

MEDIA RELEASE

New report: Kalgoorlie residents ready to change hard-drinking reputation

Growing community support to reduce the availability of alcohol

April, 2011: Residents of a West Australian town which experiences significantly higher rates of binge drinking than the state average want to mend their hard-drinking reputation. A new report into an alcohol harm-minimisation project in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, reveals growing community support for measures to reduce the availability of alcohol.

The report¹ released today outlines the impact of alcohol-related interventions carried out between 2006 to 2009, during the Kalgoorlie Alcohol Action Project (KAAP)². As part of the initiative, approximately 400 residents were surveyed at the start of the project (2006) and another 400 residents towards its end (2009).

Findings revealed that at the end of the project almost **half (45.4%) of the respondents believed the number of liquor outlets in the town should be cut**, which was an increase from 36% in 2006; while **57% believed that opening hours should be reduced**, up from 38% in 2006.

There was also an increase in the belief that there should be no 'happy hours' in pubs, with around **41% of respondents supportive of this measure**, compared to the 33.5% in the 2006 survey.

The release of the report closely follows a call by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda for tougher alcohol laws, including the introduction of a minimum floor price on alcohol. It comes as the Northern Territory prepares to pass the most comprehensive alcohol reforms in its history in a bid to curb alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour.

AER Foundation CEO Michael Thorn said: “What we are seeing from the grassroots and up, is a growing community-wide recognition that action must be taken to address alcohol problems. We hope that policymakers around the country will take heed and consider evidence-based strategies, such as restricting the availability of alcohol and introducing a minimum floor price on alcohol, as part of a holistic approach to this national problem.”

Funded with an \$800,000 grant from the Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation (AER Foundation), the KAAP aimed to decrease alcohol-related harms through whole-of-community interventions. It was carried out in partnership between the Curtin University-based National Drug Research Institute (NDRI) and the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

“While an overall shift in behaviour is the end objective, this series of smaller but significant victories and attitudinal changes have created a vital momentum towards reducing the social and economic burden of alcohol misuse. The Kalgoorlie community has clearly shown it is eager to address this problem,” Mr Thorn said.

“The project also saw the health screening of some 600 employees of one of the area’s biggest mining companies, leading to the development of intervention strategies specifically designed for the company’s managers and supervisors.”

The Kalgoorlie-Boulder is a mining centre in the southern Goldfields region of Western Australia with a population of over 30,000. According to the KAAP report, the male population in the town binge drink³ at almost twice the state average (15.9%)⁴, while women binge drink at almost three times the state average (13.7%) and more than twice as much as Kalgoorlie men.

NDRI Professor Sherry Siggers said the KAAP helped draw attention to the extent to which alcohol negatively affected the Goldfields community, and resulted in important changes in attitudes.

“It showed community-based efforts to tackle problems caused by alcohol, even in areas where alcohol has historically been socially and culturally embedded, can bring about positive change,” Professor Siggers said.

“The key to this project, and all community-based projects, is working in collaboration with local agencies and individuals to define the problem and develop a solution. It is also critical that research services are provided to help build community initiatives and add value to community-based efforts to tackle alcohol issues. The AER Foundation’s long-term support for the Kalgoorlie project demonstrates that.”

The project saw the implementation of a number of interventions including:

- Christmas educational campaigns focusing on drink-driving, drink-spiking, and responsible alcohol consumption during and after sporting events. The annual campaigns included radio and TV advertising, posters, and gift bags containing information booklets;
- A poster competition for high school students to create awareness around responsible drinking;
- An interactive presentation at a forum presented by the Eastern Goldfields Sexual Assault Resource Centre, focusing on providing Indigenous-specific information related to alcohol abuse and misuse;
- An event to raise awareness of cardiovascular disease among women and alcohol's contribution to the problem;
- Media collaborations including a fortnightly health column published in the local newspaper *Kalgoorlie Miner* addressing the impact of alcohol on health;
- Local activity during the annual Drug Action Week, including interactive displays and competitions in central Kalgoorlie;
- The development of an evidence-based intervention for alcohol and other drugs aimed at managers and supervisors of a major mining company in the area; and
- A community forum discussing alcohol-related harms and potential measures that could be put in place to address the problem within the community.

Mr Thorn said: "People have a right to feel safe when they're walking down the streets of their neighbourhoods. As a result of this project, there is now greater acknowledgement that reducing the number of liquor outlets, their trading hours and curbing irresponsible practices such as 'happy hour' promotions do have a part to play in reducing alcohol misuse.

"We hope that the changes we've started to see within the Kalgoorlie-Boulder community will continue to progress, and that the project's findings provide a useful, evidence-based tool to assist community leaders in their campaigning to promote a positive, safe drinking culture."

References:

¹Schineanu, A., Velander, F and Siggers, S. (2010) *Kalgoorlie Alcohol Action Project Intervention Evaluation 2006 – 2009*; National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia.

²The Kalgoorlie Alcohol Action Project (KAAP, 2006 – 2010), saw a number of interventions implemented in Western Australia's Kalgoorlie-Boulder with the aim of reducing the community's high levels of alcohol use and related harm through collaboration with existing agencies and service providers within the community. Intervention measures were put in place from 2006 to 2009, with a final evaluation report of the project compiled in 2010.

³The KAAP report defines binge drinking as consuming five or more standard drinks for women, and seven or more for men in a single sitting.

⁴Draper G, Serafino S (2005). 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Western Australian Results.

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Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation (AER Foundation):The AER Foundation is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Since 2001, the AER Foundation has invested over \$115 million in research and community projects to minimise the impact of alcohol misuse on Australians. Through our national grants program and commissioned research, the AER Foundation has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. We work with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit our website: www.aerf.com.au