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Health groups make urgent call for health warning labels on all alcohol products, as study reveals lack of awareness about alcohol and cancer link

Despite clear evidence that alcohol causes at least 7 types of cancer, a new national survey conducted by Alcohol Change Australia has exposed a significant lack of awareness about this link.

The survey of 2,000 adults across the country reveals that less than half of the population understands that alcohol causes cancer, despite that fact alcohol was estimated to be responsible for 4% of all new cancer cases in Australia in 2020.

The survey findings show:

- Only 14% of Australians are aware that alcohol can lead to breast cancer.
- Just a third know it causes cancers of the mouth and throat.
- Knowledge of the link between alcohol and cancer is lower among men, younger Australians, people living in regional areas, and people in lower income households.

Executive Officer at Alcohol Change Australia, Hannah Pierce, said the results emphasised the need for government action to increase awareness of the harms caused by alcohol products, especially when critical health information is often overwhelmed by aggressive marketing from the alcohol industry.

"Every Australian has the right to be fully informed about the products they use, especially when these products have the potential to cause significant harm. Despite the clear link between alcohol and various cancers, too many in our community remain unaware of the danger."

"By providing Australians with accurate information about the carcinogenic risks of alcohol, we can empower the community, but it's essential that this information cuts through the noise of industry marketing to reach every Australian."

Ms Pierce called on the Australian Government to introduce health warning labels on all alcohol products as a fundamental component of the comprehensive strategy needed to reduce alcohol-related harm.

Deputy Chair of Cancer Council's Nutrition, Alcohol and Physical Activity Committee, Julia Stafford, said raising awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer is crucial to reducing preventable cancers, and called for action from the Australian Government.

"The alcohol industry has a vested interest in downplaying the serious health impacts of its products. Alcohol companies spend millions each year on marketing that glorifies alcohol use but the evidence is undeniable—alcohol causes cancer."

"It's time for the introduction of health warning labels on all alcohol products. Clear and visible warnings will be a crucial step towards reducing alcohol-related harm and preventing cancer."

Breast cancer survivor Kathryn Elliott used to binge drink regularly before her diagnosis. She said her personal experience made her realise just how little public awareness there is about the direct connection between alcohol use and breast cancer.

"Annually, between 1,000 to 2,000 individuals face a diagnosis of breast cancer directly attributable to alcohol. Despite the profound impact on these individuals and their families, awareness about the link between alcohol and breast cancer remains alarmingly low."

"We need to have open conversations about the harms caused by alcohol. Before my diagnosis I didn't know that drinking alcohol can cause breast cancer. All women should be given health information and clear warnings about this so that they can make more educated decisions around their drinking."

Alcohol Change Australia is advocating for a comprehensive strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm. This includes the implementation of health warning labels, robust public education campaigns, and government action on alcohol marketing and price to prioritise the health and wellbeing of the Australian community.

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About Alcohol Change Australia:

Alcohol Change Australia is a collaborative alliance comprising diverse health and community organisations from across the nation. Our collective mission is to combat and diminish the impact of alcohol-related harm on individuals, families, and communities throughout Australia