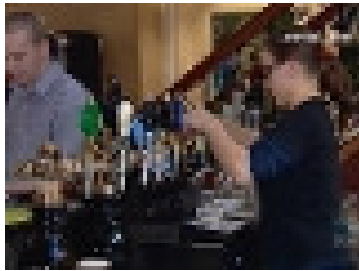


LATELINE.



Alcohol costs Australia \$36 billion/year: report

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Broadcast: 23/08/2010

Reporter: Peter Lloyd

The researchers behind a new report on the cost of alcohol misuse in Australia hope their findings lead to new policy measures.

Transcript

LEIGH SALES, PRESENTER: A new report on the harm caused by alcohol misuse in Australia claims the economic cost amounts to a staggering \$36 billion a year.

That's more than double previous estimates.

The alcohol industry questions the accuracy of the report but the people behind the research project hope their findings will lead to new measures to tackle alcohol-related social problems.

Peter Lloyd reports.

PETER LLOYD, REPORTER: This is the image we most associate with alcohol abuse - violence, a breakdown in law and order, medical emergencies.

For the first time, researchers have tried to put a price on the mayhem.

PROFESSOR IAN WEBSTER, ALCOHOL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION FOUNDATION: It's moved beyond the medical way of thinking about this. It's looking at the way alcohol affects families, children in families, strangers and indeed how it impacts on whole communities.

PETER LLOYD: Professor Ian Webster is from the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation.

It was established to change the way Australians drink. This research paper is meant to change the way we think.

IAN WEBSTER: It's a shift in our thinking from a fairly medical public health focus to a social focus.

PETER LLOYD: The report draws on nationwide police and medical records, as well as an extensive survey of more than two and a half thousand people.

It concluded that the total cost of alcohol misuse is \$36 billion a year;

That more than ten million Australians experienced some negative effect from other people's drinking;

Almost 70,000 people fall victim to alcohol related assaults;

And 24,000 of those were classified as domestic violence.

IAN WEBSTER: The way alcohol is promoted, advertised, sold - particularly to vulnerable young people - is really an obscenity.

PETER LLOYD: you are putting some of the blame on the alcohol companies?

IAN WEBSTER: Well of course. The way things are promoted, the very clever advertising, the clever way of inveigling young people into thinking that by drinking alcohol they'll be successful at sport or in sexual activities, I think, is extremely wrong and inappropriate. And we ought to be controlling that.

PETER LLOYD: What about personal responsibility? Isn't the individual ultimately responsible for how much they drink?

IAN WEBSTER: If you create an environment where it's promoted relentlessly, you create environments where people congregate and drink in ways in which - they drink heavily and there's often aggression in those environments - and when you make alcohol widely available all through the day and night, and when its price becomes lower and lower and lower - these are social factors which act against the idea of personal responsibility.

PETER LLOYD: And alcohol manufacturers tonight have hit back.

VOICEOVER (Reading statement by Stephen Riden, Distilled Spirits Industry Council): It is doubtful that any mainstream economist would agree with these findings, which appear to be generated for an advocacy purpose rather than by dispassionate science. The report is a 234-page bid for further research grants.

ANDREW SCIPIONE, NSW POLICE COMMISSIONER: Of the street events that police deal with here in New South Wales alone, well over 70 per cent of them have alcohol as a factor.

PETER LLOYD: Police are at the sharp end of alcohol-related crime on a daily basis. The country's largest force welcomes this report - but wants more studies to see if these findings

are right.

ANDREW SCIPIONE: It's been an issue and a question that we've always been trying to work through. I think the reality that in the past we've believed it was about \$15 billion and this now being double that figure tells us that there is a serious issue here.

We need to do the work, commence the research and work out exactly what the cost is behind the primary cost that we've always believed to be the figure.

PETER LLOYD: Professor Webster says his new study has attempted to go beyond crime statistics to analyse the impact of alcohol on family breakdown.

IAN WEBSTER: This study shows for the first time that about 30 per cent of the perpetrators of abuse to children have been significantly drinking at the time.

PETER LLOYD: The report will be launched in Canberra tomorrow afternoon.

Peter Lloyd, Lateline.

Alcohol costs Australia \$36 billion/year: report



© 2007 ABC | [Privacy Policy](#)