



DANGEROUS COCKTAIL: POLL REVEALS AUSSIES UNINFORMED AND MISLED ON ALCOHOL-RELATED CANCER & DISEASE LINKS

21 March 2018: A new poll has found Aussies are in the dark when it comes to an awareness of the link to long term harm from alcohol consumption, and lack an understanding of the official drinking guidelines that would keep them safe from that harm.

However, Australians want to know about the long-term harm associated with regular alcohol consumption and are increasingly of the opinion that the alcohol industry is deliberately downplaying independent university research linking alcohol to a range of harm, including cancer and cardiovascular disease.

The Annual alcohol poll 2018: Attitudes and behaviours, conducted by YouGov Galaxy found that fewer than half of Australians are aware of the link between alcohol misuse and stroke (38%), mouth and throat cancer (26%) and breast cancer (16%).

70% of Australian adults indicate that they are aware of the *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* (the Guidelines), but of major concern, only one in four (28%) of these are aware of the content.

Now in its ninth year, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education's (FARE) national alcohol poll provides valuable trend data and insights into community perspectives on alcohol.

FARE's Chief Executive Michael Thorn says the lack of knowledge of both the link between alcohol consumption and the risks of cancer and other chronic diseases, together with a clear understanding of how to avoid those risks, is extremely alarming.

"It really is a dangerous cocktail. Community awareness of alcohol's link with a range of chronic health conditions remains low. In the case of alcohol's link to breast cancer, the awareness is only 16 per cent. Nor are Australians armed with the knowledge that would reduce their risk of long-term harm; only one in four Australians have some awareness of the actual content of the official drinking guidelines," Mr Thorn said.

In 2018, Australians were asked for the first time whether they thought they had a right to know about the long-term harm associated with regular alcohol use.

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When advised that the World Health Organization recognises that alcohol is linked to approximately 200 disease and injury conditions such as breast cancer, liver disease, mouth cancer and stroke, the vast majority of Australians (84%) agreed that they had a right to that information, with 80% of Australians reporting that governments have a responsibility to educate Australians on this matter.

Mr Thorn says Australians are justified in demanding their rights as consumers to accurate information about the associated harm of the products they consume.

“If there is a silver lining here, it is that Australians clearly recognise their rights as consumers to be fully informed of the harm associated with the products they consume. The lesson here for government is that it must do a better job of ensuring Australians fully understand the long-term harm from alcohol, and are given the information that would help them reduce that harm,” Mr Thorn said.

The 2018 Poll findings make clear that the job cannot be left to the alcohol industry, with the industry’s credibility once again under fire.

61 per cent of Australians believe that the alcohol industry would downplay independent university research findings linking alcohol consumption to a range of harm such as cancer and family violence.

Polling revealed that community perceptions of the alcohol industry have not improved since 2015, finding that the majority of Australians continue to believe that the alcohol industry targets people under the age of 18 years (55%), and that it has too much influence with governments (57%).

Mr Thorn is not surprised by the Poll’s alcohol industry findings.

“What we are finding is that Australians are savvy to big alcohol’s tactics. It’s frankly disgraceful and dangerous that the alcohol industry would downplay independent research for its own benefit, but the fact that Aussies are suspicious of this behaviour is encouraging,” Mr Thorn said.

The 2018 Poll has once again highlighted how we drink, what we think about alcohol, and the nation’s experience of alcohol harm.

45 per cent of Australians drank to get drunk in 2018, equating to approximately 5.7 million Australians— a figure consistent with the 2017 Poll findings.

The Poll also found more than one third of Australians (37%) have been affected by alcohol-related violence; almost half of these (47%), in the last 12 months.

One in four (23%) parents with a child under 18 reported that their child has been harmed or put at risk of harm because of someone else’s drinking, while three quarters (74%) of parents believed their child under the age of 18 has been exposed to alcohol advertising.

Mr Thorn says it is not surprising then that the vast majority of Australians remain concerned about alcohol, with 73 per cent indicating that they believe Australia has a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse.

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“The 2018 Poll findings raise a number of red flags that the Commonwealth Government ignores at its peril. Australians are not aware of the link between alcohol and cancer and other chronic diseases, and at the same time, don’t know how to reduce their risk from harm. Add to that mix an alcohol industry actively downplaying the evidence of harm, and you have yourself a perfect storm. There is a clear message here for government – Australians remain concerned about alcohol, want governments to do more, and demand, as consumers, the right to information that will keep them safe from harm,” Mr Thorn said.

[ENDS]

Media Note: Report features summary tables by demographic including a state and territory overview of some findings.

Key Findings

- **73%** of people believe that Australia has a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse.
- **71%** of people believe that alcohol-related problems in Australia will either get worse or remain the same over the next five to ten years.
- **76%** of Australians believe that more needs to be done to reduce the harm caused by alcohol-related illness, injury, death, and related issues.
- **57%** of Australians believe that governments are not doing enough to address alcohol harm.
- **68%** of Australians believe that the alcohol industry should pay for reducing alcohol harm.
- **61%** of Australians believe that the alcohol industry would downplay independent university research findings linking alcohol consumption to a range of harms such as cancer and family violence.
- **45%** of Australian drinkers (approximately 5.7 million Australians) consume alcohol to get drunk.
- **76%** of Australian drinkers have been influenced by a promotion when purchasing alcohol.
- **70%** of Australians indicate that they are aware of *the Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol*, but only **28%** are also aware of the content.
- **84%** of people think Australians have the right to know about the long-term harms associated with regular alcohol use.
- **80%** of Australians think governments have a responsibility to educate Australians about long-term harms associated with regular alcohol use.
- **37%** of Australians have been affected by alcohol-related violence, with **47%** of these Australians indicating they have been affected by alcohol-related violence in the last 12 months.
- **23%** of parents or guardians of children under the age of 18 years report that their child has been harmed or put at risk of harm because of someone else’s drinking.
- **74%** of parents and guardians with children under 18 years of age say their children have been exposed to alcohol advertising.
- **67%** of Australians support a ban on alcohol advertising on television before 8.30pm.
- **52%** of Australians believe that alcohol sponsorship should not be allowed at sporting events.
- **80%** of Australians think there are places where alcohol advertising should be banned.

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Michael Thorn is available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. More than 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventative health challenges.

For more than 15 years, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy.

YouGovGalaxy

YouGov Galaxy is an Australian market researching company which conducts opinion polling throughout the country with results published in all major Australian newspapers.