



Media Release

PAST LESSONS FLAGGED AHEAD OF ALCOHOL SUMMIT

14 March 2013: A report issued ahead of today's NSW Alcohol Summit has highlighted the complete failure of the *2003 NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse*, and contains important lessons for the current State Government struggling to stem rising levels of alcohol-fuelled violence.

The report prepared by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) cites the failure of successive governments to support and adopt evidence-based reforms, a lack of political leadership and resourcing, and the participation and involvement of the alcohol industry as the primary reasons for the Summit's failure to reduce alcohol harms, which have continued to escalate in the ten years since.

Today's Summit at Parliament House in Sydney is being convened by the NSW ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance (NAAPA), and will include the participation and engagement of Government, Opposition and Greens MP's together with keynote addresses by the NSW Assistant Police Commissioner Mark Murdoch, and Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority Chairperson, Mr Chris Sidoti.

Following the Summit alcohol policy experts will provide individual briefings to NSW parliamentarians.

The Summit comes at a time of increased community concerns about the growing levels of alcohol harms across NSW.

The FARE report, *10 years on: An analysis of the progress made in preventing alcohol-related harms since the 2003 NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse*, analysed trends in alcohol-related harms since the 2003 Summit and found an increase in levels of harm across five of eight indicators including 37 per cent spikes in both alcohol-related domestic assaults and alcohol attributable hospitalisations.

The report also examined the 2003 Summit's recommendations, the strength of the evidence supporting them and the progress made against them.

Of great concern; the analysis found that the Government was most likely to support and implement measures such as awareness raising campaigns that have little or no evidence of their effectiveness. Measures with substantial evidence of their effectiveness were largely ignored.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says it is crucial that the current Government does not repeat those same mistakes.

“The 2003 Summit was doomed from the start. It did not focus its attentions on evidence-based measures proven to be the most effective and when it came time to implement recommendations, the Government failed to prioritise policies that would work to reduce harm. The purpose of this paper is not to condemn past governments and politicians, but rather to ensure that in the future, those same mistakes are not repeated,” Mr Thorn said.

Michael Thorn says a lack of political will, adequate resourcing and the strategic blunder to partner with the alcohol industry also doomed the 2003 Summit to failure, and says NSW cannot afford another lost decade.

“On this, the tenth anniversary of the first NSW Alcohol Summit, this study makes clear why the 2003 Summit failed. To successfully reduce alcohol harms in NSW, alcohol policy needs to be evidence-based. Instead of bowing to industry pressure, the O’Farrell Government needs to fearlessly tackle the availability, price and promotion of alcohol, and by doing so, place the people of NSW first,” Mr Thorn said.

Key Findings: Trends in NSW alcohol-related harms

- Alcohol-attributable hospitalisations , 2001-02 – 2010-11, **37% increase**
- Treatment episodes where alcohol is the principal drug of concern, 2001-02 – 2010-11, **10% increase**
- Alcohol-related non-domestic assaults, 2002-03 – 2011-12, **9% increase**
- Alcohol-related domestic assaults, 2002-03 – 2011-12, **37% increase**
- All alcohol-related assaults (domestic, non-domestic and on police), 2002-03 – 2011-12, **16% increase**

Michael Thorn is available for interview.

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Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) 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