



Foundation for Alcohol
Research & Education

Media Release

HALF OF ALL DRINKERS EXCEED NATIONAL GUIDELINES

15 August 2013: New research has further dispelled the myth that alcohol misuse is confined to a minority of Australians finding that over half (51.6%) of all drinkers consume alcohol in excess of the country's guidelines.

Produced by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) the research analysed the 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey to identify how many Australian drinkers consume in excess of the National Health and Medical Research Council's *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*.

Over the limit: A profile of Australians who drink in excess of the recommended guidelines also found that 25.9 per cent of drinkers consumed alcohol in excess of guideline one, consuming more than two standard drinks per day. Almost half (49%) of Australian drinkers consumed alcohol in excess of guideline two, consuming more than four standard drinks on a single occasion more than once in the previous year, with 40 per cent doing so at least monthly.

Adding further weight to those findings, a separate CAPR research paper, *Measuring risky drinking: An examination of the validity of different episodic drinking thresholds in predicting alcohol-related harms*, looked more closely at risky drinking behaviour, finding that almost one in six Australian drinkers consume more than 11 drinks per occasion on a monthly basis.

FARE's Director of Policy and Research, Caterina Giorgi says these findings dismantle repeated claims that alcohol misuse is only an issue for a minority of Australians.

"This research makes two things very clear. First, over half of all Australian drinkers are consuming alcohol at risky levels so this is not a problem for just a minority of drinkers. Second, this will place a significant burden on our already stretched health services if we don't start to focus on prevention measures proven to curb this type of drinking," Ms Giorgi said.

Last month FARE released its 2013 Election Platform setting out ten actions to prevent and reduce alcohol harms, and called on the major political parties to support the policies in the lead up to and following the 2013 Federal Election.

Among the ten actions is a call for greater structured screening and brief interventions (SBIs), which involve health professionals asking people about their alcohol consumption and offering advice to motivate risky drinkers to reduce their alcohol consumption.

Ms Giorgi says despite the overwhelming evidence supporting their effectiveness, in the past twelve months fewer than one in five Australians had been asked by their doctor about their alcohol use.

“We know that health professionals simply asking the question about alcohol consumption is a very effective way of reducing risky drinking, yet those conversations aren’t happening. We’re calling for political parties to support the introduction of a structured program that would provide better training to health professionals to encourage that conversation to take place,” Ms Giorgi said.

Key Findings

- 51.6% of drinkers consumed in excess of either guideline one or two in the 12 months prior to 2010.
- 25.9% of drinkers consumed alcohol in excess of guideline one, consuming an average of more than two standard drinks daily.
- Almost half (49%) of all drinkers consumed alcohol in excess of guideline two, consuming more than four standard drinks on a single occasion at least once in the previous year.
- 40.2% of all drinkers consumed in excess of guideline two at least monthly.
- Almost one in six (15.8%) Australian drinkers report consuming 11 or more standard drinks per occasion at least monthly.

Research Papers

Mathews, R & Callinan, S, (2013) *Over the limit: A profile of Australians who drink in excess of the recommended guidelines*, www.fare.org.au

Livingston, M (2013) *Measuring risky drinking: An examination of the validity of different episodic drinking thresholds in predicting alcohol-related harms*, www.fare.org.au

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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