

PRIME MINISTER

NATIONAL BINGE DRINKING STRATEGY

The Rudd Government today announced a new national strategy to address the binge drinking epidemic among young Australians.

This national strategy will begin with three new practical measures to help reduce alcohol misuse and binge drinking among young Australians:

- \$14.4 million to invest in community level initiatives to confront the culture of binge drinking, particularly in sporting organisations; and
- \$19.1 million to intervene earlier to assist young people and ensure that they assume personal responsibility for their binge drinking;
- \$20 million to fund advertising that confronts young people with the costs and consequences of binge drinking.

Binge drinking among young people is a community wide problem that demands a community wide response, including a new emphasis on young people taking greater personal responsibility for their behaviour.

The three new practical measures announced today will be funded by reprioritising existing government spending.

The binge drinking problem

Binge Drinking imposes a huge toll on our community. The 2005 Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) Survey found that in any given week, approximately one in ten – that is 168,000 – 12 to 17 year olds reported binge drinking or drinking at risky levels (defined in this report as seven or more drinks for males and five or more for females). For 16 and 17 year olds, one in five drank at risky levels.

A study of community football clubs in 2000 carried out by the Centre for Youth Drug Studies showed that:

- 13% of 18-20 year olds drank 13 or more standard drinks each time they visited the club;
- 83% left the club as the driver of a vehicle; and

- 70% of males (30% of females) believe drinking is an important tradition at their club.

In addition to the objective evidence on the costs of binge drinking, there is the untold impact on families and communities around the country.

The Government is determined to work with communities, parents and young people to implement a National Strategy on Binge Drinking that includes a new focus on personal responsibility.

While the Australian Government has a number of initiatives aimed at targeting alcohol misuse in the wider community, there has to date been no coherent national approach to tackling binge drinking among young people.

Today's announcements are only a first step. The Rudd Government will continue to engage with stakeholders on how the community can effectively confront this social problem.

These measures will dovetail with the Government's wider commitment to establish a National Preventative Health Taskforce, which will examine ways to reduce the health problems caused by excessive alcohol consumption.

The Department of Health and Ageing will also be asked to consolidate relevant data to assist in understanding the scale of this problem, and to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives by mid-2009.

Community partnerships

The Rudd Government will strengthen partnerships with sporting and other non-government organisations to affect the environments that shape the culture of binge drinking among young people.

This will be a \$14.4 million grants-based program focused on binge drinking reduction at the sectoral and local level.

This initiative could support projects such as sporting clubs and non-government organisations working together to educate and inform club members about the harms associated with binge drinking, or sporting clubs developing codes of conduct in relation to binge drinking.

The Government will also take sporting organisations' actions on responsible drinking into account in considering other government funding support.

This program could also support local government working with community organisations to address high risk activities, and community organisations working with local police to address underage drinking.

A grants round will commence from mid-2008. Funding is from the existing Community Partnerships Initiative and Rural and Regional Initiative programs.

Earlier intervention to enhance personal responsibility

The Rudd Government will invest \$19.1 million to support innovative early intervention and diversion programs to get young people under the age of 18 back on track before more

serious alcohol-related problems emerge.

These early intervention initiatives will focus not only on cultures and environments, but also a new emphasis on personal responsibility.

This initiative would target young people under the age of 18 who have been involved in an episode involving alcohol and could include:

- requiring young people to participate in educational and/or diversionary activities; and
- allowing police to confiscate alcohol or provide formal warnings.

When young people involved in binge drinking present to hospitals or fall foul of the law, the personal responsibility approach needs to be triggered.

This program will seek to support at least one pilot project in each State capital by the end of 2008. Pilots would require community buy-in from State and local governments, community and health organisations, and local police.

Confronting young people with the consequences of binge drinking

The Rudd Government will invest up to \$20 million over two years in a hard-hitting TV, radio and Internet campaign that confronts young people with the costs and consequences of binge drinking.

This campaign will draw on the lessons of previous campaigns that have worked – such as those addressing smoking, the road toll and HIV/AIDS.

This initiative will commence in 2008-09 and be funded from existing resources. Consistent with the Government's election commitments, this public information campaign will be evidence-based and non-political.

**CANBERRA
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