



Community Safety and Alcohol

In New Zealand it is often acknowledged that alcohol plays a part in the way of life for many New Zealanders. While most New Zealanders are social and responsible consumers of alcohol, we also know that alcohol abuse impacts hugely on the service provision of our police, hospitals, ambulance and fire services.



How big is the injury burden in New Zealand?

- Injuries are the leading cause of death for ages 1 to 34 years and the second leading cause of hospitalisations.
- More than 1,700 of us die each year from injuries; our men are dying at twice the rate of women.
- Injuries claim more potential years of our lives than cancer and heart disease combined.
- Nearly a quarter of a million of us have long-term disability as a result of injury.
- Over 1.6 million injury claims are accepted by the ACC for injury, every year.



What is the cost of alcohol related harm in New Zealand?

- It has been estimated that alcohol harm costs somewhere between \$1 billion and \$4 billion a year. A substantial proportion of this is related to community safety and injury.
- It is estimated that alcohol was responsible for 3.9% of total deaths in 2000 in NZ, this related to approximately 1,040 people.
- Half of all deaths attributable to alcohol were through injuries caused by road traffic crashes, deliberate self harm, falls, drownings, workplace injuries and assault.
- Most alcohol related deaths which occurred before middle age were due to injuries.
- Alcohol is responsible for around 35% of emergency department hospital admissions.



Alcohol related harm and road traffic crashes

- In 2006, driver alcohol misuse was a contributing factor in 99 fatal crashes, 409 serious injuries and 1128 minor crashes.
- The 20-24 and 25-29 age groups had the greatest proportion of alcohol/drug affected drivers involved in fatal crashes.
- To put it into percentages alcohol was a contributing factor in about 28% of fatal road crashes and 14% of non-fatal road crashes in 2006.
- The total social cost of crashes involving driver alcohol was about \$425 million – that is about a fifth of the social cost associated with all injury crashes.



Alcohol related harm and deliberate self harm

- A New Zealand study of young people aged between 13-24 years, who made a serious suicide attempt, revealed that 31% had a history of alcohol abuse or dependence.



Alcohol related harm and falls

- A recent falls study in the 25-60 age group found that just under half (45.8%) of participants in the study had consumed alcohol in the 24 hours preceding the fall event. Similar studies overseas have found that there is a strong and consistent relationship between drinking alcohol and risk of an unintentional fall at home.
- Consuming alcohol in the previous six hours has been found to be associated with an approximate 12-times increased risk of a fall-related injury in the home.



Alcohol related harm and drownings

- Between 2001-2005, alcohol was a factor in around 19% of the drownings.
- In 2007 there were 110 drownings of which 21 (19%) were known to involve alcohol and/or drugs.
- In 2004, a report issued by Maritime NZ concluded that alcohol was the prime causal factor in about 15% of fatal boating incidents and contributed to a further 15% of drowning related incidents.



Alcohol related harm and workplace injuries

- An Auckland study estimates that the cost of alcohol related lost productivity among the working population of New Zealand to be \$57 million per year.



Alcohol related harm and assault

- The New Zealand National Crime Survey 2006 found that nearly 23% of crimes in public places involved both offender and victim drinking.
- Alcohol related crime costs have been estimated at \$240 million per annum.
- A substantial amount of weekend crime is attributable to alcohol. Overseas studies suggest 50-70%.



The payoff from doing better

As a nation, New Zealanders enjoy an active and challenging lifestyle and it is important to ensure that we continue to live in a society that embraces these values while striving to achieve the New Zealand Injury Prevention Strategy vision of 'a safe New Zealand becoming injury free'.

New Zealanders' overall health will be boosted by addressing alcohol misuse. In particular, men's health will improve, as more men die as a result of alcohol related injury deaths. With greater community awareness and concern about the impact of alcohol misuse, a positive and supportive climate for developing a positive safety culture and safer environments should prevail.

The information provided here is of a general nature only and is not intended as a substitute for professional health advice. For further information on the role of alcohol within NZ visit www.alac.govt.nz

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