# We need to talk about alcohol

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More specifically we need to talk about the significant harm that alcohol is causing to far too many Australians.

Recently released [Australian Bureau of Statistics released data](https://fare.org.au/fares-response-to-report-showing-alcohol-induced-deaths-at-their-highest-rate-in-10-years/) showed that more people are dying because of alcohol, with increases two years in a row bringing alcohol-induced deaths to their highest rate in a decade.

If you didn’t hear about this, it's not surprising, because these findings did not spark a national discussion or result in governments leaping to action to understand and reverse these trends.

This is partly because, as a country, we accept a higher level of harm from alcohol than we do for any other drug.

[Every 90 minutes an Australian dies](https://ndri.curtin.edu.au/news-events/ndri-news/media-release-alcohol-causes-nearly-6000#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThis%20research%20shows%20that%20in,Sik%2Drit%2Dseez).) from an alcohol related disease or illness.

Every three-and-a-half minutes someone is hospitalised because of alcohol.

[One in ten Australians](https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/cd005d19-1ebc-47f5-a46e-1cefb97e74be/aihw-phe-270-Chapter3-Alcohol.pdf.aspx) who drink alcohol meet the criteria for alcohol use disorder. One in ten.

[Up to half a million people](https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/new-horizons-review-alcohol-and-other-drug-treatment-services-australia) are waiting for alcohol and other drug treatment, most of whom need help with their alcohol use.

[Alcohol is the main drug](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/alcohol-other-drug-treatment-services/overview) that people access alcohol and other drug treatment services for.

You’d struggle to meet an Australian who hasn’t been negatively affected by alcohol use in some way.

Most people have a story of being injured, experiencing violence or assault, having a friend or family member who has an alcohol dependency … the list goes on and on.

But alcohol isn’t seen as a drug – not like tobacco or pharmaceuticals or other drugs.

Alcohol is seen more like any other product available to buy, yet at the same time it’s given a status unlike any other product.

Alcohol is the only drug where you can be simultaneously judged for consuming too much and also not enough.

Alcohol is a drug where it’s noticed if it becomes ‘a problem for you’ and you need to stop drinking - but if you do stop drinking, you might be shunned by friends.

Alcohol is the only drug that we think our children need to be ‘introduced to’, preferably by parents at home.

Alcohol is the only drug that we buy as a gift for friends and loved ones and the only drug that is expected to be used at celebrations.

Alcohol is the only drug where excessive use is celebrated, with out-of-control intoxication seen as hilarious and encouraged.

The prolific and endless marketing of alcohol over many decades has told us that alcohol use is a normal part of life - in fact, it’s encouraged. We’re sold the idea that every holiday should involve alcohol, every social event should involve alcohol. Increasingly, marketing is even telling us that we need to be drinking while we’re streaming our favourite shows.

But alcohol is a drug and it’s more harmful to Australians than any illegal drug.

If we saw alcohol for what it is – a drug that is harming and killing far too many Australians – we would act immediately.

If we listened to and heard the stories of the people living with alcohol use disorders, the people who have experienced violence that was exacerbated by alcohol, the people who watched loved ones die because of alcohol – we would act immediately.

But instead, alcohol lobby groups are given unprecedented access to decision-makers and their asks for inaction or even deregulation are often met.

Like the lobbying by alcohol companies, much of the harm from alcohol occurs behind closed doors.

It’s easy to ignore what we can’t see - alcohol’s involvement in family violence, child protection cases, chronic diseases and alcohol use disorders. Much of this goes on for years unnoticed and the stigma associated with these harms means that people often don’t speak of these negative effects.

Until we see alcohol as a drug;

Until we acknowledge the significant harm that it causes;

Until we make space for a conversation where people raising genuine concerns are heard, too many people will experience violence, disease, deaths - all of which is preventable.

To be silent and to ignore alcohol’s role in violence, disease and preventable deaths is to say to the many Australians who experience these harms that they do not matter – that these levels of harm are an acceptable byproduct of the profits being made by large, often multi-national alcohol companies.

And so, we need to talk about alcohol.

We need to talk about the excessive harm that it causes and the ways that governments can put in place measures that prevent these harms – like common sense controls on alcohol delivery, which is rapidly increasing and being sold into homes within 30 minutes. We need to talk about ensuring that people have access to supports to get help when they reach out for it for themselves or their loved ones.

Alcohol retailers are rapidly moving to expand alcohol marketing and sales in the digital environment in ways that are harder to monitor and regulate – which will drive more harm. We need to ensure that governments are working to get ahead of this by introducing common sense measures that prioritise keeping people safe.

We need to show people that they do matter and that we no longer accept these high levels of harm from alcohol.

And the time for action is now.