Raising Awareness of Drug and Alcohol Risk (RADAR) Project

Information for Local Drug Action Groups to conduct their own community level alcohol awareness project with their local community newspapers

December 2012
Acknowledgements

This project was undertaken by the Willetton & District Local Drug Action Group and partners at the WA Centre for Health Promotion Research (Curtin University), the Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer Control (Curtin University) and Local Drug Action Groups Inc., with funding from the Community Newspaper Group and Healthway.

Acknowledgement to the Advisory Committee for their major contribution to the 12 articles included in this document: Steve Allsop, National Drug Research Institute; Lisa Clack, Youth Policing Division; Rob Donovan, Geoffrey Jalleh and Terry Slevin, Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer Control; Denise Griffiths, Curtin University; Jonathan Hallett and Jonine Jancey, WA Centre for Health Promotion Research; Gary Kirby, Drug and Alcohol Office; Lisa Rooke, South Metropolitan Public Health Unit; and Tom Shalders, Royal Life Saving Society of WA Inc.

Curtin University Human Research Ethics Approval was obtained for this project (Approval number PH-72-2012).

Citation Information

This document should be referenced as follows:

ISBN: 978-0-9874704-1-6

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Executive summary
In 2011-2012 the Willetton & District Local Drug Action Group (WDLDAG), with partners the WA Centre for Health Promotion Research (WACHPR), the Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer Control at Curtin University and Local Drug Action Groups (LDAG) Inc., undertook a project aimed at promoting community level alcohol awareness via local community newspapers. Specifically, the project included the following strategies:

- Development of 12 fact sheets containing information designed to educate parents and the general public on alcohol issues, endorsed by experts in the field of alcohol prevention;
- Publication of the monthly newspaper articles in the Canning Times community newspaper;
- Feature articles published in the Canning Times to align with relevant articles; and
- A project-specific link on the LDAG Inc. website providing access to downloadable copies of the articles, copies of relevant resources for parents, and links to other selected websites on alcohol.

Impact evaluation post-project was measured by intercept surveys with the target group (n=100) to assess the impact of the project as well as assess perceptions of the various strategies and materials. Evaluation indicated the level of awareness of articles and health issues published in the Canning Times; 30% saw and read at least one fact sheet. The usefulness of the fact sheets was also assessed; for each fact sheet, between 57% and 71% of the parents who read them found them useful, and 29% - 38% did something with the fact sheet if they read it.

RADAR is a pilot project showing good promise. The survey results demonstrate that the strategies used in this project are effective in raising awareness and changing behaviour of parents around youth alcohol use. As a result, WDLDAG have provided instructions in this document for other LDAG's to utilise the project materials.

This document includes the following:
1. Project overview
2. Instructions for conducting your own project
3. Fact sheet templates
1.0 Project overview

The Willetton & District Local Drug Action Group (WLDAG) was one of the first LDAGs established in Western Australia and has a proud history of implementing successful community based programs (for example, the “How to host a teenage party”; and “Drug free businesses”) that have been transferred into resources available to all LDAGs. The committee of enthusiastic local residents (including school nurses, teachers, parents and local City Councillors) combines many years of experience in dealing with alcohol and other drug related issues facing today’s youth. The group has raised the local profile of this very important alcohol issue. Their latest project has not only benefited their local community but also provides a model for LDAG Inc. to implement throughout WA including in rural and remote areas. The purpose of this document is to provide relevant information to LDAG’s wishing to do so.

Youth alcohol consumption and its related harms are a serious public health concern. Alcohol accounts for around 13% of all deaths among Australian youth aged 14 to 17 years. Each week one teenager dies and more than 60 are hospitalised due to alcohol related problems.¹ The top five causes of alcohol-attributed death and injury among 14 to 17 year olds are: road injury; suicide; pedestrian road injury; assault; drowning; and alcohol abuse and poisoning.¹ Among this age group, teenage males were three and a half more times likely than females to die from alcohol-attributed injury.¹,²

Australian youth often drink at levels placing them at risk of acute short term and chronic long term harms.³ National prevalence data indicate that in 2007, 30% of young people aged 12 to 17 years reported drinking alcohol daily or weekly. A further 30% of 12 to 15 year olds and almost two thirds (57%) of youth aged 16 to 17 years indicated that they drank less than weekly.⁴ In Western Australia, 63.9% of school students aged 12 to 17 years reported drinking alcohol in the past year, 40.2 in the last month and 26.9% in the week prior to the 2008 survey. Among this group 26.5% males and 32.5% females aged 14 to 17 years reported drinking at risky levels.⁵ These statistics highlight the serious issue of underage drinking nationally and locally.

On average young people start drinking at around 17 years of age, however many start much younger with national surveys now collecting data from children as young as 12 years. The age of initiation of alcohol is an important factor as it is the beginning of a trend of a pattern of risky drinking that continues into young adulthood and has been linked to alcohol dependence and chronic disease.⁶,⁷,⁸

Recent medical concern has focused on the growing research on the neurological impact of alcohol on the adolescent brain.⁹ Adolescence is a period of refinement of neurological processes such as myelination and synaptic responses. Even modest alcohol consumption during adolescence may interrupt these processes, which may create significant problems from a drop in school achievement to serious mental health problems.¹⁰-¹²
Similar to other developed countries, Australia’s cultural acceptance of heavy drinking normalises this behaviour which has filtered down into youth culture. In 2007, the US Surgeon General issued A Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking highlighting the increasing problem of alcohol consumption among youth in the US and the growing level of cultural acceptance of youth consumption. Alcohol consumption by underage youth is often accepted as a rite of passage representing cultural entry into adulthood. Six goals were set to facilitate societal change in the US through a collaborative effort involving parents, police officers, colleges, and communities.

