



Alcohol and Other Drugs Background Information



Alcohol misuse shows itself in a variety of ways in the workplace, ranging from the remaining effects of weekend or after-hour use, such as hangovers and general fatigue, to intoxication at work due to consumption during working hours.

Employed people have a higher rate of problem drinking than the general population. It's estimated around 20% of adult full-time workers are problem drinkers, compared to around 15% of the overall adult population.

Why is it important?

[Alcohol](#) contributes to significant health, social and economic costs in the workplace. Specific benefits for workplaces focused on reducing alcohol-related harm include:

- A safer working environment with decreased accidents, injuries, and fatalities
- Compliance with occupational health and safety and related legislation
- Increased staff performance and productivity
- Reduced absenteeism
- Reduced 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

Facts

Alcohol affects people in many ways, and the short and long-term effects are determined by both the volume of alcohol consumed and the pattern of drinking. In New Zealand, estimates indicate that between 600 and 1000 people die each year from alcohol-related causes (Berl, 2009; Connor et al., 2005). More than half of alcohol-related deaths are due to injuries, one-quarter to cancer and one-quarter to other chronic diseases (Connor et al., 2005).

Drinking alcohol is associated with a risk of developing health problems such as mental and behavioural disorders. These include alcohol dependence, major non-communicable diseases such as liver cirrhosis, certain cancers (such as breast and bowel cancers) and cardiovascular diseases, as well as injuries resulting from alcohol-related violence, road crashes and collisions.

The [2021/22 New Zealand Annual Health Survey](#) found:

- 18.8% of the total population are hazardous drinkers
- 10.2% of New Zealanders consumed 6+ drinks on one occasion at least weekly
- Māori drinkers were more likely to have a hazardous drinking pattern than non-Māori drinkers.
- 81% of New Zealanders had consumed an alcoholic drink in the past 12 months



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New Zealanders have some of the higher drug-use rates in the developed world with [almost half](#) of New Zealand adults having used recreational drugs at some stage in their lives. The [2021/22 New Zealand Annual Health Survey](#) reported an [increase](#) in the use of a variety of illicit drugs from 2016/17 to 2021/22.

Key Messages

- Alcohol and drug misuse can cost businesses through reduced productivity, absenteeism, and increased risk of workplace accidents
- There is no 'safe limit' when it comes to drug use
- The workplace can support employees to reduce alcohol consumption and drug misuse by creating a healthy culture around Alcohol and Drugs