

Reducing Australia's cancer death rate

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New research has revealed for the first time what impact cutting back on drinking and smoking as a population would have on Australia's cancer death rate.

Researchers from the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR), La Trobe University, found reducing tobacco and [alcohol consumption](#) rates as a nation would significantly reduce future cancer deaths.

The researchers used health and consumer data dating back to the 1930s to establish the link between population-level [smoking](#) and drinking rates and cancer mortality.

They found:

- Smoking half a kilogram less tobacco annually per capita would reduce Australia's overall cancer deaths by 8 per cent over 20 years;
- Drinking three litres less alcohol annually per capita would reduce Australia's overall cancer deaths by 12 per cent over 20 years.

Lead researcher Dr. Jason Jiang said understanding the impact on a population level was important.

"We know that there is a strong link between an individual's use of alcohol and tobacco and their risk of cancer, but few studies have looked at the impact from a national perspective," Dr. Jiang said.

"What we now have is evidence of the longer term health benefits of taking a collective approach to reducing smoking and drinking.

"Public health advocates and policymakers on tobacco and alcohol should work together to minimise the adverse health effects on cancer of these two risky behaviours."

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive Michael Thorn said the study provides further evidence that a reduction in per capita alcohol consumption would flow through to reductions in cancer deaths.

"The problem unfortunately is that too few Australians are aware of the link between alcohol and cancer, or understand the Government drinking guidelines which state how best to avoid those risks," Mr Thorn said.

Cancer Council Victoria CEO Todd Harper, said research like this reinforced the need for greater education about the risks associated with smoking and alcohol consumption.

"There remains work to be done on both fronts. To continue to see decreases in smoking rates it is vital population-wide education campaigns occur at sustained and effective levels," Mr Harper said.

Mr Harper also expressed concern about a lack of community knowledge on the harms of alcohol.

"The lack of community knowledge of the harm alcohol can cause is particularly worrying, especially given many Australians are unknowingly [drinking](#) at levels which can damage their health, and increase their risk of eight types of cancer," Mr Harper said.

The research, published in the *Journal of the American Medical*

Association, expands on a study conducted last year by Dr. Jiang and colleagues that found reducing [alcohol](#) consumption would reduce liver, pancreatic, head and neck [cancer](#) rates.

More information: *Journal of the American Medical Association* (2018). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.0713](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.0713)

Provided by La Trobe University

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