Young people are influenced by their physical and economical environments which are important in shaping their attitudes and beliefs. Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that a person's behaviour is determined by his or her intention to perform the behaviour as a function of his or her attitude and the influence of other people significant in their lives (subjective norms) toward the behaviour. Theory of Planned Behaviour holds that only specific attitudes toward the behaviour in question can be expected to predict that behaviour. Parents’ attitudes and behaviours in relation to alcohol are a major influence on at least early drinking habits. Family structure, including older siblings, also plays a role in influencing favourable or unfavourable norms toward alcohol. Australia’s cultural acceptance of heavy drinking normalises this behaviour which has filtered down into youth culture.

Availability of alcohol is an enabling environmental factor in the context of youth drinking. Research has identified parents as a common source of alcohol supply to underage youth. In 2008, parents were a source of alcohol supply for 45.8% of 12 to 17 year old school students, and a further 23.1% received alcohol from friends. This highlights the need for more parent education on the risks of alcohol and the role they can play in promoting the health and wellbeing of their children and youth in general.

Your community project may involve use of the local community newspaper to promote the prevention of alcohol related harm among youth. Its main purpose is to increase awareness and knowledge, and counter normalised beliefs and attitudes of youth and their parents with regard to supply and consumption of alcohol in the local community.

2.0 Instructions for conducting your own project
Because RADAR has been piloted by WDLDAG in a local community a lot of the formative work has already been done, including extensive review and evaluation of project materials. This means that you will be able to use the templates and instructions provided in this document without needing to modify large amounts of the materials and processes. In this section you will find a summary of the strategies you may wish to use, as well as a range of tips and useful information to assist with conducting your own project.
2.1 Strategies

Monthly fact sheets
Monthly fact sheets developed and published in your local community newspaper on alcohol issues. Each article should concentrate on a particular theme, for example:

- Alcohol and parents
- Leavers and parties
- Alcohol and youth
- Christmas and parties
- Alcohol and drowning
- Alcohol advertising and sponsorship
- Alcohol and health risk
- Alcohol, driving, and injury
- Alcohol and obesity
- Alcohol and cancer
- Alcohol and brain development

The original templates (section 3.0) were prepared in advance via consultation from experts. Fact sheets were pilot tested with W&DLAG members and parents from the local community. Where possible, fact sheets were aligned to community/temporal events e.g. Easter and driving; Christmas and parties; holidays and driving; Leavers and parties. They incorporate quotes from experts, clear messages, and a link to websites for more detailed information. You are welcome to reproduce these fact sheets for your own local community use.

Feature articles
Feature articles can be published in the community newspaper to align with the relevant articles/events. See section 3.0 for examples. The first article was published to advertise the presence of the monthly articles. The second article was published to raise awareness of the evaluation soon to be conducted in the City of Canning, asking parents to assist researchers where possible.

Website
A special RADAR project site has been set up on the L Dag website www.loc aldrugaction.com.au containing articles, copies of relevant resources for parents, and links to other selected websites on alcohol. You may wish to provide a link to this website in your articles.

2.2 Evaluation
It is important to note that evaluation can take a lot of time and resources. If you don’t have access to volunteers to assist with surveying community members or the time to do it yourself, it is advised that you publish fact sheets without evaluating. The templates provided have been reviewed by experts and evaluated by professional researchers to ensure readability, relevance, and appropriateness for the target
audience.

Considering these limitations, if you would still like to evaluate the fact sheets in your local area you can measure their effectiveness by conducting process and impact evaluation.

- Process evaluation: Developing and maintaining a database to record and document project resources and related activities.
- Impact evaluation: Conduct evaluation of participants post-project via a brief intercept survey.

**Process evaluation**
An activities database should be developed and maintained to record the project-related activities during the project period. Your committee can complete a monthly report and collect a number of process indicators (e.g. copies of fact sheets; copies of ads; interviews, other related press articles, unpaid media, number of partnering organisations, website visitors etc.) that can be collated at the end of the project.

**Impact evaluation**
An intercept survey can be used to assess the overall impact of the project with respect to parents’ knowledge and awareness. Following the completion of the project, a survey of 100 adults in the project community can be conducted at local shopping and/or sporting centres. If you would like to conduct impact evaluation you can request a copy of the survey template. Please see contact details at the end of this document.

To collect useful data it is important to:

- Adhere to your inclusion/exclusion criteria i.e. only survey parents of youth aged 12-17 years who reside in your local area who read the relevant newspaper. Anyone not fitting these criteria should not be included.
- Be willing to approach a large number of people to collect your required sample size. You may need to reduce numbers from 100 for final evaluation if you live in a small population.

### 2.4 Useful tips

**Establishing a relationship with your local newspaper**

If not already established, building a relationship with your local newspaper is a positive way to gain wide exposure for limited expense. In the case of the RADAR project, a representative from the W&DLAG contacted the Editor of the local Community Newspaper to request in-kind support for the project. This support was negotiated to be agreed that the Canning Times newspaper would cover 50% of the total publication cost of 12 articles published over a period of 12 months, with the commitment of the W&DLDA to pay the full cost of two additional editorial articles to support the project objectives. Briefly, the process may include the following steps:

- Contact/build a relationship with your local newspaper (Editor and/or Journalist).
- Discuss the project and provide RADAR project resources as an example.
• Agree on a partnership including the financial cost involved to your LDAG (important for budgeting) and the level of in-kind support the paper is willing to provide.

