

Breast cancer leading cause of alcohol-attributable death in New Zealand women

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(Medical Xpress)—Alcohol is responsible for more than one-in-twenty deaths of New Zealanders aged under 80, new University of Otago research suggests. Although most harm to young people's health from drinking is through injury, alcohol also contributes to chronic diseases, and breast cancer is the leading cause of death from alcohol in both Māori and non-Māori women overall.

A new assessment of the burden of ill health due to [alcohol consumption](#) in New Zealand, commissioned by the Alcohol Advisory Council, is published today (July 15) by the Health Promotion Agency. The report, 'Alcohol-attributable burden of disease and injury in New Zealand: 2004 and 2007' included 35 different groups of [health conditions](#) causally related to drinking, and found that approximately 800 deaths per year in

people under 80 were attributable to alcohol.

Professor Jennie Connor and Robyn Kydd from the University's Department of Preventive and Social Medicine in Dunedin conducted the study in collaboration with the WHO Global Burden of Disease 2010 Risk Factors Collaborating Group, based in Toronto.

The report confirms the significant impact of heavy drinking and intoxication on [health outcomes](#), with 43% of all alcohol deaths being due to injuries, and much of the burden of non-fatal conditions being due to alcohol use disorders.

Professor Connor says the report also highlights alcohol's important toxic and carcinogenic properties, and that for many [chronic diseases](#) there is no threshold for safe consumption. More than 30% of alcohol-attributable deaths were due to cancers, including breast and [bowel cancer](#).

"This study demonstrates that alcohol consumption is one of the most important [risk factors](#) for avoidable mortality and disease in early and middle adulthood, and contributes substantially to loss of good health across the life course," she says.

More alcohol-related harm was seen in men than in women, and in Māori than in non-Māori. These differences were largely due to differences in alcohol consumption patterns.

"Alcohol has so many different impacts on health that summaries at a population level are needed for us to understand the magnitude of the issue as a whole and the importance of healthy alcohol policy.

"In addition to the wide range of physical health conditions included in this study, we need to remember that there are many effects of heavy

drinking on communities that are not able to be reflected in studies such as this", says Professor Connor.

Health Promotion Agency (HPA) General Manager Policy, Research and Advice, Dr Andrew Hearn, says the report is a valuable addition to the evidence of the impact of alcohol on people's health and as a cause of injury across the population in New Zealand.

"Reports such as this can be used to inform preventive strategies and their priorities," he says.

Provided by University of Otago

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