



Press release – 16 July 2013

Alcohol Healthwatch welcomes the release of a new report on the alcohol-attributable burden of disease and injury in New Zealand. The report released yesterday by the Health Promotion Agency shows the considerable damage to health caused by alcohol use, including 802 deaths of people under 80 years old in 2007 alone.

Alcohol Healthwatch director Rebecca Williams says the findings paint a bleak picture and confirm that our country's drinking culture is taking a considerable toll on life and health. However she says that the findings must serve to prompt action. "Now is not a time for hand-wringing over these dismal statistics. Rather it's a time to use the good evidence that we have and take appropriate action."

The study shows that in 2007, 1 in 20 deaths in New Zealand were attributable to alcohol. Injury is shown to be the leading cause of alcohol-related deaths for those aged 15 – 44 years, whereas chronic diseases such as cancer are the leading cause of alcohol-related death in those aged 45 – 79 years.

Road traffic injuries are the leading cause of alcohol-related death for both Māori and non Māori men, with other injuries, alcoholic liver cirrhosis and drowning also included in the top five causes of alcohol-related death for men.

Breast cancer is the leading cause of alcohol-related death for both Māori and non Māori women, with injuries, alcoholic liver cirrhosis, heart disease and other cancers included in the leading causes of alcohol-related death for women.

When looking at disability, alcohol use disorders are the biggest contributor to alcohol-related ill health for both men and women.

The report's authors, including Professor Jennie Connor and Robyn Kydd from the University of Otago, warn that there are no health benefits from drinking before middle age, and that the health burden falls inequitably on Māori.

Williams says that while the new alcohol legislation adopted last December is a start, it will not effectively address this burden. What is needed is for Government to adopt an evidence-based approach and address the price and marketing of alcohol, lower the blood alcohol concentration for adult drivers and require health warnings on all alcohol containers and at point of sale. She says we don't need more research on this issue in order to act confidently. In moving forward some basic principles must be adhered to, particularly to ensure that the health of New Zealanders is put before alcohol industry profit.

For further comment: Rebecca Williams, Director, Alcohol Healthwatch (09) 520 7035 or 021 862 250.

Connor, J., R., Kydd, R., Rehm, J., Shield, K. (2013) *Alcohol-attributable burden of disease and injury in New Zealand: 2004 and 2007, Research report commissioned by the Health Promotion Agency*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.

A copy of the full report can be found at www.hpa.org.nz