• Ensure both parties are clear on what has been agreed by confirming in writing (e.g. email).

• Make sure payments to the newspaper are made on time to maintain a positive working relationship with the paper.

• Provide the newspaper (Editor) with any positive feedback/evaluation that you collect.

The more publicity your project attracts the more impact your project will have in your community.

**Additional financial support**
You may wish to apply for funding to assist with payment of article publication. Healthway offer funding to organisations and community groups to run or trial innovative health promotion programs. It is a good idea to seek a quote from your community newspaper for the cost of publishing each article to include in your application. Applications must be received by Healthway at least three calendar months prior to the commencement of the project. Visit [http://www.healthway.wa.gov.au/application-forms/health-promotion-project-grants](http://www.healthway.wa.gov.au/application-forms/health-promotion-project-grants) for the application form. Please note that it is unlikely Healthway will provide funding for staffing given you won’t be trialling a new project.

Another option for smaller grants is the **STRIVE GRANT**. Information about applying for these grants is available on the LDAG Inc. website [http://www.localdrugaction.com.au/](http://www.localdrugaction.com.au/).

**Maintenance**

• Negotiate page numbers close to the front of the newspaper, as this will increase the likelihood that readers will see the articles.

• Ensure your articles are eye-catching by making them colourful and neatly formatted.

• Different types of community newspapers can be found in different communities. It is important to find a newspaper (if possible) that prints plenty of local news as opposed to lots of advertising, as it is more likely that parents will see your articles.

• Depending on your financial resources, you may only wish to publish a selection of the articles provided. It is recommended that you choose those that address alcohol issues prevalent in your local community.

• You may wish to publish on a weekly basis instead of a monthly basis to create a shorter program.

• Speak with the Editor about aligning other types of articles (letters to the editor, feature articles etc) with your articles to create additional alcohol awareness in your local community.

• If you wish to extend the reach of articles you may like to offer free copies to local schools each month. These can be published in the school newsletter or pinned on noticeboards, which provide other means of reaching parents.
2.5 Limitations
People involved with health promotion are well aware that comprehensive programs that involve multiple strategies are far more effective than a few newspaper articles. Hence, it is unrealistic to expect the community newspaper to have a large effect on changing attitudes or behaviour. However, the fact sheets are useful to support the other ongoing programs and media coverage about alcohol and health. Such relatively small scale activities by many LDAGs can collectively help to influence a change in community norms about alcohol use.

2.6 Contacts
For further information or queries please contact Krysten Blackford, RADAR Project Officer, WA Centre for Health Promotion Research, on (08) 9266 4017 or k.blackford@curtin.edu.au; or LDAG head office on (08) 9471 0434 or ldaginc@health.wa.gov.au.
3.0 Templates

Monthly fact sheets

Article 1: Project overview – August
Article 2: Alcohol and parents – September
Article 3: Leavers and parties – October
Article 4: Alcohol and youth – November
Article 5: Christmas and parties – December
Article 6: Alcohol and drowning – January
Article 7: Alcohol advertising and sponsorship – February
Article 8: Alcohol and health – April
Article 9: Alcohol, driving and injury – May
Article 10: Alcohol and obesity – June
Article 11: Alcohol and cancer – July
Article 12: Alcohol and brain development – August
A new program (RADAR) to reduce alcohol problems in the City of Canning

Alcohol is seen by many as being part of the Australian way of life and is central to many social functions. However, there is much community concern about the harm alcohol can cause, especially to our youth.

ALCOHOL & YOUTH – What are the facts?
- 24% of 12 to 17 year olds drink alcohol daily or weekly
- Of those who drink weekly, 34% of males and 43% of females aged 16 to 17 years drink at risky levels
- On average, young people start drinking regularly at 17 years but some are as young as 12 years
- The earlier a person starts drinking the more likely they will develop alcohol related problems later in life

ALCOHOL & YOUTH – What are the consequences?
- Alcohol consumption accounts for 13% of all deaths among 14 to 17 year old Australians
- Alcohol related problems result in one death and 60 hospitalisations on average each week for 14 - 17 year olds
- Even modest alcohol consumption can negatively affect school achievement and mental health

RADAR PROJECT - Overview

*Raising Awareness of Drug and Alcohol Risk* (RADAR) is a community project developed by the Willetton & District Local Drug Action Group (WDLDAG) together with the Canning Times and Healthway.

The project aims to counter Australia’s cultural acceptance of heavy drinking which normalises risky drinking behaviour. It plans to raise awareness of parents about their children’s alcohol use, and what they can do.

Monthly articles will be published in the *Canning Times* on alcohol issues including the following topics:
- Parental influence on alcohol consumption
- Leavers & parties
- Alcohol & drowning
- Christmas and parties
- Drink driving

Links to further information will be provided via the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au which will contain downloadable materials.

If you are interested in learning more about this project or WDLDAG please contact Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of WDLDAG at geologica@upnaway.com

What do the experts say?

Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of WDLDAG, says “we as parents have a responsibility to protect our children from risky drinking. We need to be aware that their drinking is influenced by our own drinking habits”.

Mr Davis suggests “we all can help by ensuring we are suitable role models when consuming alcohol in front of our children or in our homes”.

An initiative of Local Drug Action Groups Inc. supported by:
ALCOHOL AND PARENTS
Modelling responsible behaviour

Alcohol related problems are often seen as a youth issue, but as a parent your attitudes and actions around drinking have a major influence on the drinking habits of your children.

