

MEDIA RELEASE



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Alcohol a major killer of youth: Deakin University study reveals

Alcohol alone causes more than a quarter of all deaths of 15—29 year-olds in developed countries, a new Deakin University study has revealed in this week's issue of the Lancet.

Deakin University psychology professor John Toumbourou said that it was time for Australian governments and the community to get serious about the growing problem of teenage alcohol abuse.

"The problem of alcohol abuse among young people in Australia is one of the most extreme relative to comparable developed countries." Professor Toumbourou said.

He believes that current Australian policies are promoting the problem.

"The Lancet study is a systematic literature review and clearly shows that where alcohol is cheap and readily accessible young people will experience more problems," Professor Toumbourou said.

"In Australia, there is a lot of resistance to increasing the taxes on alcohol or to restricting alcohol's availability. However, increasing the cost of alcohol or restricting the number of liquor licenses are proven to be amongst the best ways of limiting its appeal to young people."

Professor Toumbourou led an international group of experts to review approaches and strategies to prevent substance abuse in young people.

They found that death, injury and illness caused by substance use are among the top 10 contributors to the global disease burden.

"What was once seen by many in developing countries as the disease of industrialised nations is now a worldwide trend," Professor Toumbourou said.

"Alcohol alone contributed to 27 per cent of all deaths involving 15 to 29-year-olds in economically developed countries in 2002 and illicit drugs a further 4 per cent."

Professor Toumbourou said that rates of tobacco use, harmful alcohol use, and illicit drug use can be significantly reduced through the concerted application of a combination of regulatory, early-intervention, and harm-reduction approaches.

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