

Australia's soaring \$3bn hangover bill

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The cost to Australia's economy of alcohol and other drug related (AOD) absenteeism has soared from \$1.2bn in 2001 to more than \$3bn, according to analysis being published today by Flinders University's National Centre for Education and Training on *Addiction* (NCETA).

The new paper, titled Alcohol and drug-related [absenteeism](#): a costly problem has just been published in the *Australian and New Zealand*

Journal of Public Health (ANZJPH).

Professor Ann Roche, Director of NCETA, the lead author of the report, said that, in the case of [alcohol](#), people often didn't realise that drinking was the cause of their absenteeism.

"Often people will have a lot to drink on Friday or Saturday and then have diarrhoea or gastro type symptoms on a Monday morning that are a direct result of the alcohol, but they don't connect these with their drinking," said Professor Roche.

Professor Roche said the findings of the NCETA analysis, which looked at the most recent National Drug Strategy Household Survey (2013), were supported by subsequent research in 2014 and 2015.

The NDSHS surveyed 12,196 people, comprising of 56.3% males and 43.7% females, with an average age of 41.1 years. Most drank alcohol at low-risk levels (56.1%), 26.6% at risky levels and 9.3% at high-risk levels, while 8% abstained.

Most had never used any illicit drug (49.5%), or had not used within the past year (34.9%). A total of 7.3% used drugs yearly, 2.9% did so monthly, and 5.4% did so weekly.

Participants self-reported missing a total of 1,688,161 days due to alcohol and 854,497 days due to drug use (M1), with rates of absence increased with riskier/more frequent consumption.

NCETA used two measures to work out the cost of AOD-related absenteeism.

The first measure multiplied the self-reported number of days missed due to AOD use by \$267.70 (one day's, wage plus 20% employer on-

costs; while the second measure (M2) calculated the amount of any illness/injury absenteeism attributable to AOD use by estimating the mean difference in absence for those who used alcohol or drugs compared to abstainers. This figure was also multiplied by \$267.70.

Professor Roche said the huge increase in cost to the economy was being incurred by a small proportion of Australians who were drinking more, and who were also using stimulants such as methamphetamine to keep themselves going.

She said it was time for Australian businesses to implement strategies to promote healthy behaviour among their employees and reduce the costs of AOD related absenteeism.

"I would recommend that organisations develop and implement a formal AOD policy, provide education and training regarding AOD use, and provide access to counselling and treatment," said Professor Roche.

"The good news is that these kinds of strategies have been shown to be highly effective in addressing this kind of absenteeism behaviour."

NCETA recently revealed the most comprehensive picture of Australian alcohol use – and its impacts – yet in the alcohol section of its [online Knowledgebase](#).

Provided by Flinders University

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