



MEDIA RELEASE

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## Myth busted: red wine no magic remedy for heart disease

Coinciding with today's United Nations (UN) meeting on non-communicable diseases, the Alcohol Policy Coalition (APC) has released a paper challenging the commonly-held belief that red wine is beneficial for preventing cardiovascular disease.

"After reviewing all the scientific evidence it appears any positive effects of alcohol in reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease have been hugely overestimated. In particular, red wine has no special, protective qualities when it relates to cardiovascular disease," said Kathy Bell, CEO Heart Foundation (Victoria).

"The Heart Foundation does not recommend red wine or other types of alcoholic drinks to prevent or treat cardiovascular disease. To reduce your lifetime risk of alcohol-related harm, you should drink no more than two standard drinks on any day."

More than half of all alcohol-related deaths globally are from diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer or liver cirrhosis. For only the second time in its history, the UN is today convening a high-level meeting to address the problem of non-communicable diseases, including those caused by alcohol consumption (the only other high level meeting to tackle a health issue was in 2001, when the focus was AIDS and HIV).

On a global scale, 545,000 people died of alcohol-related cardiovascular disease in 2004\*. In Australia, five per cent of all cancers are caused by alcohol, including one in five breast cancers.

In Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows a sharp increase in wine consumption.

"It's no surprise that wine consumption has gone up – price influences consumption and wine is taxed by value not alcohol content. So when Australians can buy cask wine for less than soft drink, it's little surprise we have a \$15billion drinking problem on our hands," said Todd Harper, CEO of Cancer Council Victoria.

"But there is something the Government can do to help fix the problem - with an effective alcohol tax, Australia can lead the world in reducing alcohol related diseases, including heart disease and cancer."

The Australian Government is reviewing Australia's taxation next month and this will be the perfect opportunity to develop a system to tax drinks based on alcohol content with a premium price for more harmful products.

"At the moment, alcohol taxation in Australia is inconsistent and confusing. We know that by taxing alcohol by volume we can reduce drinking to safer levels, which will have a marked effect on rates of heart disease and cancer."

The UN Summit will be held in New York on 19-20 September 2011.

The APC's paper, titled *Cancer, Cardiovascular Disease and Alcohol Consumption* will be available for download from [www.alcoholpolicycoalition.org.au](http://www.alcoholpolicycoalition.org.au)

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The Alcohol Policy Coalition (the Coalition) is a collaboration of health agencies – Australian Drug Foundation, Cancer Council Victoria, Heart Foundation (Victoria), Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre and VicHealth – with shared concern relating to the misuse of alcohol and its health/social impacts on the community. Alcohol remains one of the major causes of preventable death and illness in Australia. As such, the Coalition advocates for evidence based policy to prevent and reduce the harms caused by alcohol to Australians.

\* Jürgen Rehm, Colin Mathers, Svetlana Popova, Montarat Thavorncharoensap, Yot Teerawattananon, Jayadeep Patra, *Global burden of disease and injury and economic cost attributable to alcohol use and alcohol-use disorders*, The Lancet, Vol 373 June 27, 2009