

MEDIA RELEASE

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VICHEALTH AND RMIT ASK: WHAT TYPE OF DRINKER ARE YOU?

Researchers from Melbourne have studied thousands of Victorian alcohol drinkers to reveal four 'drinking types'. The types of drinkers give insight into the links between personality, cultural influences, and drinking to excess.

The *Drinking Related Lifestyles* research, funded by VicHealth and led by RMIT University Associate Professor Mike Reid, was conducted in two parts – first, in-depth interviews with 187 drinkers, followed by an online survey of 2,500 Victorians about what influences their drinking behaviour.

The team analysed the emerging common themes and came up with four categories of drinkers: the initiator, the follower, the moderator and the protector (see next page). Each of these has an opinion of the other. Some enable others' drinking and others let their friends know when it's time to put the brakes on.

The results of this survey have been transformed into an interactive online quiz and website – launched today – available at www.yourdrinkingprofile.com.au to help Victorians see where they fit in the spectrum.

A/Prof Reid said the enduring conclusion from their investigation was that rather than blaming people who drink to excess, we should instead empower responsible drinking.

“Our deeply ingrained drinking culture makes people think they need a reason not to drink rather than a reason to drink,” he said. “Of the four drinking types our research identified, ‘initiators’ and ‘followers’ are clearly the most problematic – one pushes the boundaries and drinks too much, while the other follows, thinking if they don't they will be seen in a negative light.

“Effective change requires people to have socially permissible ways to participate in our culture without drinking to excess. Drinkers need to be provided with tools and resources to empower them to drink responsibly with a reassurance that they will be socially accepted.

“We need a multi-pronged approach to addressing the social role of alcohol and this project lays the foundation stone for the long road ahead to change our attitudes towards harmful drinking and ultimately improve the health of all Victorians.”

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said this research puts Victoria's alcohol culture under the microscope to examine – in a non-judgmental way – people's motivations for drinking, and why alcohol is such a central part of our lives.

“Heavy drinking is viewed as acceptable in almost all social situations, from weddings to sports matches, and even at baby showers,” Ms Rechter said.

“We want to take positive steps towards a culture in Victoria where drinking too much isn't seen as the thing to do, but currently there is little encouragement for people who choose moderation. People who take a break or abstain from alcohol are often questioned or singled out for their choice because it's seen as unusual.

“The health impacts of alcohol are widely documented, with links to more than 60 medical conditions. So as much as alcohol is entrenched in most facets of our lives, we can't ignore the fact that it is problematic. There comes a point when we have to ask whether we are drinking too much and drinking too often. And whether it's affecting our health, our jobs and the people around us.

“A 2013 national poll found that 75 per cent of us believe Australia has a problem with excessive drinking. The community is ready to talk about our love affair with booze. We are not saying don’t drink, but we are saying it’s time to have a frank and honest community discussion about the place of alcohol in our lives.”

The *Drinking Related Lifestyles* report will inform a new campaign with the State Government to examine Victoria’s drinking culture, start a community conversation about alcohol and offer alternatives to getting drunk.

Types of Victorian drinkers (and percentage of survey sample)

The Initiator (40%)

- Outgoing and the ‘life of the party’
- Loves to have a drink and let loose
- Gregarious and outgoing and loves to make things happen
- Drinks to have fun
- Likes to be a source of information on alcohol brands, types of drinks and places to go out
- Likes to go out and drink at bars and clubs

The Follower (13%)

- Fun, social and easy-going
- Influenced by social and cultural pressures
- Tends to join in and go with the flow
- Gets swept up in the moment and enjoyment of social situations
- Prefers to drink at home with friends and family

The Moderator (26%)

- Self-disciplined and self-sufficient
- Likes to relax and prefers a more chilled out experience
- Knows when to say ‘no’
- Likes to have a drink or two but that’s it
- Prefers to drink at home

The Protector (21%)

- Controlled and conscientious
- Enjoys having fun in a safe environment
- Looks out for others when out socialising
- Not overly interested in drinking alcohol
- Happy to abstain while others are drinking

The RMIT study has generated a number of ideas about the way to tackle Australia’s drinking problem:

- Challenge the social acceptability of drinking to excess (‘No one likes you when you’re messy’).
- Question why we as a society revere drunkenness (‘Is that really something to be proud of?’).
- Undermine the hero status of getting drunk and drinking to excess (‘what an idiot’).
- Remove the excusing of drunkenness and related bad behaviour (‘that’s no excuse’).
- Strengthen social acceptability of not drinking, not getting drunk and drinking in moderation
- Challenge social pressure that makes others drink (‘why do you need me to have a drink?’).
- Focus on the positives of moderate drinking (enjoying every moment) rather than the negative (missing out).

Download the *Drinking Related Lifestyles* reports at: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/drinking-lifestyles