



FACTSHEET: Risky Drinking for Workplaces — Why does it Matter?

As we head into the holiday season (or any time there is cause for celebrations) this is a great opportunity to think about the impact of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) in the workplace.

According to the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, one in 20 Australian workers have acknowledged to working under the influence of alcohol at some point in their career. Alcohol use contributes to 11% of workplace accidents and injuries. And alcohol-related time off work costs companies around \$2 billion each year. The same source also states that about a third of Australian workers have experienced negative effects from a colleague's use of alcohol. This includes being involved in an accident or close call, reduced ability to do their job, having to work extra hours to cover for a co-worker, and a co-worker taking one or more days off work¹.

Reducing alcohol use in the workplace and providing staff with education can support worker safety and reduce the impact of AOD on the work environment.

WHAT IS RISKY DRINKING?

Risky drinking is defined as more than 10 standard drinks a week and more than four standard drinks on any one day.

Repeated risky drinking can result in dependence, where an individual requires specialist clinical support to recover.

Risky drinking can have profound effects on an individual, including:

- Increased psychological distress, particularly symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Reduced productivity and satisfaction in the workplace
- Long-term impacts on physical health, including increased risk of liver disease, heart disease and cancer.

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WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO BUSINESSES?

Risky drinking has significant negative consequences for the workplace, including substantial costs associated with absenteeism, presenteeism and attrition related to an individual's alcohol consumption². The estimated cost of alcohol-related absenteeism alone to Australian workplaces is \$3.9billion³.

Risky drinking can also create work conditions that are physically unsafe (particularly alcohol-related workplace injuries) or psychologically unsafe (where intoxication or alcohol withdrawal can result in poor behaviour and conflict between employees).

Alcohol consumption patterns are influenced by the workplace environment and risky drinking can be exacerbated in workplaces that encourage drinking (for example through high availability of alcohol and cultural norms).

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- Regular short absences after a weekend
- Drinking excessively at work events

- Commentary from an individual that suggests alcohol is being used as a coping mechanism, like 'I could really use a drink'
- Regular hangovers
- Smelling of alcohol at work
- Deterioration in work performance or satisfaction.

WHAT CAN WORKPLACES DO TO PROMOTE A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH ALCOHOL FOR EMPLOYEES AND ADDRESS ANY ISSUES?

- Minimise social events that are focussed around alcohol
- Where alcohol is provided, always include alcohol-free options
- Educate managers and staff on how to screen for risky drinking in a non-judgemental and supportive way
- Incorporate addressing risky drinking and other addictive behaviours as a core pillar of healthy workplace strategies
- Reduce stigma and promote understanding and support by offering employee assistance programs that include support for alcohol related issues.

We would like to thank SMART Recovery Australia and Clean Slate Clinic for assisting in the compilation of this factsheet.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Smart Recovery Australia](#)
- [Clean Slate Clinic](#)
- [Turning Point](#)
- [Hello Sunday Morning](#)
- [Sober In The Country](#)
- [Alcohol and Drug Foundation](#)
- [DrinkWise Australia](#)
- [Department of Health Report on Alcohol and Other Drugs in the Workplace](#)

ENDNOTES

1. Alcohol and Drug Foundation. <https://adf.org.au/insights/aod-workplace-safety/#:~:text=One%20in%2020%20Australian%20workers,other%20drugs%20in%20the%20workplace.&text=Alcohol%20use%20contributes%20to%2011,around%20%242%20billion%20each%20year>.
2. Morse AK, Askovic M, Sercombe J, et al. A systematic review of the efficacy, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of workplace-based interventions for the prevention and treatment of problematic substance use. *Front Public Health*. 2022;10:1051119. Published 2022 Nov 7. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2022.1051119
3. Alcohol and Other Drug Use: A Focus on Employed Australians (June 2023). <https://nceta.flinders.edu.au/application/files/5016/8723/8146/DOH-Workplace-Report-Part1.pdf>

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Corporate Mental Health Alliance AUSTRALIA

The Corporate Mental Health Alliance (CMHAA) is a group of Australian businesses dedicated to providing mentally healthy workplaces for their people.

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