Underage drinking (under 18 years)

- Children under 15 years are at the greatest risk of physical and mental harm from drinking
- Binge drinking can lead to risky behaviours such as unsafe sex, violence, and drunk-driving
- The safest option for young people is to delay their drinking for as long as possible
- 41% of 12 to 17 year olds state that their alcohol is supplied by their parents
- 21% state that they get alcohol from their friends
- 37% state they drink most of their alcohol at home

As a parent, what can you do to reduce underage drinking?

- Be a positive role model.
  - Not drinking and low risk drinking may help your children to not drink now and to drink responsibly when they are adults
- Talk to your children. Some tips when talking about drinking:
  - Choose the right time to talk – make sure they’re sober and wait until everyone is calm
  - Listen without judgement, don’t interrupt and expect the same in return
  - Discuss ground rules and make decisions together
  - Help your children think for themselves by talking through the risks of alcohol use and the benefits of not drinking
  - Make sure your children understand your expectations about drinking
- Talk to other parents.
  - Discuss your expectations and concerns about alcohol use with other parents
  - Know where your child is and whose parents will be supervising them
- Keep yourself up-to-date on alcohol issues and share these with your children
- Understand that providing alcohol to your children increases the risk that they will drink

For more information email Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of WDLDAG at geologica@upnaway.com or visit the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au for RADAR information via the Bulletin Board.

What an expert says!

“It is important to remember that as parents we can do a lot to reduce risk for our children. Simply making sure they know our expectations about alcohol, knowing where they are, who they are with and what they are doing has been shown to have positive results. Talk to them about how they can look after themselves and their friends, and how you can help”.

Professor Steve Allsop, Director, National Drug Research Institute
LEAVERS, PARTIES and ALCOHOL
This time is exciting for students, but it can cause anxiety for parents...

What is Leavers?

- Leavers is a celebration of the end of high school every November.
- School leavers may choose a range of ways to celebrate, but leavers commonly choose to attend the official celebrations in holiday destinations across WA including Rottnest Island, Dunsborough, and Margaret River.
- Leavers Zones are located in Rottnest and Dunsborough to ensure the safety of both leavers and community members.

Teenagers attending Leavers - Tips for parents

- **Talk to your child about their plans.** Know where and who they are staying with.
- **Be responsible.** Recognise it's possible your Leaver will drink alcohol. Discuss the risks of drinking and heavy drinking and how they can minimise the risk. Don't supply them with alcohol before they go.
- **Keep in contact.** Agree on regular check-in times via text or phone calls, and be prepared to respond to an emergency should your child be involved.
- **Network with other parents.** Talk with the parents of your child's friends and share the responsibility of providing food and other essential supplies.
- **Agree on a plan.** Work out what you and your child can do if a problem arises.

Tips for leavers

- **Plan and prepare.** Book accommodation early, plan travel arrangements, work out a budget, and remember your ID and official Leavers Wristbands. Discuss your plans with parents and friends.
- **Be safe.** Eat healthy and keep properly hydrated at all times by regularly drinking water. Always carry a list of emergency contacts.
- **Travel safely.** Travel in a safe vehicle, follow the speed limit, don't drink and drive, and use the free bus service whenever you can.
- **Look after your mates.** Don't leave your friends on their own, organise a meeting place in case you become separated, and seek medical attention if a friend becomes unwell or passes out.
- **Follow the rules.** Celebrate during the official Leavers dates: 26th – 29th Nov 2011. Know the rules at your accommodation, and note it is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to carry alcohol.
- **Respect the community.** Remove all your rubbish and be considerate of other people, property and places.
- **Your reputation is important to you.** Don't take a risk with it by drinking too much and regretting something you do.

For more information refer to the Office of Crime Prevention’s official Leavers website [www.leaverswa.com.au](http://www.leaverswa.com.au), the Local Drug Action Group (LDAG) Bulletin Board at [www.localdrugaction.com.au](http://www.localdrugaction.com.au) or contact Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of Willetton LDAG at geologica@upnaway.com

**What do the experts say?**

"Leavers celebrations are a time of risk taking by some teenagers. When someone’s judgment is clouded by alcohol, they can do things they would not normally do. They are vulnerable and people may take advantage of them.

During Leavers celebrations local police focus on keeping young people safe so they can enjoy themselves in ‘Leavers only’ areas located in Dunsborough and Rottnest Island. Services such as Red Frog and Drug Arm in these areas are there to help no matter what the problem is so leavers should approach these people for help when needed."

*Lisa Clack, Leavers WA Project Manager, Youth Policing Division.*
ALCOHOL AND YOUTH

It is common for young people to experiment and take risks such as drinking alcohol. Health experts recommend that the safest option for young people is to not drink alcohol at all.

Alcohol use by young people
A survey of Australian school students in 2008 found many young people were current drinkers:
- 11% of 13 year olds, 21% of 14 year olds, and 27% of 15 year olds consumed alcohol in the past week.
- 38% of male and 34% of female 16 year olds consumed alcohol in the past week.
- 20% of male and 17% of female 17 year olds consumed 5 or more drinks in one session in the past week.

Why do young people drink?
There is no single reason why young people drink alcohol. Usually there are several influences at any one time. Some reasons may include:
- Copying the behaviour of parents or other adults;
- Having fun with friends and wanting to fit in;
- Improving confidence and self esteem;
- Desire to experiment and take risks; and
- Easy availability of alcohol and supply by adults.

