



NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

Tuesday, April 12, 2005

Smoking down, drinking up: Alcohol trends worry GPs

The Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP) welcomes the latest results *from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey*. The survey shows Australia is leading the world with its reduced smoking rates, and there has been significant falls in the number of people using marijuana. However, the report also shows worrying trends in the risky consumption of alcohol.

"The fall in tobacco smoking and marijuana use is encouraging. Declining use suggests the effectiveness of public health campaigns that have highlighted the risks associated with these drugs. But the findings on alcohol use suggest the opposite," said ADGP Chair Dr Rob Walters.

"Alcohol abuse use is commonly seen in general practice and is a risk factor for both physical and mental health. As the Government renews its National Alcohol Strategy, ADGP will be calling for greater incentives for primary care teams to deliver quality preventative care to consumers, including Medicare incentives for GPs and practice nurses to deliver lifestyle advice, risk assessments and evidence-based treatments."

More than one-third of people aged 14 years and over has put themselves at risk of alcohol-related harm in the short term at least once during the last 12 months. Males aged 20-29 years (17.4%) were the most likely group to consume alcohol at risky or high-risk levels for short-term harm at least once in the last week. More than one in 10 people aged 14-19 years put themselves at risk of alcohol-related harm in the short term on at least a weekly basis during the last 12 months.

"Everyday, GPs and their teams see the consequences of teenage drinking for young people and their families. We must tackle the binge-drinking culture that is so widespread among young people, and that puts them at risk. We must also reduce the large numbers of young people who have developed drinking patterns that put their health at risk of long-term harm," said Dr Walters.

"Many people lack awareness of the dangers of alcohol use. This seems to be particularly the case for young people. More needs to be done to persuade people of the risks of heavy alcohol consumption, to provide advice on drinking habits and how to identify risk of harm much earlier, and general practice is the front-line setting where this can occur."

This survey also demonstrates the relationship between mental health problems and harmful alcohol use. It found that those drinking at risky drinking levels were more likely than low-risk drinkers to experience high levels of psychological distress.

ADGP is coordinating a national initiative across 33 Divisions of General Practice aimed at helping general practitioners treat people with co-existing alcohol misuse and mental health problems. "Under the program, *Managing the Mix*, GPs will receive the latest education to help enhance their skills, and consumers will benefit through newly-created resources and information. Locally, GPs will also work with other allied and specialist health care providers to ensure better coordinated and supportive care supported by their Division of General Practice," Dr Walters said.

The Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation is the main funding body of this initiative. Funding has also been received from the Federal Departments of Health and Ageing and Veterans' Affairs.

For comment:

Dr Rob Walters, ADGP Chair, 0418 127 123

For information:

Leanne Wells, Manager, Policy and Development, 0409 818 290