

Media Release

Friday 29 November 2019

Limiting alcohol could prevent almost 30,000 cancer cases

Cancer Council encourages Australians to reassess drinking habits this festive season

As the festive season approaches Cancer Council is encouraging Australians to moderate their alcohol intake, with research showing nearly 30,000 cancer cases could be prevented over the next 25 years if all Australians stuck to the government's alcohol guidelines of no more than two standard drinks per day.

The study, by QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, examined how many cancer cases could be prevented in Australia in scenarios where people reduced their alcohol intake or stopped drinking entirely.

Clare Hughes, Chair, Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee, Cancer Council Australia said, "We know that alcohol is a cause of cancer and these figures show just how many cases could be prevented if Australians either stopped drinking entirely or at least drank alcohol within the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines for alcohol consumption.

"The festive season has become synonymous with sharing a drink with friends thanks to clever and pervasive marketing by the alcohol industry and approximately 80 per cent of Australians consume alcohol.

"What many people don't realise is that when looking at cancer risk, there is actually no safe limit of alcohol consumption. In fact, the more alcohol consumed over a lifetime, the greater the risk of developing alcohol-related cancers.

"If we can help more people to understand the potential long-term harms of consuming alcohol, even in small amounts, it has the potential to save many lives.

"If you do drink, limit your intake to no more than two standard drinks a day and have some alcohol-free days.

Ms Hughes continued, "Alcohol is a significant risk factor for cancer, particularly those of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, breast, bowel and liver.

"The cancer sites with the highest number of potentially avoidable cases were bowel cancer, with over 16,000 potentially preventable cases and breast, where just over 4,000 cases could be prevented.

"The number of alcohol-related cancer cases that could be prevented further climbed when the researchers looked at what would happen if people stopped drinking entirely."

Cancer Council Australia recommends a suite of policy reforms to reduce alcohol-related cancer burden.

These include public education campaigns to raise awareness about the link between alcohol and cancer; restrictions on alcohol advertising and promotion to young people; alcohol pricing policy reforms to reduce high-risk alcohol consumption and health information and warning labels on alcohol products.



National Health and Medical Research Council alcohol guidelines recommend that healthy Australians consume no more than two standard drinks per day (equivalent to 20g of alcohol per day).

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For more information please contact:

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About Cancer Council

Cancer Council is Australia's leading cancer charity working across every aspect of every cancer. Every day, we support families affected by cancer when they need it most, speak out on behalf of the community on cancer issues, empower people to reduce their cancer risk, and find new ways to better detect and treat cancer. With your help, we're getting closer to a cancer free future every minute, every hour, every day. For more information on how Cancer Council helps, visit impact.cancer.org.au

About QIMR Berghofer Medical research Institute

QIMR Berghofer is a world leading translational research institute that focuses on cancer, infectious diseases, mental health and chronic disorders. Its priority is translating research from the laboratory bench to the hospital bedside and the broader community to improve human health. It does that by developing new and better prevention strategies, diagnostic tools and treatments.

About the research

Access the abstract here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ijc.32204>