

## **New Report: young drinkers driven to excess by drinking access**

**18th August 2008** – New research released today by the Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation (AER) Foundation examines the degree to which young Victorians drink at high risk to their health.

The Victorian study found that, over a twelve month period, twenty three (23) per cent of male drinkers aged 16 to 24 years regularly consumed more than twenty (20) standard drinks in one day, and that nineteen (19) per cent of female drinkers regularly consumed more than eleven (11) standard drinks in one day. It also demonstrated that approximately one in five of the drinkers had consumed their first drink at thirteen years of age or younger.

The research was undertaken by Michael Livingston and a team from Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre and the Burnet Institute, and it highlights the critical issue of alcohol availability (outlet density) and its incremental effect on the rate at which young people drink at high risk levels.

Lead author of the report, Michael Livingston said: “There is a significantly higher proportion of young people in the country drinking at harmful levels which is due, in part, to the increased availability of alcohol and licensed venues in regional Victoria.

“The findings also demonstrate the importance the price of alcohol plays in these outcomes, showing how young drinkers who have greater disposable incomes are much more likely to drink to excess” added Mr Livingston.

AER Chief Executive Officer Daryl Smeaton said the findings of the report are deeply concerning. “The level at which young people are drinking at short-term high risk to their health is alarming. These figures show male respondents are drinking at ten times, and females at five times the NHMRC 2007 draft safe drinking guideline levels, leading to unnecessary hospitalisations, injuries from car accidents, assaults and violence. This behaviour contributes to the already significant \$15.3 billion cost burden of alcohol related harm annually. Livingston’s research provides further evidence that governments urgently need to review licensed outlet density nationwide to arrest this growing trend”.

A summary of the findings detailed in the report reveals:

- 23 % of male drinkers aged 16 to 24 years regularly consumed more than 20 drinks in one day
- 19 % of female drinkers regularly drank more than 11 drinks in one day
- 17% of drinkers had their first drink at the age of 13 years or younger, of these, 31% are current high-risk drinkers
- 25 % of male drinkers aged 18-21 years drank at high risk levels
- 22 % of female drinkers aged 18-21 yrs drank at high risk levels

- Working adults, living out of home and with \$80 or more per week recreational spending money were characteristics of the group which drinks most at high risk levels
- Typically, individuals poorly integrated with their school, peers and family, living in poor social environments, engage in socially negative behaviours such as risky drinking at a young age.

Mr Smeaton added: "This new report highlights the pressing need for national action. AER has consistently called for a comprehensive suite of measures to reduce alcohol-related harm including the introduction of volumetric taxation (to remove the cost benefit to price sensitive consumers opting for high alcohol, low cost products), removal of alcohol from the National Competition Policy so that licensing and outlet density restrictions can be reviewed, and an ongoing public education campaign. These measures will not only reduce risky consumption of alcohol and the associated harm but will also contribute to a shift in attitude towards a safer drinking culture."

The research results will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

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**About AER:** AER is an independent, not-for-profit company established in 2001 and funded by a government grant. The AER mandate is to prevent alcohol and licit substance abuse especially amongst disadvantaged, indigenous and young people; to support evidence-based treatment, research and prevention programs in the Alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector; and to highlight the dangers of licit substance abuse and promote the responsible consumption of alcohol within the community. AER has funded over 850 programs throughout Australia including numerous programs which contribute to shifting community attitudes towards a responsible approach to alcohol consumption. For further information: <http://www.aerf.com.au>

#### **About Turning Point:**

Turning Point strives to promote and maximise the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities living with and affected by alcohol and other drug-related harms. Since being established in 1994, Turning Point has led research and its translation into policy and practice at a local, national and international level. Turning Point is formally affiliated with St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne and the University of Melbourne. Turning Point is part of the International Network of Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Resource Centres for The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and is a member of the International Harm Reduction Association. The Centre is also a Registered Training Organisation and an accredited Higher Education Provider. The organisation integrates activities across a diverse range of specialist knowledge and professional practice. This unique combination enables Turning Point to translate evidence into action. Our work is essential to understanding the complexities of alcohol and drug use in our community and in developing effective approaches to prevent and treat dependence and other related harms.

#### **About Burnet Institute**

The Burnet Institute is Australia's leading organisation focused on laboratory research and the public health aspects of infectious diseases of global significance. The Institute works within Australia and across the Asia and Pacific regions addressing important health problems many of which are focused on young people. The Institute's mission is to reduce the impact of infectious diseases and other health issues by translating medical research into tangible public health outcomes and the

implementation of public health research which leads to the development of strategies to effect positive change. Burnet has more than 350 scientific researchers and public health professionals and has specifically chosen to focus its efforts on finding solutions to those public health problems that have the greatest impact on humankind today. For further information about the Burnet Institute [www.burnet.edu.au](http://www.burnet.edu.au)

### **About the Report**

Livingston, M.et al., Individual and community correlates of young people's high-risk drinking in Victoria, Australia. Drug Alcohol depend (2008). The data in this study comes from 2003 and 2004 VYAD Surveys. The final sample was 10,879 (5505 from 2003) and 5374 from 2004). The community resided in 568 postcodes which is the standard proxy for community, and featured 19.2 respondents per postcode.