



Alcohol at work

Why address alcohol at work?

Alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive (mood changing) drug in Australia, and its use can result in a range of physical, emotional and social harms. While many organisations do not provide alcohol during the typical working day, it is important that everyone takes responsibility for changing the alcohol culture across Australia. With 17% of adults in NSW drinking at levels harmful to their health¹, the workplace is an ideal setting to promote and support moderate drinking or to create an alcohol-free environment. Organisations can play an important role in supporting workers to reduce their current levels of drinking.

The effects of alcohol on health

While there is no safe level of drinking, alcohol consumption at harmful levels can cause unwanted effects such as injury and disease, including liver or brain damage, heart disease and high blood pressure. It can also increase the risk of some cancers and lead to weight gain and obesity. Drinking can cause harm to the developing foetus during pregnancy or when breastfeeding a baby.

Where to begin?

There is a range of actions that an organisation can implement to reduce the impact of alcohol on the health of workers.

You can find a sample action plan addressing alcohol on the *Get Healthy at Work* website.

Some things to consider when choosing the right type of actions for your workplace.

Policy

An effective alcohol policy provides and promotes actions that will assist in addressing alcohol in the workplace. An alcohol policy should be tailored to meet the specific needs of your organisation. For example, an organisation may choose to develop a policy that promotes an alcohol-free workplace, or discourage gifting alcohol or using alcohol as an incentive.

Communication

It's important that workers are aware of the expectations of their organisation when it comes to alcohol. Even though your organisation may have policies and procedures in place, if workers aren't aware of them, they can't follow them.

To gain support across the organisation, you should involve workers during the development of policy and other alcohol actions and continue to engage them throughout the process.

Education and awareness training

Alcohol awareness and education programs can contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of workers. The provision of regular, ongoing and adaptable education plays a central role in supporting cultural and behavioural change. Successful education programs adopt a 'whole of organisation' approach and are complimented by other actions.

The most important aspect of your training should be communicating your organisation's position on alcohol.

Event management

Events and social occasions are high-risk occasions for every organisation. A work function is an important way for organisations to thank workers or to celebrate an event such as the end of year or some other special occasion. A successful function is not only enjoyable for everyone involved, but is also incident-free, with all guests returning home safely.

It's important to make sure you are protecting and promoting your company's image and expected behaviour before, during and after the event.

Employee assistance programs

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) are an effective early intervention service to assist employees with personal or work-related issues. While not a requirement, SafeWork NSW recommends EAPs to be a feature of all workplaces.

Free treatment and support

There are a number of free alcohol support and treatment services on offer across NSW. These services are available to support individuals, family and friends of someone with a substance problem, or to help the workplace understand how they can support a worker with an alcohol problem.

For more information on how your workplace could implement these actions, and to download free checklists to help get you started, refer to the information in the table below.

Alcohol resources		
DrugInfo	druginfo.adf.org.au	Provides easy access to information about alcohol and other drugs. Services include a resource centre with free information, fact sheets and publications as well as email alerts for people interested in preventing alcohol and other drug-related harm.
ADF SEARCH	ADF SEARCH at druginfo.adf.org.au	An online search database for information on alcohol and other drugs. The database includes over 4,000 reports, books, journal articles and more. This service can help you find out more about the effects of alcohol.
NSW Alcohol and Drug Information Service	yourroom.com.au	Online drug and alcohol information and resources.

Alcohol treatment and support		
Counselling Online	counsellingonline.org.au 24 hours, 7 days a week	Free and confidential online alcohol and other drugs counselling service provided.
NSW Alcohol and Drug Information Service	Sydney Tel. 02 9361 8000 Regional Tel. 1800 422 599 24 hours, 7 days a week	A confidential information, advice and referral telephone service that provides education, information, support, crisis counselling and referral to services in NSW.

Promote less drinking		
Encourage participation in alcohol awareness challenges	febfast.org.au dryjuly.com.au ocsober.com.au	Challenges for individual workers to abstain from alcohol for the entire month.
Promote Hello Sunday Morning	hellosundaymorning.org 24 hours, 7 days a week	Online program to help individual workers understand why they drink and improve their relationship with alcohol.

For information and advice regarding alcohol and work health and safety visit: safework.nsw.gov.au or call **13 10 50**.

For more details visit gethealthyatwork.com.au

