



# MEDIA RELEASE

**EMBARGO THURSDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2010**

## **YOUNG AUSSIES FACE PRESSURE TO DRINK**

Young Australians face the risk of social exclusion if they don't drink the way their peers are drinking.

According to a study funded by DrinkWise Australia and the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing released today, young people who choose to stay sober will typically have to come up with socially acceptable reasons why they are not drinking and will potentially face heavy social exclusion at worst, through to constant interrogation at best.<sup>1</sup>

Chair of the Board of DrinkWise, Trish Worth, said one reason for this exclusion is that the sober member of the group reduces the confidence and enjoyment of those who are drinking, making them self conscious<sup>2</sup>.

A young person who participated in the study summed up the feeling as, 'It's like you're a spy or something.'

'It's almost as if the people around you feel worse that you are not drinking than you do yourself...It's as if they're more conscious of their behaviour if there's someone around that's not drinking,' she said.

Ms Worth said the data shows that after an event young people often get together to reframe negative events, like being sick, in a positive or humorous light.

'Those who don't drink interfere with the group's ability to do this, "their sober account... presents a more realistic and less idealised version of events, equivalent to a video recording"<sup>3</sup>', Ms Worth said.

On top of this, just participating in the drinking session is not enough to appease the group said Ms Worth.

'Young people expect all participants to "drink in sync".<sup>4</sup> What this means is, that in an effort to belong our 14 to 24 year olds are adhering to group decisions regarding whether a night out will be a 'big one' or a 'quiet one',' Ms Worth said.

It's a drinking culture that is not unique to young people. The DrinkWise study highlights that adults often use alcohol to exclude or include people as well.

Adults, who choose not to drink at a particular occasion, or at all, face social sanctions and exclusion including being labelled with derogatory terms such as soft, wowser, and teetotallers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Borlagdan J. et al, 2009, 'From Ideal to Reality: cultural contradictions and young people's drinking, p51

<sup>2</sup> Borlagdan J. et al, 2009, 'From Ideal to Reality: cultural contradictions and young people's drinking, p38

<sup>3</sup> Borlagdan J. et al, 2009, 'From Ideal to Reality: cultural contradictions and young people's drinking, p53

<sup>4</sup> Borlagdan J. et al, 2009, 'From Ideal to Reality: cultural contradictions and young people's drinking, p43

<sup>5</sup> Borlagdan J. et al, 2009, 'From Ideal to Reality: cultural contradictions and young people's drinking, p33

Ms Worth said in Australia there is a drinking culture where drinkers feel threatened by abstainers and abstainers feel threatened to drink.

In a country where one quarter of 20 to 29 year olds are drinking in a way that puts them at risk of short-term harm at least monthly we need to reshape our drinking culture.

Ms Worth said achieving this cultural change will be challenging. The report highlighted that today's youth are spending more time with their friends than with family members and have more unsupervised and free time compared to past generations, with 24/7 interaction via online communities.

To immediately address the problem researchers have called for promotion of the middle ground between not drinking and drinking to intoxication to minimise harm.

Ms Worth said parents have the opportunity to positively influence longer-term change by having frank discussions with their kids about alcohol, establishing open lines of communication on the topic; and challenging the norms highlighted by the report by role-modelling a positive alternative.

The report titled, 'From Ideal to Reality: cultural contradictions and young people's drinking', examines the socio-cultural influences on 14 to 24 year old Australian's drinking and is the result of qualitative research undertaken by the *National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA)*.

It builds on an earlier literature review undertaken by NCETA and published with the support of DrinkWise and the Government in 2008, 'Young people and alcohol: the role of cultural influences'.

**Available for interview:**

- The Hon. Trish Worth, Chair of DrinkWise
- Cath Peachey, CEO DrinkWise

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**Background**

**A PDF version of 'From Ideal to Reality: cultural contradictions and young people's drinking' is available from [www.drinkwise.org.au](http://www.drinkwise.org.au)**

The report comprises the results of the second phase of a three year national project that aimed to examine the socio-cultural influences on young people's drinking drawing on qualitative research gathered from ethnographic observations of leisure events, focus groups with young people, in-depth interviews with both young people and key stakeholders including teachers, parents, youth health workers, police, taxi drivers, employers, bartenders, first aid officers, health professionals and marketers.

DrinkWise is working to improve Australia's drinking culture so that consuming alcohol too young and to excess is considered undesirable. The organisation is committed to generational change and seeks to raise awareness of modelling responsible drinking behaviour and attitudes. Visit [www.drinkwise.org.au](http://www.drinkwise.org.au)