Media statement (updated): New data highlights the need for prompt action on alcohol in Australia.

New data out this week from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reveals that alcohol use remains a leading risk factor contributing to the burden of disease in Australia, motivating Alcohol Change Australia to continue to call for prompt government action to reduce alcohol-related harm for all Australians.

The Australian Burden of Disease Study 2024 revealed that alcohol use was the sixth highest risk factor contributing to the burden of disease in Australia. Alcohol use was responsible for 4.1% of the total burden of disease and injury. The total burden of disease from alcohol use was 2 times higher in males than females (5.5% vs 2.6%). [i]

The study found that alcohol use contributed to a number of diseases and injuries including 11% of the burden due to breast cancer.[ii] This is despite only 14% of Australians being aware that alcohol can cause breast cancer.[iii]

Natalie Stapleton, Executive Officer at Alcohol Change Australia emphasised that despite having a National Alcohol Strategy in place there has been inadequate action to address the unacceptable harm alcohol causes in our communities.

“Alcohol harms continue at significant levels across Australia and disproportionately impact on different groups. This new data continues to demonstrate that alcohol is a key risk factor contributing to the burden of disease and injury in our country. Alcohol use is related to many diseases and injuries including cancer, heart disease, liver disease and car accidents.”

Ms Stapleton said, “The report this week reinforces that alcohol is still significantly impacting on the health of the Australian community and that we must implement effective policy solutions, such as those in the National Alcohol Strategy, to reduce harm for all Australians.”

Alcohol Change Australia wants to see the Government take action to reduce alcohol related harm and prioritise the health and wellbeing of all Australians. Right now, an inquiry is being run that is investigating the health impacts of alcohol and other drugs in Australia, with submissions open until 31 December 2024.[iv] We are hopeful that we will see strong recommendations and action coming out of this inquiry to reduce alcohol-related harms in Australia.

Ms Stapleton said “The data this week should act as a wake-up call to do more to address the impact of alcohol. The good news is, there are a range of evidenced based measures the Australian Government can introduce, such as restricting alcohol marketing, reducing cheap alcohol and informing consumers about the harm alcohol can cause to empower them to make informed decisions. It’s time for action.”

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

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[i] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australian Burden of Disease Study 2024 [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024. Available from: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/australian-burden-of-disease-study-2024

[ii] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024. Available from: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia

[iii] Alcohol Change Australia. Public Opinion on Alcohol in Australia. Knowledge, attitudes and support for change. 2023. Available from: https://alcoholchangeaus.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/AlcoholChangeAustralia_Report_FINAL.pdf

[iv] House Standing Committee on Health Aged Care and Sport. Inquiry into the health impacts of alcohol and other drugs in Australia. 2024. Available from: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Health_Aged_Care_and_Sport/Alcoholanddrugs