

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cancer Council endorses Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol

The National Health and Medical Research Council releases new Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol

Cancer Council Australia supports and commends the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) updated guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol, in light of growing evidence of the link between alcohol use and cancer.

The guidelines recommend that in order to reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease, Australians should consume no more than 10 standard drinks per week.

Clare Hughes, Chair, Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee, Cancer Council Australia says "The alcohol industry is focused on getting Australians drinking more however the evidence is clear, drinking is not good for your health.

"Research has shown that even small amounts of alcohol increase your risk of cancer. If Australians reduced their alcohol intake in line with the new guidelines, this would make a big impact in reducing the 3,500 cancers currently caused by alcohol across the nation each year.

"In 2019, around three-quarters (77%) of Australians aged 14 and over consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months and 17% of people aged 14 and older used alcohol at levels that placed them at risk of alcohol-related disease."

Alcohol is a known carcinogen, with evidence showing drinking alcohol increases your risk of cancers of the breast, mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, liver, stomach, and bowel.

3% of all cancers diagnosed in Australia are caused by alcohol, so reducing alcohol intake can help to reduce the burden of cancer in Australia.

Clare Hughes added "The more you drink, the greater your risk of getting cancer. As we head into the festive season, we encourage everyone to keep the guidelines in mind and have no more than 10 standard drinks per week, whilst also having a few alcohol-free days each week."

The new guidelines follow recent Cancer Council NSW research published in the British Journal of Cancer in October. The study, which was the largest investigation into alcohol consumer and cancer risk in Australia, found that the relative risk of developing any of the seven cancers known to be caused by alcohol rose by 10% for every seven standard drinks used per week.

In terms of risk over a lifetime, for every 100 people exceeding 14 drinks per week, approximately five of them will develop cancer due to their alcohol consumption by age 85 years - most commonly breast cancer for women and bowel cancer for men.

Lead author of the research Dr Peter Sarich says "Heading into the holiday season, the new alcohol guidelines serve as a timely reminder for all Australians to rethink



their drinking. There's now very strong Australian evidence that the more you drink, the higher your cancer risk will be."

Anita Dessaix, Chair, Public Health Committee, Cancer Council Australia says 'We commend the NHMRC for their rigorous and evidence-driven approach to reviewing and updating the guidelines, which reflect the increased risks associated with alcohol use.

"For the guidelines to be effective, we need to ensure Australians understand them. There is a lot of work needed to raise awareness, with just 16% of Australians aware of the link between alcohol and breast cancer.

"We are joining other health groups in calling on the Commonwealth Government to invest in a well-funded public education strategy to raise awareness of the guidelines, helping people understand them and supporting Australians to reduce their alcohol use and their risk of alcohol-related cancers.

The NHMRC guidelines also provide recommendations for young Australians in order to reduce the risk of injury and harm to health. It states that children and young people under 18 years of age should not consume any alcohol. In addition, the guidelines recommend that to reduce the risk of harm to their unborn child, women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol and that the safest option for women who are breastfeeding their baby is to not consume alcohol.

For more information visit: www.cancer.org.au

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