

Alcoholic products are harming 10 million Australians each year, new research indicates

Almost half of Australian adults are harmed by alcoholic products consumed by another person, a study published today indicates, as researchers probe alcohol's widespread negative effects.

In a 2021 survey of 2,574 adults, participants were asked about the impacts of alcohol use by people they interacted with – friends, housemates, strangers, partners, family members and colleagues – in the previous year.

Nearly half of respondents (48.1%) said they had experienced harm from another person's drinking, while 7.5% reported having been "harmed substantially". This equates to almost 10 million adults a year harmed by others' alcohol use and more than 1.5 million experiencing serious harm.

Study co-author and Senior Research Fellow at La Trobe University's Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Dr Anne-Marie Laslett, said the findings highlighted the widespread harm caused by alcohol in Australia and the need for evidence-based policies to prevent it.

"We know that alcohol is harmful to people's health, but it doesn't just negatively impact people who drink alcohol," Dr Laslett said.

"It also affects people close to someone who uses alcohol – like family members, friends, work colleagues, and the broader community."

Dr Laslett said serious harm was more likely to arise from the alcohol use of people Australians know than from strangers' drinking, but overall harm from others' alcohol use was experienced across society in a range of locations.

"People are harmed in the home, in licensed premises, on the streets – in almost any public or private place," she said.

Professor of Emergency Care Research at Monash Health and University Diana Egerton-Warburton, a study co-author, said the harm caused by alcoholic products to friends, family, colleagues and the community was "entirely preventable".

"Policy makers have the ability to turn off the misery and the injuries that we see in the emergency department every day," Professor Egerton-Warburton, a member of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine Public Health Committee, said.

"Reducing the availability of alcohol would prevent some of these presentations – for assaults and injuries, social and mental health problems related to alcohol – which have been exacerbated during the pandemic as alcohol use in the home has increased."

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) CEO Caterina Giorgi said that far too many Australians are harmed and more action is needed to prevent this.

"Alcoholic products cause too much harm to far too many Australians. The fear, hurt, anxiety and anguish that results from alcohol's impact on partners, families and communities – the negative effects are far reaching and devastating," Ms Giorgi said.

“It doesn’t have to be this way. Governments across Australia can take action to ensure common sense measures are put in place so that families and communities are safe, and so that alcohol companies are not exploiting people through practices like targeted digital marketing which prey on people at their most vulnerable and make every phone a bottle shop.”

Alcohol and Drug Foundation CEO Dr Erin Lalor said the rate of alcohol harm in Australia was “alarmingly high” and that evidence-based measures were needed to prevent it.

“We cannot accept the high levels of harm that alcohol causes to individuals, families, and our communities,” Dr Lalor said. “We know that increased availability of alcohol is associated with higher rates of harm. Yet alcohol is more accessible than ever before, especially now that it can be rapidly delivered into homes with just the click of a button.”

People negatively affected by the drinking of someone they knew reported harms ranging from being emotionally neglected or having the person fail to do something, to having a serious argument, being threatened, called names, insulted, pressured or forced into sexual activity or otherwise physically hurt.

Other negative effects of the alcohol use of a person known to participants included having to spend time caring for the person or take on extra caring responsibilities for children or others. Financial trouble, family problems, being put at risk in a car when the person was driving or having to leave the home to stay somewhere else were also reported.

The researchers used data drawn from two surveys of 2,574 adults in Australia, recruited through a random digital dial mobile phone sample of 1,000 adults and a Life in Australia™ panel survey of 1,574 people.

The [research paper](#) is published in the academic journal *Addiction* today, titled *Alcohol’s harm to others in 2021: who bears the burden?*

Support is available at the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015, Lifeline on 13 11 14 and the National Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Counselling Service on 1800 737 732.

The research team are available for interview.

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