particularly through the week. And a combination of things woke me up to that,” Scott said.

And he’s not alone.

Chris is another Canberra man who was growing increasingly conscious of his alcohol use.

He’s a 35-year-old public servant, married with three children: an almost-three-year-old daughter and one-year-old identical twin boys. So, in his own words, it’s been a “pretty full-on” couple of years.

“I don’t get to go out and socialise as much as I used to since those three came on the scene. So, if I do get a leave pass, I tend to make the most of it.”

Scott and Chris’ stories aren’t unique, and in fact, recent research confirmed a large portion of men in the ACT shared their story.

According to baseline data collected in February 2020, a third of Canberra men (31 per cent) want to cut back on their drinking.

Scott and Chris belong to the target group for a pilot health promotion program called ‘TOM’ – aimed at the ‘Third of Men’ in Canberra wanting to change their drinking habits.

## Why did it matter?

The baseline study for this program revealed that men in the ACT drink at higher risk levels than women. Canberra men are also more likely to overestimate how much alcohol they can drink without harming their health.

Like Scott, Chris doesn’t identify himself as a heavy drinker, though he concedes many negative impacts that can occur from alcohol use.

“Even though I’m not a big drinker, I’ve got heaps of dumb stories of drinking too much and doing something embarrassing. It’s not necessarily only the health effects. It can affect your personal life, can affect your friendships. It can affect your employment.”

## What did we aim to do?

Along with decreasing the risk of longer-term health problems, cutting back on your drinking can improve your mood and sleep, increase your energy and concentration, boost immunity, save you money, and improve your relationships with loved ones.

To reach men like Scott and Chris, FARE – with the help of ACT Government’s Health Promotion Grants program – launched TOM, an online pilot program supporting the Third of Men in Canberra wanting to reduce their drinking.

Central to the program was a purpose-built website featuring ‘Tom’s’ story as well as tools and tips to cut back on drinking, including links to websites and apps like [Daybreak](http://fare.org.au/tom/daybreak/) and [DrinksMeter](http://fare.org.au/tom/drinksmeter/).

Animated ‘Tom’ characters were also featured, who delivered values-based messages and normalised drinking less alcohol. The project collaborated with prominent Canberra men, including Menslink CEO Martin Fisk, who provided their thoughts and reflections about alcohol to complement the program’s key messages.

Scott and Chris were engaged as the program’s pilot participants, sharing their efforts to reduce their drinking through entries in weekly online journals that were also available on the program website.

Using Facebook and Instagram posts to drive people to the website, view and download supportive resources, and read Scott and Chris’ journal entries, we were able to test what messages resonated most with the Canberra men in the key demographics.

## What did we achieve?

This pilot project demonstrated that an online approach is cost-effective and works well to encourage men to reduce their alcohol consumption.

After participating in the pilot program, Scott said the benefits of cutting back on his alcohol use were hard to ignore.

“I came to realise there was a payoff. You will inevitably feel better if you drink less.”

Chris agreed, noting that being encouraged to keep a daily record of his drinking habits was useful in helping him to cut back.

“Being aware of what I’m drinking, that’s a real positive. I was drinking more and more regularly than I thought I was. It’s been really helpful to see that.”

During its active period (1 September – 19 December 2020), TOM reached approximately 93,000 men in the ACT aged 25-55. The nearly 33,000 engagements with the social media ad campaign represent a significant 35 per cent of the target group.

The fact that approximately one-third of men in the ACT continues to express an intention to reduce their alcohol use suggests further health promotion work in this space is worthwhile.

Summing up his experience with TOM, Scott said, “You don’t have to be teetotal… but there is a real, noticeable benefit to cutting back. And knowing that feeling can happen fairly quickly is something I’d want other people to know.”

## Join our community

Will you join the community taking action on alcohol?