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Hospitality drinking culture key focus of new VicHealth investment

A new VicHealth, Monash University and Chisholm Institute campaign will tackle the heavy drinking culture amongst male hospitality workers, as research reveals they are more likely to drink at high levels than other social groups.

The project is one of [three initiatives announced today](#) as part of VicHealth's \$370,000 Men's Risky Drinking Cultures grants, which aims to change the social pressure on men to drink when they get together.

The research found risky drinking amongst hospitality workers was very common, attributed to access to free drinks and the perceived necessity for winding down post-work. It has also been revealed many hospitality workers feel they need to drink on the job to fit in with the workplace culture.

The VicHealth, Monash University and Chisholm Institute campaign will target hospitality students as they are about to enter the workplace to empower them to change the heavy drinking culture dominating the industry.

The project will also work with supervisors and mentors, as they're often responsible for encouraging new workers to fit in with the drinking culture.

VicHealth CEO Dr Sandro Demaio said it was important hospitality workers didn't feel they had to drink to do well or cope at work.

"Hospitality workers in our bars, restaurants and cafes work long hours in high-pressure environments and many workers feel drinking is their only option to blow off steam," Dr Demaio said.

"There has been an increasing focus on the mental wellbeing of our hospitality workers and we think workplace culture is critical to improving this. The often-entrenched drinking culture in many of our pubs, bars and restaurants is absolutely a part of this.

"This project is about supporting hospitality workplaces to amplify some of the positive social cultures they already promote that don't revolve around heavy drinking – we want men to feel they can connect with their colleagues and mates without having to resort to getting drunk."

Monash University Senior Research Fellow Dr Michael Savic said the industry has a responsibility to provide safe workplace environments for hospitality workers.

"Our research has shown in some workplaces on-the-job drinking is encouraged through access to free drinks and is seen as a way of 'loosening up' and creating an enjoyable atmosphere for patrons and staff," Dr Savic said.

"We know hospitality students are heavily influenced by workplace cultures around drinking. We need to make sure that young hospitality workers feel safe and supported when entering the workforce.

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“Throughout this initiative we’ll be working closely with students and hospitality professionals to ensure the campaign reflects and resonates with their experiences.”

Other initiatives funded as part of the Men’s Risky Drinking grants include a Knox and Maroondah City Council project working to change the drinking culture in local sports clubs and a Wyndham City Council project to understand alcohol cultures with men in their local area and develop initiatives which support improved health and wellbeing.

Parliamentary Secretary for Health Anthony Carbines congratulated the grant recipients, saying they would make a big difference to how at risk men approached drinking.

“While its okay to enjoy a beer among colleagues in moderation it’s concerning that there appears to be a heavy drinking culture amongst male hospitality workers as a way to connect with colleagues or express masculinity.”

“Workplaces should be safe and supportive environments that promote the health and wellbeing of their staff. The Men’s Risky Drinking grants will ensure just this by changing damaging stereotypes about how men should enjoy a drink in a work social environment. “

Dr Demaio said the projects were about helping men feel like they had other options to socialise beyond drinking alcohol.

“Men have told us they think the Australian male drinking culture is harmful but they don’t know how to change it – they feel stuck in the same drinking culture perpetuated by alcohol industry advertising,” he said.

“We need to create a culture where men can connect with each other without drinking heavily and feel empowered to intervene if they’re concerned about a friend or family member’s wellbeing.

“For too many men, being an Australian man means you’re not allowed to socialise without a beer in your hand. These projects will question this outdated view of what it means to be a man in our society, and support men to change the way they think about alcohol.”

To find out more about <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/funding/mens-risky-drinking-grants>

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