

Media Release



EMBARGOED Friday 19 April, 2019 AEST 1800

More than a quarter of family violence incidents involve alcohol, data shows

Alcohol is involved in at least one in four domestic violence incidents that end up at hospital emergency in Warrnambool, but experts say the overall figure could be much higher.

Data collected by emergency staff and Deakin researchers as part of the Last Drinks study highlight the insidious role of alcohol products on family and intimate partner violence.

But Director at Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre Geoff Soma said the emergency department results could underestimate the true impact, with alcohol consistently implicated in more than 50 per cent of presentations seen at WRAD.

“Between the ED data and drug and alcohol centres you get some idea, but the data only picks up those that present for treatment,” Mr Soma said. “There’s also a significant percentage out there that, for whatever reason, are not seeking help.”

Last Drinks researchers survey every adult presenting at Warrnambool Base Hospital emergency, asking questions about their alcohol consumption in the 12 hours prior to arrival.

Data collected over the past 18 months revealed that every incident of intimate partner or family violence where alcohol was a factor involving packaged alcohol products consumed at home.

Mr Soma said that current evidence indicated the supply of alcohol was related to the rates of harm.

“The evidence suggests that rates of alcohol-harm, including family violence, are related to the amount of alcohol available in a community, especially alcohol sold via bottle shops,” he said.

The figures revealed two in three victims presenting to ED were female, but domestic violence victims who had also been drinking alcohol were 87 per cent female. This is much higher than average, with general emergency visitors equally split between male and female.

Last Drinks project manager Nic Droste said collecting the data in ED meant it recorded only incidents where the victim has also consumed alcohol.

“It doesn’t account for drinking by the partner or family member, therefore the involvement of alcohol products is likely to be much higher,” Dr Droste said.

Mr Soma said treatment and support services grouped alcohol with other drugs because, while legal, its impact on individuals and their families was just as harmful as illegal substances.

“Alcohol products affect people psychologically, affecting their mood and exacerbating other issues such as anxiety and depression,” Mr Soma said.

“This can then affect the way they interpret things said to them and the way they communicate and articulate their needs, and as we know that affects relationships.”

Mr Soma said the figures did not adequately capture the impact on children who witnessed violence fuelled by booze and other drugs.

“We can talk about family violence and its direct impact on the victim but there are also the children who are affected on so many levels,” Mr Soma said.

“There's no doubt that it can certainly affect their emotional and psychological development, which can then affect their performance at school, their social interactions and things like future employment.”

He said WRAD was currently running a pilot program engaging GPs to ask patients about their use of alcohol and other substances in order to improve the support pathway and ensure people received the help they needed as early as possible.

Last Drinks Warrnambool is part of the Driving Change trial running in emergency departments across Victoria, NSW and the ACT until 2021. As part of the project, which builds on a pilot study run in Warrnambool in 2014, hospitals gather information on alcohol-related presentations, including time and location of drinking, injuries and weapons used.

The data is used to create practical ways of reducing harm from alcohol products within the community. The project adapts the highly successful “Cardiff” model for violence and injury prevention pioneered in the UK by Professor Jon Shepherd.

Anyone wanting help to cut down or quit can call DirectLine confidential alcohol and drug service on 1800 888 236, Turning Point live online counselling at www.counsellingonline.org.au or contact their GP.

Available for interview:

Geoff Soma, Director at Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre

Media contact : Tanya Hollis mobile: 0401 628 599 | email: tanya@tanyaholliswrites.com