Why is youth drinking a concern - what harm can alcohol cause to young people?
Harmful alcohol use by young people can increase the risk of:
- **Damage to brain development** which can, in severe cases, lead to learning difficulties, memory problems, and lifelong consequences for personality and behaviour;
- **Participation in risky behaviours** such as driving under the influence, physical violence, and unsafe sex;
- **Reputational damage** when doing something they may later regret and/or which might be posted to the internet;
- **Accidental injuries** such as road crashes, pedestrian accidents, and drowning;
- **Mental health issues** such as depression, self harm and suicide;
- **Sexually transmitted infections** and unplanned pregnancy;
- **Relationship difficulties** with family and friends; and
- **Long term damage to organs** including the liver, stomach and brain.

Australian Guidelines to reduce health risks from alcohol
For children under 18 years of age, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.
- Children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking. Not drinking in this age group is especially important.
- For children aged 15-17 years the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.

For more information email Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of WDL Dag at geologica@upnaway.com, or visit the Local Drug Action Group website **www.localdrugaction.com.au** for RADAR information via the Bulletin Board.

What do the experts say?
“Alcohol consumption by 12 to 17 year olds has doubled over the past decade. This is concerning because when young people are introduced to alcohol at an earlier age they tend to drink more and are more likely to develop risky drinking patterns. The National Health and Medical Research Council’s guidelines say not drinking alcohol is the safest option for children and youth. The guidelines form a clear position on the need to prevent and delay alcohol consumption by young people.”

Gary Kirby, Director – Prevention and Workforce Development Directorate, Drug and Alcohol Office
Christmas, Parties & Alcohol

Lots of drinking often occurs during the festive season and it can be helpful to know how to minimise the risks.

Christmas Cheer!

Too much Christmas Cheer can result in harm for drinkers and others

- Last Christmas 2 million Australians knew someone who was injured/harmed as a result of binge drinking.
- 1.3 million Australians experienced abuse or violence arising from binge drinking.
- 70% of Australians were negatively affected by someone else's drinking e.g. excessive noise, verbal abuse, traffic crashes, physical and sexual assault.

Hosting a Christmas party

Be the perfect host

- **Food**: food slows the rate of alcohol absorption and eating slows the pace of drinking.
- **Non-alcoholic drinks**: provide mineral water, soft drink, juice, tea and coffee.
- **Alcohol alternatives**: provide low alcohol drinks such as mid-strength beer and low alcohol wine. Serve in small glasses.
- **Entertainment**: provide diversions so drinking isn't the party's focus.
- **Friends**: offer food and non-alcoholic alternatives to the quick drinkers.
- **Closing Time**: stop serving alcohol and start serving tea and coffee.
- **Transport**: get guests home safely by taxi, public transport, or picked up by parents or friends, and suggest in your invitation that if people are going to be drinking to leave the car at home.

Christmas Party Goers

Have fun... and be invited back next year

- **Start with a soft drink** and have a spacer or Mocktail (non-alcoholic drink) every 2 or 3 drinks.
- **Use standard drinks** to keep track of how much you drink using information on labels*
- **Drink slowly** and avoid drinking games that encourage 'skulling' or 'shooters'.
- **Eat before and while you are drinking** and avoid salty snacks that make you thirsty.
- **Stick to one drink at a time** and don't let people top up your drink.
- **Stay busy** with activities such as playing pool or karaoke.
- **Drink low alcohol alternatives** such as low or mid-strength beer and low alcohol wine.
- **Be strong** and don't be pressured into drinking too much.
- **Don't medicate with alcohol** if you suffer from mental health issues such as depression. Seek support instead.
- **Enjoy Yourself!**

* (the National Health and Medical Research Council recommends for reduced lifetime risk of harm no more than 2 standard drinks for men and women on any one occasion and no more than 4 drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol related injury).

Have a safe and happy Christmas!

For more information email Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of WDLDAG at geologica@upnaway.com or visit the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au for RADAR information via the Bulletin Board.

What do the experts say?

“Christmas is a great time to catch up with friends and family. It’s important to remember that young people learn from their parents and see them as role models. Parents should be aware of simple ways to keep their families safe during this period, such as restricting young people’s access to alcohol, offering non-alcohol alternatives, encouraging people to ‘space’ their drinks, providing standard drinks and lots of food.”

Jennifer O’Mullane, Local Drug Action Groups Inc.
ALCOHOL AND DROWNING

Alcohol and swimming – what is the problem?

Alcohol contributes to:
- At least 20% of all adult drowning deaths in Australia.
- Over 40% of drowning deaths of 15-29 year olds.

How is alcohol a problem?

Even a small amount of alcohol can have a number of effects which increase the risk of drowning:
- Impaired judgement and risk taking can lead to bad decision making and an inability to identify and manage a difficult situation.
- Impaired coordination and reaction time stops you responding quickly to emergencies.
- Disturbances of the inner ear affects your ability to tell “up” from “down” underwater.
- Restricted lungs and blood vessels can restrict your ability to swim and shout for help if in trouble.
- Reduced effectiveness of CPR (resuscitation methods) reduces the chances of surviving near-drowning.
- Hypothermia sets in faster through increased loss of body heat.

Alcohol and water safety checklist

Remember alcohol and water activities don’t mix well, but if you’re planning to drink while enjoying water activities:
- Eat food before drinking alcohol
- Drink plenty of water and non-alcoholic drinks between alcoholic drinks, especially in summer.
- Avoid swimming after drinking alcohol.
- Avoid swimming in conditions or environments that are unfamiliar.
- Have someone around who isn’t drinking.
- Avoid diving or jumping from objects not intended as diving platforms at dams, creeks, and rivers.

For more information please visit www.lifesavingwa.com.au, email Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of WDLDAG at geologica@upnaway.com, or visit the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au for RADAR information via the Bulletin Board.

What do the experts say?

“Not only does alcohol make you less coordinated and make you take more risks, but in the water these problems are magnified. It can also cause inner ear disturbances – not being able to tell up from down when under the water.”
Tom Shalders, Health Promotion Officer, Royal Life Saving Society WA Inc.
What do the experts say?

Alcohol sponsorship and advertising promotes alcohol as integral to everyday life. This is particularly so for sport where it seems that rather than the alcohol brand sponsoring the sporting code, the sporting code is sponsoring the alcohol brand! Extensive research shows that exposure to alcohol marketing is related to uptake of alcohol and problem drinking.

Professor Robert Donovan, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University
The more alcohol you drink = a greater risk of harm to you

Effects of alcohol

Alcohol is a drug that slows the messages from your brain to your body. How alcohol affects you depends on factors like: the amount consumed, your age, body size, gender, and food you’ve eaten.

**Short term effects:**
- Reduced concentration, slurred speech, slowed reaction time;
- Confusion, blurred vision, poor muscle control;
- Feeling nauseas, vomiting;
- Increased risk taking behaviour, increased injury, violence, falls;
- Unconsciousness or death in extreme cases.
- Feeling relaxed, sense of well-being;

**Long term effects:**
- Hangovers
- Stress, sleeplessness, tiredness;
- Sexual problems;
- Blackouts;
- Brain and liver damage;
- Heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke;
- Increased risk of many cancers;
- Weight gain, obesity, diabetes.

**Australian guidelines for drinkers**

**Guideline 1:** For healthy men and women, drink no more than 2 standard drinks on any day.
- The lifetime risk of harm increases with the amount of alcohol consumed.

**Guideline 2:** For healthy men and women, drink no more than 4 standard drinks on a single occasion.
- The risk of alcohol-related injury increases with the amount consumed.

**Guideline 3:** For 15-17 year olds, the safest option is to delay drinking for as long as possible.
- Risk of accidents, injuries, violence and self harm are particularly high among drinkers under 18 years.

**Guideline 4:** For women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.
- Maternal alcohol consumption can harm the developing fetus or breastfeeding baby.

One standard drink =

For more information regarding standard drinks, drinking guidelines, and access to resources please visit www.alcohol.gov.au. Alternatively, you can email Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of WDLDAG at geologica@upnaway.com or visit the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au and follow the link to the RADAR project.

What do the experts say?

Almost 6,000 people in Western Australia are hospitalised every year due to alcohol-caused injury. In WA 125 people die each year from cancer directly caused by alcohol consumption and 900 people are hospitalised from alcohol-caused cancers. The message to drink in moderation has never been more important. To stay at a low-risk of alcohol caused cancer and other disease, health experts recommend no more than 2 standard drinks on any day.

Jonathan Hallett, Research Fellow, WA Centre for Health Promotion Research, Curtin University.
How does alcohol affect your driving?

- Driving is a complex task requiring concentration and decision making skills.
- Driving after drinking alcohol significantly increases your chance of having an accident.
- Even a small amount of alcohol can greatly increase the risk of a traffic injury, due to:
  - Slowed reaction time – this can affect your ability to respond in an emergency situation.
  - Altered thinking process – this can make it difficult to multi-task and affect your ability to notice other drivers/cars.
  - Blurred vision and impaired hearing – this can affect your ability to identify hazards.

How much alcohol can you drink before driving?

- To stay within the legal limit, the best advice is to avoid drinking and driving.
- Australia has strict laws about drink driving, with the legal limit set at 0.05 blood alcohol concentration (BAC).
- BAC is a measure of the amount of alcohol in your body, expressed as grams of alcohol per 100ml of blood.
- People of average build and in good health metabolise about one standard drink per hour.
- This means that for males, drinking 2 standard drinks or less in the first hour and one per hour thereafter will probably keep them below 0.05mg%.
- For females it would be one standard drink in the first hour and one every hour thereafter.
- Of course, how much you have eaten, your body size, your health, and whether you have used any other drugs can make a difference.

Tips for staying safe on the roads

There is no safe level of alcohol consumption for safe driving. The best advice is to not drive after drinking any amount of alcohol. Plan ahead:

- Organise a “skipper” who will avoid alcohol altogether.
- Arrange for someone to pick you up, call a taxi, or use public transport.
- Stay overnight and make sure you’re not over the limit in the morning.

However, if you are a licensed driver and would like to drink, stay within the legal BAC limit.

- Drink water or soft drink between alcoholic drinks and start with a non-alcoholic drink.
- Drink light alcohol drinks such as mid-strength beer or reduced alcohol wine.
- Stick to one type of drink and don’t mix drinks.
- Don’t let people top up your glass and avoid drinking in rounds.

For more information email Mr Brian Davis, Convenor of WDLDAG at geologica@upnaway.com or visit the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au for RADAR information via the Bulletin Board.

What do the experts say?

Large reductions in drink driving over the last 20 years have prevented many traffic injuries and deaths. Everyone now knows that it is dangerous and irresponsible to drive while intoxicated.

Adults have the responsibility to set a good example to children by not driving when affected by alcohol.

Professor Peter Howat, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University
What is obesity?

- Obesity refers to excess body fat which can reduce life expectancy and increase health issues.
- Excess body fat is caused where energy (kilojoules) intake exceeds energy expenditure.

How does alcohol contribute to weight gain and obesity?

- Alcoholic drinks are “empty kilojoules” meaning they’re high in energy and low in nutritional value.
- Beer, wine and spirits are often consumed with sugary soft drinks (e.g. mixed alcoholic drinks) and snack foods, such as potato chips, pastries and nuts, which add to overall energy (kilojoule) intake.
- The snacks eaten with alcohol are more likely to be turned into body fat straight away while the body burns off kilojoules from alcohol first.
- Overweight and obesity can increase the risk of health issues such as cardiovascular (heart) disease, sleep apnoea, type 2 diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), and some cancers.

How to avoid alcohol-related weight gain

- Limiting alcohol intake is an important strategy for achieving energy balance and preventing weight gain.
- While it is important to avoid drinking on an empty stomach, avoid high fat foods such as hot chips, pizza, or kebabs whilst drinking.
- Balance energy intake with regular physical activity – at least 30 minutes per day.
- For an idea of alcohol’s contribution to total energy intake, below is a list of common alcoholic drinks and their kilojoule amounts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drink</th>
<th>mL</th>
<th>No. of standard drinks</th>
<th>kJ</th>
<th>%DI*</th>
<th>Equivalent to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular beer</td>
<td>375mL (1 can)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>488kJ</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>½ (50g) regular takeaway hot chips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light beer</td>
<td>375mL (1 can)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>390kJ</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>1 (20g) chocolate biscuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>250mL (1 glass)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>710kJ</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>1 (50g) glazed doughnut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirits</td>
<td>60mL (1 shot)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>508kJ</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>1 (30g) choc chip muesli bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champagne</td>
<td>100mL (1 glass)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>270kJ</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>½ (15g) small packet of potato chips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-mixed spirits</td>
<td>375mL (1 can)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>949kJ</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>1 (50g) chocolate bar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*%DI refers to the percentage of daily energy intake based on an average intake of 8750kJ/day

For more information email Kerry Hug, Convenor of WDL Dag at kerryhug@optusnet.com.au or visit the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au for RADAR information via the Bulletin Board.

What do the experts say?

In moderation drinking alcohol can be part of a healthy diet but large amounts can be harmful to health. If you do drink alcohol, try to drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration or dilute wine with mineral or soda water. Always watch what you eat with alcoholic drinks as the kilojoules can add up and if the food is salty - it may make you drink more. The big tip is to try over time to drink less than you do... ask for help if you need advice on how to cut down

Denise Griffiths, Community Liaison Officer, Dietetics, Curtin University
Evidence shows that drinking any amount of alcohol will increase your risk of developing cancer.

Alcohol and cancer risk
- Alcohol is classed as a group 1 carcinogen, which means that alcohol use is a known cause of cancer.
- This is the highest carcinogen rating and categorises alcohol with tobacco smoke and asbestos as being known risk factors for cancer.
- Even small amounts of alcohol increase cancer risk, but the more you drink, the greater the risk.
- There is no evidence that alcohol protects you from any type of cancer, and there is no difference between different types of drinks (e.g. beer, wine, and spirits).

Facts and figures
- Each year, approximately 5070 new cases of cancer are related to long-term alcohol use in Australia.
- In WA alone, more than 100 people die due to alcohol-related cancers each year.
- Alcohol increases your risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, bowel, oesophagus, liver, and breasts.

How much should I drink?
- Cancer Council Australia (CCA) recommends that to reduce your risk of cancer, you should limit your alcohol consumption.
- For individuals who choose to drink, CCA recommends no more than two standard drinks per day.
- One standard drink equals:
  - It is also recommended that you avoid drinking more than 4 standard drinks on any one occasion. Having at least one or two alcohol-free days a week might help avoid the risk of dependence.

For more information you can visit the Cancer Council website http://www.cancer.org.au/home.htm, email Kerry Hug, Convenor of Willetton & District Local Drug Action Group at kerry.hug@det.wa.edu.au or visit the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au for RADAR information via the Bulletin Board.

What do the experts say?
“We have known since 1988 that alcohol consumption increases risk of cancer. As more research has been conducted over the past 20 years the evidence linking alcohol and cancer has become stronger. There is no difference in risk according to beverage type; the risk applies to drinking wine, beer or spirits and is linked to the alcohol content of the beverage. We recommend people follow the National Health and Medical Research Council limits and consume no more than 2 standard drinks on any one day.”

Terry Slevin, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer Control
ALCOHOL AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Alcohol and the teenage brain don’t mix.

Effects of alcohol on the brain

- **Risky drinking** can contribute to a range of adverse impacts on the brain – this can arise due to the direct toxic effects of the alcohol (depending on amount consumed), injury that might be associated with intoxication, and for some regular heavy drinkers, combined with dietary deficiencies, permanent damage and impairment.

- **Short term damage** includes: impaired attention, impaired memory, impaired vision, decreased motor control, increased impulsivity, blackouts, and decreased reaction time.

- **Long term damage** includes a reduction to the function of key parts of the brain that are particularly sensitive to alcohol such as:
  - Frontal lobes: complex planning & impulse control;
  - Temporal lobes: memory regulation & fear response; and
  - Cerebellum: motor coordination.

Alcohol affects teenagers differently than adults

- **Evidence** has emerged over the past couple of years about the impact of alcohol on developing brain, which does not finish maturing until the mid-20s.

- **Alcohol can disrupt brain development** during the critical phase of growth that occurs from 12 to the early 20s.

- **Teenagers are more vulnerable** than adults to many effects of alcohol, including: memory, brain damage, altered brain development, driving skills, and long-term cognitive issues.

- **Alcohol damage is accumulative** over a lifetime and may be impossible to pinpoint when that 'harm' starts for each person.

  - It seems that this information is not well known, as recent research shows that 40% of young people got their last alcoholic drink from their parents.

Alcohol and the teenage brain: best to keep them apart

- **Because we are unclear about low risk levels of alcohol consumption for young people**, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) provides the guideline that …
  - **Not drinking** in the under 15 years age group is especially important,
  - For young people aged 15 to 17 years, **the safest option is to delay drinking** for as long as possible.

For more information you can email Kerry Hug, Convenor of Willetton & District Local Drug Action Group at kerry_hug@det.wa.edu.au or visit the Local Drug Action Group website www.localdrugaction.com.au for RADAR information via the Bulletin Board.

What do the experts say?

"Evidence has emerged over the past couple of years about the impact of alcohol on developing brains. These studies identify physical changes in the brain and evidence of impaired problem solving and other cognitive functioning. This might influence the ability of the child to reach their full educational capacity. The accumulating body of evidence would suggest that alcohol causes damage to brain tissue and function. As a parent, this risk of long-term harm has made me more conservative about my children’s access to alcohol”.

**Professor Steve Allsop, Director, National Drug Research Institute**
Feature article examples

Feature article 1 – mid-project
- This article was used to draw parents’ attention to the articles and to recruit new committee members.

Feature article 2 – end of project
- This article was used to alert parents to the intercept surveys taking place in the community in the coming weeks.
Is binge drinking by youth a problem in our community?

Alcohol causes 13% of all deaths among Australian youth aged 14 to 17 years. Each week one teenager dies and more than 60 are hospitalised due to alcohol-related problems.

On average young people start drinking at around 17 years of age. However, many start much younger with national surveys now collecting data from children as young as 12 years. Even modest drinking between 12 and 17 years may cause a range of problems, from a drop in school grades to serious mental health problems.

The Raising Awareness of Drug and Alcohol Risk (RADAR) project, run by Willetton and District Local Drug Action Group (WDLDAG) along with Healthway and Canning Times, aims to raise awareness about the damaging effects of alcohol on our youth.

Since August 2011, RADAR has published 10 monthly newspaper articles that have focussed on issues that are often associated with alcohol related harm, including, Leavers, Christmas, youth parties, alcohol and drowning, and drink driving.

Kerry Hug, WDLDAG Convenor, said the group is keen to raise the local profile of the health issue. “We’re aligning the RADAR articles with other current programs, to strengthen the message that drinking is harmful to the health of youth,” Ms Hug said.

Ms Hug highlights the importance of preventing alcohol-related harm among youth in the community. “Australia’s cultural acceptance of heavy drinking normalises this behaviour which has filtered down into youth culture.”

“Parents play an important role in the health and wellbeing of their children. They also have more of an influence on the behaviours and choices of their children than they realise. Raising parents’ awareness of the impact of alcohol on the health of young people can support parents in having informed discussions with their children on drinking and the potential harmful consequences of risky drinking.”

Delaying the start of drinking for youth is vital, as it is the start of a pattern of risky drinking that continues into adult years, and has been linked to alcohol dependence and chronic disease.

WDLDAG consists of local residents including school nurses, teachers, parents and local city councillors, with many years of experience in dealing with issues facing today’s youth. The group meets on a monthly basis and welcome new members.

If you are interested in joining WDLDAG, finding our more about the RADAR project, or other WDLDAG projects, please contact Kerry Hug on 0434 070 420 or Kerry.Hug@health.wa.gov.au.

July’s RADAR article can be found on page 5 of this issue of the Canning Times. Please visit www.localdrugaction.com.au for a copy of past articles.
Problem drinking in our youth – who’s doing something about it?

Alcohol is seen by many as being part of the Australian way of life and is central to many social functions. However, there is much community concern about the harm alcohol can cause, especially to our youth.

The Raising Awareness of Drug and Alcohol Risk (RADAR) project, run by Willetton and District Local Drug Action Group (WDLDAG), along with Healthway and Canning Times, aims to raise awareness about the damaging effects of alcohol on our youth.

Since August 2011, RADAR has published 12 monthly newspaper articles that have focussed on issues associated with alcohol related harm. Topics have included; parents as role-models, Leavers, Christmas, youth parties, alcohol-related drowning, drink driving, alcohol advertising, obesity, cancer, and brain development.

In the coming weeks, research staff will be attending local shopping and sporting venues to ask parents for feedback on the RADAR articles at in the coming weeks. This will assist project staff to measure how many people saw and read the articles and how relevant and helpful the information was. This will also help to determine whether similar projects can be implemented in other areas around the State.

Kerry Hug, WDLDAG Convenor, emphasised the importance of feedback on the articles from parents as the key target group, to provide essential information to assist the success of future programs that aim to prevent alcohol-related harm among our youth.

“We as parents have a responsibility to protect our children from risky drinking. The feedback we get from local parents is so important because it tells us how many parents read the articles and if they found the information useful and informative with respect to understanding the issues around our children and alcohol.”

“The aim of RADAR project is to raise awareness of parents about their children’s alcohol use, and what they can do to keep their children safe. The articles highlight a range of issues associated with alcohol consumption for both parents and youth, as well as providing practical guidelines for parents to reduce the harm associated with risky drinking by youth” Ms Hug said.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) provides the following guidelines for children and youth:

- Children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking. Not drinking in this age group - under 15 years - is especially important.
- For young people aged 15 to 17 years, the safest option is to delay drinking for as long as possible.

RADAR articles can be found at www.localdrugaction.com.au. If you would like further information regarding the NHMRC guidelines or any of alcohol-related health issues mentioned, please visit http://www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/

If you are interested in finding out more about the RADAR project, or other WDLDAG projects, please contact Kerry Hug on 0434 070 420 or Kerry.Hug@health.wa.gov.au.
4.0 References