

MEDIA RELEASE

**2019 ANNUAL ALCOHOL POLL CONFIRMS ‘DECADE OF DECEPTION’
AS AUSTRALIA’S ‘GET DRUNK’ CLUB CLIMBS TO SIX MILLION**

8 May 2019: In the tenth year of surveying Australians, new polling has found the number of people who drink alcohol to get drunk has edged close to half the drinking population, to around six million people, despite little change in overall alcohol consumption.

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) says it has been the ‘decade of deception’ when it comes to informing Australians about the risks of alcohol, especially the life-time risk of chronic diseases, including cancer and cardiovascular disease.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says the *2019 Annual Alcohol Poll: Attitudes and Behaviours* (the Poll) shows a steady climb over the past decade of people drinking to get drunk, while Australians remain confused about what constitutes low-risk to high-risk alcohol consumption.

“Since 2011 there’s been an overall increase in the proportion of Australian drinkers who drink to get drunk from 35 to 47 per cent, with a quarter admitting to drinking to get drunk once or more a month,” Mr Thorn said.

“Alcohol harm has continued to increase despite the fact that overall consumption has remained relatively constant over the past 10 years, with no significant fluctuations,” he said.

Mr Thorn says consumption trends are compounded by Australians’ confusion around risk.

“The findings highlight the dangerous lack of clarity about the long-term risks of drinking alcohol, including mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, liver and breast cancer,” Mr Thorn said.

“The Poll found fewer than half of Australians are aware of the link between alcohol use and mouth and throat cancer (29%) and breast cancer (16%),” he said.

The global science is now overwhelming and the World Cancer Research Fund says there is strong evidence that cancer risk increases with any amount of alcohol, and continues to increase with every drink.

Mr Thorn says it is not surprising that Australians are confused about cancer and other health risks when nebulous terms such as ‘drink responsibly’ and ‘drink in moderation’ are commonplace in alcohol marketing.

“An overwhelming majority of Australian drinkers (87%) consider themselves responsible drinkers, yet a high percentage of those drinkers consume alcohol to get drunk,” Mr Thorn said.

“The Poll results clearly demonstrate how ambiguous and subjective the concept of ‘responsible drinking’ actually is, when 68 per cent of drinkers who consume 11 or more standard drinks on a typical occasion, consider themselves responsible drinkers,” he said.

THE SOLUTION TO END THE DECADE OF DECEPTION

Mr Thorn says over the past decade there has been a lack of government investment in preventive health measures, including raising awareness of the short-term and long-term risks of drinking alcohol.

“There hasn’t been a national alcohol awareness campaign since the binge drinking strategy, *Don’t turn a night out into a Nightmare*, which ended in 2010,” Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says the confusion around alcohol risk is reaching a crisis point as the country heads into the federal election.

“One in 22 Australians die from alcohol-related causes, yet the community remains in the dark about the range of life-threatening diseases that alcohol causes,” Mr Thorn said.

“The Poll has given us 10 years of valuable data that shows what goes wrong when we don’t have strong preventive health policies and programs in place,” he said.

Ten days out from the vote, FARE has reiterated the critical need for the incoming federal government to implement evidence-based public awareness campaigns that tell the truth about the long-term harms of drinking alcohol.

“It was encouraging to see Labor’s modest announcement last week to address crucial areas that FARE has identified for attention, including targeted awareness campaigns about the risks of alcohol, putting pregnancy warning labels on alcohol products and protecting young people from alcohol advertising,” Mr Thorn said.

The Greens have also recognised preventive health, pledging to establish an independent Preventive Health Commission to implement evidence-based harm prevention programs.

“The Greens have given the most positive undertaking on reducing alcohol harm, including banning all advertising and sponsoring of alcohol at sporting events and during sports broadcasts, and implementing a campaign to raise awareness of alcohol harm, especially during pregnancy to prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD),” Mr Thorn said.

“A government that implements these priority actions will have the support of the country, with more than four in five Australians believing that people have a right to know about alcohol-related harm, and the majority (75 per cent) believing that more needs to be done to reduce alcohol harm,” he said.

KEY FINDINGS

- **66%** of people believe that Australia has a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse.
- **75%** of Australians believe that more needs to be done to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.
- Fewer than half of Australians are aware of the link between alcohol use and stroke (**41%**), mouth and throat cancer (**29%**) and breast cancer (**16%**).
- **53%** of people believe that alcohol-related problems in Australia will worsen or remain the same over the next five to ten years.
- **47%** of Australian drinkers consume alcohol to get drunk.
- **87%** of Australian drinkers consider themselves a responsible drinker.

- **78%** of Australian drinkers who consume alcohol to get drunk, consider themselves a responsible drinker.
- **64%** of Australian drinkers who consume alcohol to get drunk at least twice a week consider themselves a responsible drinker.
- **79%** of Australian drinkers who consume six to ten standard drinks on a typical occasion consider themselves a responsible drinker.
- **68%** of Australian drinkers who consume 11 or more standard drinks on a typical occasion, consider themselves a responsible drinker.
- **38%** of Australians have been affected by alcohol-related violence, including **18%** who have been victims of alcohol-related violence.
- **23%** of parents or guardians with a child under 18 report that their child had been harmed or put at risk of harm because of someone else's drinking.
- More than 80% of Australians believe people have a right to know about a wide range of alcohol-related harms.

EDITORS' NOTE:

The Poll report features summary tables by demographics, including location, gender, age and voting intention.

Mr Thorn is available for interview.

Contact: Clare Ross 02 6122 8616 or 0429 291120