GET THE FACTS: ALCOHOL

Alcohol is considered to be an important part of Australian culture.1 While social drinking over a meal, at a celebration, or a sporting event can be enjoyable, binge drinking is a major cause for concern. The consumption of alcohol is at one of the highest points in recent decades: it is estimated that more than 10.2 liters of alcohol are consumed per person aged over 15, per year.2 18% of Australian drinkers aged over 14 drank at levels that placed them at a lifetime risk of an alcohol related risk or injury, while 38% drank at levels that placed them at a risk of injury on a single occasion in the last 12 months – for 26%, this was at least monthly.3 People in their late teens and 20s are the most likely to drink at risky levels.4

To prevent harm, the National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that men and women drink no more than two standard drinks on any day to reduce the risk of lifetime risk of alcohol-related disease or injury. It is recommended that healthy men and women drink no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion to reduce the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion. It is advised that for children and young people under 18 years of age, not drinking alcohol is the safest option. Not drinking is especially important under the age of 15, and delaying the initiation of drinking for as long as possible is the safest approach to avoid long and short term harms.5

Like any drug, improper use of alcohol can have negative effects on physical and mental health; and like any regulated drug, the inappropriate possession, use or sale of alcohol has legal consequences. Get the facts below.

The consequences: The law
Alcohol laws vary from state to state, but in all states it is illegal to sell alcohol to people under the age of 18, or to an intoxicated person. In some states a minor can have alcohol, as long as it was provided by a parent or guardian, at a private residence, and the parent or guardian is present. There are also penalties for public drinking, and for being intoxicated in public. Penalties include fines and being taken into protective custody.

The consequences: Your health
It is widely accepted that alcohol consumption, particularly regular heavy drinking, is responsible for increased illness and death. The major known disease and injury conditions attributed to dangerous levels of alcohol consumption include:

- Alcohol dependence disorders
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Oesophageal and liver cancers
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Fatal poisoning
- Epilepsy
- Homicide
- Self-inflicted injury

Among young adults aged 18 to 24, excessive alcohol consumption was related to:

- Motor vehicle crashes while intoxicated
- Injury
- Unprotected sex
- Assault from another drinking college student
- Alcohol-involved sexual assault or date-rape

References: