

HEALTH REPORT

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ALCOHOL – PART OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAY OF LIFE

National survey figures released today reveal that alcohol misuse may be even more rife within the Australian community than many people think.

A key finding of this month's Pfizer Australia Health Report is that just over one-in-10 Australians has, at some point in their lives, experienced a problem with alcohol.

This 'at risk' group is more likely to have consumed their first full serve of alcohol at 13 or 14 years of age, suggesting a strong link between early teenage drinking and alcohol problems in later life.

The national research was conducted the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) and researched-based medicines company, Pfizer Australia.

It finds that a staggering three-in-five Australians say they know a friend or a family member who has experienced a problem with alcohol.

Almost one-in-five Australians (17 percent) admit to feeling pressure to drink alcohol in a workplace situation.

NDARC warns that consuming alcohol from a young age can increase the likelihood of developing an alcohol dependency as an adult.

"Evidence suggests that the younger you start using alcohol, the longer you will use it, increasing the chance of developing a range of problems," said Paul Dillon, Information Manager from NDARC.

"Drinking alcohol to excess during your formative years can create a cycle of alcohol problems which continue throughout your adult years.

"It would be foolish for us to try to stop alcohol consumption when it plays such a part in our culture. However, it is vital that we try to prevent early initiation of alcohol use. This research demonstrates the need for innovative strategies dealing with alcohol consumption," he said.

According to Mr Dillon, the fact that 17 percent of Australians feel pressure to drink in work situations reflects the cultural problem which exists in Australia in relation to alcohol consumption.



“This social pressure can be particularly problematic for women. The blood alcohol concentration in a woman’s body will almost always be higher than that in a man’s body after drinking exactly the same amount,” he said.

Despite the associated risks of alcohol consumption, the survey shows that many Australians have a liberal attitude towards alcohol use.

Almost half of those surveyed agree that getting drunk occasionally is simply part of the Australian way of life while more than half state they had their first full serve of alcohol before 17 years of age.

Mr Dillon says alcohol is often mistakenly believed to be a stimulant. This is because drinking a small amount of alcohol may initially reduce tension or inhibitions, making a person feel more relaxed or excited.

“Alcohol is actually a central nervous system depressant. Increasing alcohol concentrations in the body inhibits many of the brain’s functions, dampening the motor and sensory centres, and rapidly making judgement, co-ordination and balance more difficult,” he said.

Additionally, the poll shows that 35 percent of Australians feel it is appropriate to give children an alcoholic drink in the home at 15 or 16 years of age.

“Young people need good role modelling and an understanding of how to manage alcohol in a more healthy manner. Introducing alcohol to children with a meal in a controlled environment, such as the home, is one way to do this. A parent needs to decide what is appropriate for their child based on their family situation,” said Mr Dillon.

Regardless of the liberal views of many Australians, the survey reveals that alcohol consumption is not being embraced by all Australians.

Concern exists around the issue of ‘ready to drink’ (RTD products) and warning labels on alcohol. Just over three in four Australians agree that RTD products are marketed to under 18 year olds.

Furthermore, almost two thirds of Australians disagree that warning labels on alcohol encourage people to drink less.

To assist with educating the public about Australian alcohol consumption, the NDARC has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to produce this month’s edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

The findings on Australian perceptions of Australian alcohol consumption are based on responses from 1,520 Australians aged 13 years and over. The research was conducted in April 2005 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

Pfizer Australia is the nation’s leading research-based health care company, investing over \$A42m in local research and development annually. It discovers, develops, manufactures and markets innovative medical treatments for both humans and animals. For more information, visit www.pfizer.com.au.

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