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\$56 billion up in smoke, drink and drugs

The social costs of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug abuse to Australian society have risen to \$56.1 billion in 2004-05, according to a report commissioned by the Australian Government.

The new figures highlight the importance of the Government's recent actions on alcohol and tobacco.

The social costs, including costs to the community from factors such as ill health, premature death, reduced productivity, crime and accidents are:

- Tobacco - \$31.5 billion or 56.2 per cent of total social costs
- Alcohol - \$15.3 billion or 27.3 per cent
- Illicit drugs - \$8.2 billion or 14.6 per cent
- Alcohol and illicit drugs consumed together - \$1.1 billion or 1.9 per cent.

These alarming figures include:

- \$9.8 billion in lost productivity in the household due to tobacco
- \$5.7 billion in lost workplace productivity due to tobacco
- \$3.5 billion in lost workplace productivity due to alcohol
- \$4 billion in crime due to illicit drugs
- \$3.1 billion in road accidents caused by alcohol.

The real costs of tobacco are estimated to have risen by 23.5 per cent between 1998-99 (\$25.5 billion) and 2004-05 (\$31.5 billion). The real costs of illicit drug use are estimated to have risen by 11.3 per cent over the same period (from \$7.4 billion to \$8.2 billion). [Although Australia's smoking rates are falling, the delayed health effects of past smoking mean that smoking costs have continued to rise. The costs of alcohol over the same period can't be compared because of methodology differences.]

This is the first comprehensive report of its type since the 1998-1999 figures were released. The report, *The Costs of Tobacco, Alcohol and Illicit Drug Abuse to Australian Society in 2004-05*, was prepared by Professor David Collins of Macquarie University and Professor Helen Lapsley of the Universities of Queensland and New South Wales.

Government initiatives

The Australian Government is committed to delivering better health across Australia through an increased focus on prevention.

The Government will establish a National Preventative Health Taskforce to develop a National Preventative Health Strategy to bring a preventative focus to the health system. The three priority areas for the taskforce are obesity, tobacco and excessive consumption of alcohol.

The Government has already announced a national strategy on binge drinking, including:

- \$14.4 million to invest in sporting and community level initiatives to confront the culture of binge drinking;
- \$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;
- The establishment of a nationally consistent code of conduct on alcohol use for peak sporting bodies and community sports organisations;
- Australia's six major sporting bodies have offered their support for high-profile sporting personalities to assist in the Government's \$20 million hard hitting advertising campaign warning young people of the dangers of binge drinking.

The Government has also announced \$14.5 million in funding for the Indigenous Tobacco Control Initiative as a first step towards closing the gap in smoking rates between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, and will bolster the National Tobacco Strategy.

The Australian Government is also committed under the National Drug Strategy to combat the harm caused by illicit drugs through funding a wide variety of programs that support research, treatment and counselling.

The Costs of Tobacco, Alcohol and Illicit Drug Abuse will provide further information to shape the development of the strategy and the work of the Preventative Health Taskforce.

Further information: Copies of the full report (127 pages) and a summary document (20 pages) can be found at:

www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/mono64

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