

# Drinking guidelines ignored

*“Don’t tell me what to do, it’s my life, it’s in my hands”*

National Health and Medical Research guidelines around alcohol consumption are at risk of being ignored by young people because they don’t take their drinking cultures into account, a Deakin researcher has warned.

Dr Lyn Harrison said previous drinking guidelines had been based on the premise of harm minimisation.

“The ‘universal’ recommendation for low risk drinking is two standard drinks in any one day,” she said.

“The rationale for these guidelines is that once people get the information they will act on it and change their behaviour, yet the data from the young people in our study, shows that this is not

necessarily the case,” Harrison said.

Her research, which took place in Melbourne, Geelong and Warrnambool is part of a wider research project into the cultural drivers of young people’s drinking, funded by Drinkwise Australia.

For young people alcohol consumption is most often related to socialising, fun and pleasure and their identity is focused on individual choice and their management of the risks.


“This culture is at odds with the authoritarian, top down approach to things - like the NHMRC guidelines.

“You also have to ask how many people, not just young people, go out and have only two standard drinks.”

Harrison said the young people resented the intrusion into their lives and their response was ‘don’t tell me what to do, it’s my life, it’s in my hands, let me do it and suffer the consequences.’”

Harrison said the young people interviewed also had difficulty seeing the long-term consequences of their actions either on their health or future lives.

“It’s very difficult for kids to do that. It is even difficult for adults,” she said. “Young people don’t think about being old, even middle aged people think it will be a while before they are old and decrepit.

The final 2009 Guidelines are expected to be released later this month. 



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