

Alcohol treatment episodes at their highest in a decade

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The number of Australians reaching out to alcohol treatment services is at its highest in a decade, with almost half (49%) of all alcohol and other drug treatment episodes involving alcohol as a drug of concern, new data shows.

Treatment episodes where alcohol is the principal drug of concern have increased by 37% since 2012-13 reaching 87,334 episodes in 2021-22.

Since the COVID pandemic began in 2019-20, when [alcohol companies aggressively marketed their products as a way to cope with the stresses of the pandemic](#), there was a 16.4% increase in people reaching out for help for alcohol to 2021-22.

For people reaching out for help for their own alcohol use, just over half were aged between 30 and 49 years, with 25% aged 30-39 and 26% aged 40-49s.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) CEO Caterina Giorgi said the data released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows a concerning increase in alcohol harm, reflecting a corresponding increase in hospitalisations and deaths.

“We’ve been really worried about the long-lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on alcohol use in Australia. For every person who is reaching out for help, there are many people who can’t access support,” Ms Giorgi said.

“At the same time, we’ve seen alcohol companies increasingly using data to drive targeted marketing to people who are most at risk of harm. In an environment where every phone is a bottle shop, people doing it tough are being targeted in ways that prey on their vulnerabilities.”

“We cannot just sit by and watch these numbers continue to rise for another decade. Governments across Australia need to be doing more to prevent the significant harms from alcohol.”

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Alcohol and Other Drug Spokesperson Dr Hester Wilson said that it was time for governments to take the alcohol industry seriously and save lives.

“These latest figures are yet another wake up call,” Dr Wilson said.

“More must be done to take on Big Alcohol and protect the health and wellbeing of our communities. It’s high time for government to recognise that alcohol is the new cigarettes,” she said.

“In Australia, we don’t allow tobacco companies to sponsor sporting events, or advertise, and most major political parties, except for the Nationals, no longer accept Big Tobacco donations.

“Alcohol should be treated in the same way; these companies should not be allowed to advertise or lobby politicians.”

The data showing the rise in alcohol treatment episodes is contained in the *Alcohol and other drugs treatment services in Australia annual report* published by the AIHW today.

It comes after recent AIHW data showed [a 27% increase in alcohol-related hospitalisations](#) from 2015-16 to 2020-21, while the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) revealed [that alcohol-induced deaths are at their highest in a decade](#).

Caterina Giorgi, CEO Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education is available for interview.

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