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New report reveals teenage drinking widespread across NSW

NSW Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, said today a new report reveals 40 per cent of teenagers have consumed alcohol in the past month.

Mr Della Bosca said the University of Wollongong's *Research to determine the impact of "Ready to Drink" spirit beverages on young people* shows that overall 90 per cent of 12-17 year olds admitted to consuming alcohol.

"The researchers, who surveyed young people across the State, found teenagers perceived drinking to be common among their friends, peer groups and siblings and 60 per cent believed their parents would be ok with them trying alcohol," the Minister said.

"These attitudes and the influence of alcohol advertising are leading to an increase in binge drinking among teenagers and young adults and are being reflected in emergency department admissions at public hospitals across the State.

"In the past eight years we have experienced a 130 per cent increase in alcohol-related emergency department presentations for people aged 18-24 years which is putting a lot of pressure on our emergency doctors and nurses.

"So it is obvious attitudes towards risky drinking behaviour develop very early among older children and younger adults.

The report also found:

- Advertising was spontaneously mentioned as a reason for preferences for specific brands and products, particularly in male groups with humour, music and animated characters most recalled.
- Non-drinkers and experimental drinkers said that advertising was a key influence for perceiving a particular brand or product they would like to try.
- Nearly all had seen alcohol advertising with 94 per cent recalling TV advertising.
- Advertisements for pre-mix alcohol products focussed on social and sexual/romantic success, emotional/psychological benefits and sporting/adventure success, breaching current codes.

"Under the current code, advertisers must not depict the consumption or presence of alcohol beverages as a cause of or contributing to the achievement of personal, business, social sporting, sexual or other success or achievement," Mr Della Bosca said.

"It is clear the alcohol industry is not going to take a responsible attitude to advertising.

"I raised the issue of advertising at the Australian Health Ministers Council earlier this month and the issue is now being presented to the National Preventative Health Taskforce for consideration – it has the power to recommend changes to advertising," the Minister said.

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“Alcohol abuse is a complex problem and requires a whole-of-government and community approach – our focus is on education, policing, licensing and advertising,” Mr Della Bosca said.

“We have launched a new interactive website and booklets to raise awareness among young people and their parents about the risks of binge drinking.

“The recently released Garling Report into acute health services across NSW advises that we need to focus on prevention when dealing with the health and well-being of children and young people – alcohol abuse needs to be included in this approach.

“The new booklets - *Guides to dealing with alcohol for teenagers and parents* - will educate young people about the risks associated with binge drinking and inform parents of the significant influence they have on their children’s attitudes.

“They will be available through Area Health Services, Community Drug Action Teams who take part in community information events across NSW and youth services such as Police Community Youth Clubs,” the Minister said.

The website - **www.whatareyoudoingtoyourself.com** - expands on the key messages of the booklets as well as offering an interactive educational environment with a quiz and contact details for further information.

“We have also passed tough new laws on licensing where 2am lockouts apply to violence hotspots,” the Minister added.