

For immediate release: Monday 4 March 2019

29 drinks a session ok: Men's perceptions of risky drinking putting them in harm's way

New research from health promotion foundation VicHealth and Monash University has found Victorian men are underestimating the harm from heavy drinking, with some believing the health risks only begin at 30 drinks per session.

The study into masculine drinking cultures was prompted by a VicHealth survey that found 40 per cent of Victorian men regularly drink more than four standard alcoholic drinks in a session, putting themselves at risk of injury and diseases like cancer and stroke.

Yet the study found most men interviewed believed risky drinking meant downing anywhere between 10-30 drinks, with a small minority stating no amount of alcohol was too risky.

With Aussie men at higher risk from alcohol than women, the study looked at what influences groups of men to drink, highlighting the drinking culture among sports players and supporters, hospitality and office workers. It found:

- 59 per cent of the men surveyed said they downed more than five drinks in one session weekly and 38 per cent said they drank more than 11 drinks in one session monthly
- While risky drinking was highly prevalent amongst all sub-groups hospitality workers had the highest rates of risky drinking attributed to access to free drinks and the perceived necessity for winding down post-work
- Alcohol was described by the men as a way of 'opening-up' to each other and many felt they couldn't socialise without drinking – even with close mates
- Men described their drinking as autonomous yet were observed to be heavily influenced by other men in the group through round buying, being pressured to drink or making fun of those who chose 'fruity' drinks with lower alcohol content
- Men were very hesitant to step in and intervene to help a mate who was drinking heavily unless he was trying to drive or drunk to the point of being completely incapacitated
- Men described 'inheriting' drinking behaviours from their fathers and drinking being central to being an Australian man
- Men were uncomfortable about the Australian drinking culture but felt powerless to change it.

The findings have prompted VicHealth to announce half a million dollars in new funding to try to change the way groups of men think about alcohol. The funding will be available for organisations who wish to change male risky drinking cultures in their communities.

Parliamentary Secretary for Health Anthony Carbines said it was important men felt like they had other options to socialise beyond drinking alcohol.

"It's concerning that some Victorian men feel like the only way they can connect with their friends or express their masculinity is through drinking," Mr Carbines said.

Media Contact

Rachel Murphy Senior Media Advisor on 03 9667 1319 /0435 761 732 rmurphy@vichealth.vic.gov.au

For immediate release: Monday 4 March 2019

“This new funding will help to create new interventions that 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.”

VicHealth Executive Manager of Programs Kirstan Corben said the research showed we need to challenge stereotypes and public health initiatives needed to change tactics when it comes to supporting men to drink less.

“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 and learned from their fathers and grandfathers,” Ms Corben said.

“This funding is about redefining masculine drinking and creating options for men where they can connect with their mates and express themselves without having to drink 20 beers.”

Monash lead researcher Professor Steven Roberts said the research showed men really care for their friends’ health and their drinking but don’t know how to intervene.

“Men want to protect their mates’ autonomy when it comes to drinking but they also care about their friends and don’t want them to come to harm. Our research showed for most men the only time they felt comfortable intervening was to stop someone drink-driving,” Professor Roberts said.

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

The Exploring men’s risky drinking cultures report is available on the [VicHealth website](#).

VicHealth’s Men’s Risky Drinking grants open today and close 9am Monday 8 April. Applicants can apply for up to \$150,000 in funding for a two year project. To find out more and apply visit:

<https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/funding/mens-risky-drinking-grants>

Media Contact

Rachel Murphy Senior Media Advisor on 03 9667 1319 /0435 761 732 rmurphy@vichealth.vic.gov.au