

Friday, 17 September 2010  
C171/10

## Action on Alcohol and Youth needed – launch of new Centre

The McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth (MCAAY) was launched today to reduce alarming levels of alcohol problems and risky drinking among young people.

The Centre, which is being launched with an initial \$400,000 from the McCusker Foundation, will be based at Curtin University. The Centre aims to reduce alcohol related harms in young people through reduced overall consumption and lower risk patterns of consumption, particularly among Western Australians aged 14-25.

In launching the Centre, Malcolm McCusker spoke on the dangers of alcohol.

“Alcohol kills! Excessive alcohol consumption can have devastating effects on individuals, families and communities,” Mr McCusker said.

“Young people in particular need to acknowledge that ‘getting blind drunk’ is not cool, in fact, it can have disastrous consequences.

“Whilst I am not against an adult enjoying a glass of wine with a meal, I am firmly against young people drinking excessive amounts of alcohol and putting themselves and their friends at risk.”

Tonya McCusker, a trustee of the McCusker Foundation said, “I remember sitting with Malcolm last November, watching the news and being horrified at the actions of young Australians during school leavers week, as a result of drinking excessive amounts of alcohol.”

“I saw girls passed out on the ground, boys vomiting in drains, intoxicated youngsters racing across busy streets, and so many other tragedies that impact on families, friends and entire communities.

“Whilst enormous headway has been made in educating our young people about the detrimental effects of tobacco and drugs, alcohol remains a glorified killer in disguise.

“Malcolm and I hope that this new Centre will help save the lives of young Australians – help save the lives of the five young Australians who will die this week as a result of alcohol related injuries.”

Research shows that:

- 80 per cent of alcohol consumed by people aged 14-24 is consumed in ways that put the drinkers’ (and others) health at risk of acute harm.
- 24.3 per cent of 12-17 year old students in WA reported drinking at levels considered to place adults at risk of short term harm.
- Over the last 10 years, about 15 per cent of all deaths among 15-24 year olds were due to risky or high risk drinking.
- Rates of alcohol related harm in young people have increased significantly over recent years, particularly those aged 16-24.

- Recent reports show that compared with young Australians as a whole, a larger proportion of young Western Australians drink at levels that put them at risk of both immediate and chronic harms.

The McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth will be directed by Professor Mike Daube of Curtin University.

Professor Daube said there was a need to change the culture where young people think drinking to get drunk is acceptable.

“We have a special problem in WA. Some of the answers may not initially be popular – price, controls on access, curbing the tidal wave of alcohol promotion to which our kids are exposed, spending more money on education about the harms – but we have to make a start now or the problems will only get worse.” Professor Daube said.

“There is something we can all do, as citizens, parents, community members and decision-makers.

“The McCusker Centre will work with other concerned groups, including health, education and law enforcement agencies, and will place a special focus on involving young people. Above all, it will be about generating public discussion and action.”

Professor Steve Allsop, Director of the National Drug Research Institute, said it was time to address the intolerable harm that risky drinking causes our young people.

“A large proportion of young people, at least occasionally, drink at risky levels and almost 200 young Australians are hospitalised every week, while on average, approximately five people aged 15-24 years die every week from alcohol caused injury or disease.”

Police Acting Deputy Commissioner Nick Anticich, said alcohol intoxication within our community puts enormous demands on police.

“Alcohol intoxication is a factor in about 60 percent of calls for police attendance and about 90 percent of calls between 10pm and 2am.

“Young people feature as a significant part of the problem. Police continue to be concerned about their drinking patterns and the consequences of their behaviours while alcohol affected.

“The WA Police is committed to supporting action to reduce underage drinking and binge drinking.”

The Centre will be based at the Curtin Health Research Campus at Shenton Park.

Speakers at the launch included Malcolm McCusker AO QC CitWA, Tonya McCusker, Professor Mike Daube, Professor Steve Allsop, Professor Fiona Wood and Professor Jeanette Hackett.

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