



ALCOHOL HARMS – A NATIONAL PROBLEM THAT NEEDS A NATIONAL SOLUTION

The two-day AMA National Alcohol Summit commences at the National Convention Centre in Canberra today.

The Summit features political, medical, public health, and community leaders; police; families of victims; and other stakeholders who have come together to discuss the range of harms that alcohol brings to the Australian community, and develop practical solutions to produce a safer, more responsible drinking culture in Australia.

AMA President, A/Prof Brian Owler, said a National Summit on alcohol is long overdue.

“Let’s be clear – Australia has a problem with alcohol,” A/Prof Owler said.

“More than half of Australian drinkers consume alcohol in excess of the recommended intake, and one in five Australians drink alcohol at a level that puts them at risk of lifetime harm for injury or disease.

“The health, social, and economic burden caused by alcohol in Australia is substantial and unacceptable. Alcohol-related violence, chronic disease, accidents, and death occur frequently.

“These incidents harm not only the individual drinker, but also families, bystanders, and the wider community.

“The range and extent of alcohol-related harms are alarming. Even more alarming is that the number of people harmed by alcohol is increasing.

“As doctors, AMA members see the devastating effects of alcohol abuse every day – from victims of domestic abuse in the local general practice to victims of car accidents and senseless violence in our emergency departments.

“A range of factors – including the social acceptability of hazardous alcohol use, the marketing and glamorisation of alcohol, and the ready availability of alcohol and its affordability – contributes to harmful alcohol use in the Australian community.

“This Summit gives us the opportunity to shine the spotlight on this major national problem.

“We are not calling for a ban on alcohol: we are calling for a safer and more responsible drinking culture in this country.

“We want to save lives, and improve the quality of life for millions of Australians,” A/Prof Owler said.”

Key statistics

Consumption

- On average, alcohol causes 15 deaths and hospitalises 430 Australians every day.
- The number of Australians killed or hospitalised because of alcohol consumption has increased in the last decade.
- One in five Australians consumes alcohol at levels that puts them at risk of lifetime harm from injury or disease.
- Two in five Australians consume alcohol at levels that put them at risk of short-term harm at least once a year.
- One in three 14 to 19 year olds drink alcohol in a way that places them at risk of an alcohol-related injury from a single drinking occasion at least once a month.
- More than half (52 per cent) of Australian drinkers consume alcohol in excess of the recommended intake.
- Three quarters of Australians believe that Australia has a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse.

Burden on health system and social/community services

- The cost of alcohol-related harm in Australia, including harms caused by someone else's drinking, is estimated to be between \$15 billion and \$36 billion a year. This includes costs to the health system, law enforcement, lost productivity in the workplace, and the pain, suffering, and harms to drinkers and those around them. Harms to others include violence, injury, crime, and car crashes.
- Alcohol has been causally linked to at least 60 different medical conditions. Longer-term health problems associated with risky alcohol use include liver damage, heart damage, and increased risk of some cancers.
- Alcohol is a greater factor than speed, fatigue, weather, or road conditions in fatal road crashes in Australia, and is responsible for more than a third of road deaths. Every year, alcohol consumption is responsible for over 11,000 hospitalisations among young people aged 15-24 years. Each week, approximately one death and 65 hospitalisations among the under-aged (14-17 years) are attributed to alcohol.

Alcohol and violence

- Conservative estimates suggest that the total annual cost of alcohol-related crime in Australia is at least \$1.7b; the annual social cost relating to alcohol-related violence (which excludes costs to the criminal justice system) is \$187m; and the costs associated with the loss of life due to alcohol-related violent crime amounts to \$124m.
- One in 20 Australians aged 14 years and over has been physically abused by someone under the influence of alcohol; one in four Australians have been a victim of alcohol-related verbal abuse.
- In a NSW study, two-thirds of patients presenting at an emergency department with injuries from interpersonal violence reported having consumed alcohol prior to the incident; three-quarters of these patients stated that they had been drinking at licensed premises.
- Alcohol is a significant risk factor for domestic violence. The ABS reports that, among women who have experienced an assault from a male perpetrator in the preceding 12 months, nearly half (49 per cent) state that alcohol or drugs are a contributing factor. The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found that 41 per cent of all incidents of domestic assault reported to the police between 2001 and 2010 were alcohol-related. This percentage varied, however, and was as high as 62 per cent in Far Western NSW.
- Almost five million people in Australia aged 14 or older (26 per cent) reported being a victim of an alcohol-related incident in 2013.

Alcohol and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- Compared with non-Indigenous Australians, a higher proportion of Indigenous Australians abstain from both alcohol use and binge drinking.
- There is no significant difference in the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who drink at risky or high-risk levels.

- Indigenous Australians were hospitalised for diagnoses related to alcohol use at four times the rate of other Australians.
- Indigenous people died from alcohol related causes at nearly five times the rate of non-Indigenous people.
- Alcohol use is the 5th highest ranked risk factor for the burden of disease and injury in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, accounting for 5.4 per cent of the burden of disease.
- Alcohol is estimated to be responsible for 4 per cent of the health gap in disease burden between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Alcohol contributed the most to burden due to mental disorders (16 per cent) and injury (22 per cent).
- Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there is a strong link between alcohol consumption and representation in the criminal justice system, particularly for men.
- Chronic risky drinkers are more likely than low risk drinkers to have been arrested in the last five years (29 per cent compared to 15 per cent), to have been formally charged by police (55 per cent compared with 36 per cent) and to have been incarcerated at some point in their lifetime (18 per cent compared with 7 per cent).

Alcohol, culture and sport

- Studies have consistently shown that children who regularly see alcohol advertising are more likely to start drinking at a younger age and drink at more harmful levels as an adult. The more a child is exposed to alcohol marketing, the earlier they will initiate drinking, and the more they will drink in the long term. In one study, it was found that 12 year-olds who are heavily exposed to alcohol advertising are 50 per cent more likely to start drinking in the following year than those with limited exposure.
- Televised alcohol advertisements are just as likely to be seen by children as adults. Around half of all alcohol advertising on television in Australia is shown at times classified as popular children's viewing times.
- The majority of alcohol advertising and sponsorship – in terms of frequency, time of advertising, and marketing expenditure – occurs in and around sport. Most alcohol advertising on Australian television is broadcast during coverage of live sporting events, and at peak viewing times.
- Athletes in clubs sponsored by alcohol companies are more likely to drink.

*****ALL SESSIONS OF THE AMA NATIONAL ALCOHOL SUMMIT WILL BE LIVESTREAMED.** You can view the live stream on the AMA National Alcohol Summit webpage at <https://ama.com.au/alcoholsummit>

The Twitter hashtag for the Summit is #AMASummit

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