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No safe teen alcohol use – research released:

An Australian study related to the drinking habits of adolescents has exposed the common misconceptions about safe alcohol use and the failings of harm minimisation approaches according to MethCon Group director Mike Sabin.

The study carried out by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne tracked 1520 young people from their mid teens over a 10 year period and concluded that there was no "safe" or "sensible" level of drinking for adolescents and it thought the research findings could well fuel a campaign to raise the legal drinking age across the Tasman.

The study which was published last week in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health shows conclusive evidence that those teens who abstained from any alcohol use experienced far fewer [bad] alcohol-related outcomes than those who drank at the so called 'recommended' level. It also showed that the chance of developing alcohol-related disorders among those considered 'low risk' drinkers was closer to that of 'risky' drinkers than non drinkers.

Mr. Sabin said the findings have cast significant doubt on the Australian National Guidelines that suggest there is a "low risk" level of drinking for under-18s, while lead researcher and epidemiologist Dr. Elya Moore said the most remarkable finding was that they had found no evidence of a level of drinking for adolescents that may have been safe.

"What these findings have highlighted is the realities of adolescent brain function and development and the significant risks present when people of this age are using psychoactive substances", claimed Mr. Sabin.

"The reality is that during adolescence the brain absorbs drugs five to eight times faster and metabolises them more slowly than an adult brain. They are also extremely vulnerable over this period as their developing brains are forging billions of connections as new nerve pathways are forming, which essentially provide the blue print for adult behaviours including those related to substance abuse and dependency", said Mr. Sabin.

"The research reflects physiological realities in that the developing adolescent brain is at high risk of damage from substance abuse and damage during this time is likely to define their adult life and behaviour in terms of dependence and harmful substance abuse", claimed Mr. Sabin.

"These findings are significant as never before have we seen such a high-risk blend of contributing factors to adolescent drug and alcohol harm, headed up by the greatly increased availability of alcohol and a lowered drinking age, framed within an enabling and permissive national drug policy centred on harm minimisation. The problem compounds markedly with the same factors being present with illicit drugs, in particular cannabis and methamphetamine (P)", said Mr. Sabin.

"The take home message from this longitudinal research study is that harm minimisation approaches that have underpinned responses to drug and alcohol

related harm in New Zealand and Australia in recent history are contributing to the problem rather than reducing it and that a change to a preventative focus is needed", said Mr. Sabin.

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