

MEDIA RELEASE

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PROJECT TO REDUCE ALCOHOL IMPACT IN VICTORIAN WORKPLACES ANNOUNCED

A three-year research project at two manufacturing sites in Victoria will investigate how to reduce the toll of alcohol in workplaces.

The trial project, which will seek proactive ways to reduce harm caused by alcohol-use on and off the job, is funded by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) under its \$3 million [Creating Healthy Workplaces](#) project.

Corex Plastics (Australia) Pty Ltd and Hilton Manufacturing Pty Ltd have been chosen as the two sites to undertake the alcohol trial, which will be led by a consortium of LeeJenn Health Consultants, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction and South East Business Networks.

The Workplace Reduction of Alcohol Harm Program has been announced during WorkSafe Week (22 October to 1 November).

Both organisations will implement a range of initiatives designed to promote a culture of responsible drinking and ultimately create a precedent for other workplaces to trial similar projects.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said research showed 90 per cent of the Australian workforce consumes alcohol.

"Harmful drinking outside work, as well as at work, can result in major consequences for a person's health, their colleagues, friends and family – and ultimately it harms our society," Ms Rechter said.

"It is a serious problem. The impacts include workplace accidents and injuries, workplace fatalities, reduced productivity, poor work relations, and increased absenteeism and presenteeism.

"This pilot project aims to find sustainable ways to promote a workplace culture that discourages risky alcohol use by changing workplace culture, working conditions, availability of alcohol and even factors outside the workplace, like social events."

Ms Rechter added that lost productivity in the workplace attributable to alcohol costs \$3.5 billion annually and most at-risk groups include men, young people aged 14–29 years, blue-collar workers and workers in agriculture, retail, hospitality, manufacturing, construction and financial services industries.

"It makes business sense to invest in reducing alcohol-related harm in the workplace, it's good for productivity, workplace morale and ultimately the businesses' bottom line."

A/Prof Nicole Lee, Director of LeeJenn Health Consultants added: "It's absolutely vital that we tailor the initiatives to the individual workplaces so that the changes are accepted across the board and are sustainable. We are working very closely with the organisations and their managers and HR personnel to ensure that any initiatives are a good fit for them and meet their goals.

"We are focusing, not so much on individual's drinking, but on how the whole workplace can support a healthier drinking culture."

VicHealth's \$3 million Creating Healthy Workplaces Program includes the release of five international evidence reviews on how stress, gender inequality, alcohol, race-based discrimination and prolonged sitting at work contribute to chronic disease. Find out more about the alcohol program at: www.leejenn.com.au and www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/workplace

Facts about alcohol use in Victorian workplaces, from the VicHealth [Reducing alcohol-related harm in the workplace](#) review:

- Approximately 90 per cent of the Australian workforce consumes alcohol. The majority drink after work, or on days off, although sometimes it does occur during the working day.
- Harmful drinking outside work, as well as at work, can result in major health, social and economic consequences for the individual drinker, their families, organisations and society.
- Alcohol accounts for 3.2 per cent of the total burden of disease and injury in Australia – 4.9 per cent in males and 1.6 per cent in females.
- Lost productivity in the workplace attributable to alcohol costs \$3.5 billion annually.
- At-risk groups include men, young people aged 14–29 years, blue-collar workers and workers in agriculture, retail, hospitality, manufacturing, construction and financial services industries.

Specific benefits for workplaces in reducing alcohol-related harm include:

- ✓ a safer working environment with decreased accidents, injuries and fatalities
- ✓ compliance with occupational health and safety and related legislation, such as specific legislation around safety
- ✓ increased staff performance and productivity
- ✓ reduced absenteeism and presenteeism
- ✓ decreased staff turnover and early retirement
- ✓ reduced operating, reputational and indirect costs
- ✓ improved work relations and staff morale
- ✓ improved health and wellbeing of employees.