

ACT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS EMBRACE THE SOCIAL NORM OF LESS RISKY DRINKING

30 October 2019: An ACT Health-funded campaign targeting the ACT's university students has had a positive impact on the drinking culture of undergraduates with a significant drop in risky drinking.

The Reduce Risky Drinking project was implemented by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) with the Australian National University and the University of Canberra over a three-year period.

The project challenged perceptions about alcohol use and provided information on risky drinking to more than six-and-a-half-thousand students through eye-catching posters and merchandise, competitions and digital campaigns.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn has congratulated ACT Health for providing the grant to undertake the project *Risky drinking among undergraduate university students: a social norms-based approach*.

"At the conclusion of the project today, 63 per cent students are using alcohol within the drinking guidelines for short term risk, compared to 39 per cent in 2017," Mr Thorn said.

"The project has achieved a number of positive changes to the attitudes and behaviour of the ACT's students, including a corresponding significant reduction in binge drinking," he said.

"The percentage of undergrads who consume 10 or more standard drinks per occasion has significantly dropped from 16 per cent to 2.6 per cent since the start of the campaign in 2017."

Mr Thorn says the evaluation conducted by Hall and Partners also found students' perceptions are now more in line with actual drinking trends.

"Fewer students now believe that students around them are drinking to get drunk once a week or more – a drop from 59.6 per cent to 41.4 per cent," Mr Thorn said.

"More than 65 per cent of the targeted students at ANU and UC are now more aware of drinking levels and the associated risks of short- and long-term harm," he said.

Mr Thorn says the universities now have an obligation to continue promoting messages around alcohol to embed the norm that heavy binge drinking is not an acceptable norm among students.

Mr Thorn is available for interview. Contact Clare Ross 02 6122 8616 or 0429 291120