

NEW STUDY INTO AUSTRALIA'S HEAVIEST DRINKERS VALIDATES CONTROL OF CHEAP ALCOHOL

18 April 2019: A new research study has found the strongest characteristic shared by Australia's heaviest drinkers is their thirst for cheap alcohol, which reinforces the role of price control as a measure to reduce alcohol harm.

The findings of the study, *Examining Australia's Heaviest Drinkers*, undertaken by FARE's research partner the Centre for Alcohol Policy and Research (CAPR) at La Trobe University, have been published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health.

Lead author, Dr Michael Livingston, says the study is CAPR's second major study of Australia's heaviest drinkers; this one honing in on the top two million drinkers and exploring socio-demographic factors as well as consumption.

"Our results confirmed that the heaviest drinking 10 per cent of Australians drink more than half of all alcohol consumed in Australia," Dr Livingston said.

"This group are drinking well above the [National Health and Medical Research Council's low-risk drinking guidelines](#), and drink an average of around six standard drinks per day," Dr Livingston said.

It is well established that rural areas have disproportionately high levels of consumption and alcohol-related harm compared to metropolitan areas, and the study confirmed that heavy drinkers are likely to be middle-aged men living outside major cities.

"We found that 16 per cent of this heavy-drinking subset live in outer regional and remote areas, compared with 10 per cent of other drinkers. The heaviest drinkers were also more likely to drink cask wine and beer as their main drinks, and they were more likely to drink at home," Dr Livingston said.

The most significant finding of the study is that cheap alcohol is the standout common factor among Australia's heaviest drinkers.

"Surprisingly, there were few other strong relationships with socio-demographic factors such as employment status and neighbourhood disadvantage," Dr Livingston said.

Chief Executive of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Michael Thorn says the CAPR study reinforces the important role of regulating alcohol prices as a population-wide measure to reduce alcohol harm.

"This research provides important evidence that addressing cheap alcohol is a highly targeted way to reduce harm among Australia's heaviest drinkers," Mr Thorn said.

This study further supports governments overseeing or considering introducing a floor price on alcohol, which is one of the reforms underway in the Northern Territory.

“The trend towards packaged liquor sales continues apace, with more than 80 per cent of the alcohol consumed in Australia now sold as packaged liquor,” Mr Thorn said.

The alcohol industry maximises profits through this business model, which includes discounting, special offers and other point-of-sale promotions like shopper-dockets.

“This is concerning as packaged liquor stores are linked with high rates of assaults, domestic violence, chronic disease and road crashes,” he said.

Mr Thorn says chain superstores, such as Woolworths’ Dan Murphy’s, contribute to this harm, particularly in relation to the risk of trauma.

“Earlier research found that each additional chain outlet is associated with a 35.3 per cent increase in intentional injuries (including assaults, stabbing, or shooting) and a 22 per cent increase in unintentional injuries (including falls, crushes, or being struck by an object),” Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says the packaged liquor model enables Woolworths to sell as much alcohol as possible, as cheaply as possible, to the most vulnerable people in our country.

“Clearly government has a responsibility to address the problem of cheap alcohol by fixing the way alcohol is taxed, introducing floor prices and halting the proliferation of harm-causing packaged alcohol products,” Mr Thorn said.

Dr Livingston and Mr Thorn are available for interview.

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The **Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR)** is an innovative, world-class research facility examining alcohol-related harms and the effectiveness of alcohol-related policies. The Centre, which receives funding from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and La Trobe University, is led by Professor Emmanuel Kuntsche and Professor Robin Room. To find out more visit www.capr.edu.au

La Trobe University is an Australian public institute founded in 1964. In 1967, 552 students enrolled at La Trobe University, the third university to open in Victoria. It has grown to accommodate more than 30,000 students including approximately 7,600 international students from over 90 countries. It now has a network of campuses with 21,000 students at our Melbourne campus and over 5,900 at our campuses in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura, Melbourne City, and Shepparton. www.latrobe.edu.au/

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. Nearly 6,000 lives are lost every year and more than 144,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges. To find out more visit www.fare.org.au.