

Media Release

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CULTURAL DIVERSITY SEES NON DRINKERS ON THE RISE

27 November 2013: New research to be released today will show the number of Australians who abstain from drinking alcohol has increased from 13.7 per cent to 17.1 per cent.

The increase was driven primarily by lifetime abstainers (7.2% - 10.0%) with abstention rates increasing dramatically among young adults and underage respondents. The biggest reduction in drinking was seen in 14 to 17 year olds, with 50.2% abstaining from alcohol in 2010 compared with 32.9% in 2001.

The study analysed trends in abstaining in population sub-groups based on age, sex, locality, socio-economic status and cultural background using data from National Drug Strategy Household Surveys between 2001 and 2010.

It found increased abstention rates among adults were due to an increase in the proportion of people from non-English speaking background, and the numbers of abstainers among that group.

Corresponding census data highlights how the Australian population is increasingly culturally diverse, and includes significant numbers from lighter and non-drinking cultures, with Indian, Chinese, Vietnamese, or Lebanese ancestry up from 5.5 per cent in 2001 to 7.8 per cent in 2011.

Dr Michael Livingston, a researcher with the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, says that while the key driver of abstention rates among the adult population appears to be cultural diversity, the increase in abstention among 14 -17 year olds is less easily explained.

“It is unclear what is driving the increase in abstention among 14-17 year olds. The increases in abstaining in this age group were consistent across all socio-demographic groups so further research is needed in this area,” Dr Livingston said.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive Michael Thorn says understanding non-drinking trends helps deliver a clearer and more accurate picture of the nation’s alcohol consumption and drinking culture.

In recent years we have witnessed a levelling out in the nation’s apparent consumption of alcohol per capita data, yet at the same time we see rising alcohol-related harms. That is easier to understand when we understand that the decrease in apparent consumption is being driven by migration trends, and young people commencing drinking later, and that when we look only at those

who consume alcohol, we are in fact seeing an increase in the amount of alcohol consumed,” Mr Thorn said.

Dr Michael Livingston and FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn are available for interview.

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Michael Livingston: Marion Downey 0401 713 850

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Since 2001, FARE has invested over \$115 million in research and community projects to minimise the impact of alcohol misuse on Australians. Through its national grants program and commissioned research, FARE has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. FARE works with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit FARE’s website: www.fare.org.au