

6 August 2013

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT **COUNTING THE COST OF ALCOHOL ABUSE**

The NSW Government does not estimate or report the total cost of alcohol abuse. The Audit Office of New South Wales' sponsored research estimates it costs the government over \$1 billion a year, or around \$416 from each NSW household.

"If social costs are included, the total cost of alcohol abuse in New South Wales is around \$3.87 billion per annum, or about \$1,565 from each household," said Mr Achterstraat.

"My concern is that the NSW Government does not know the full cost of alcohol abuse – at best, cost information is fragmented," said Mr Achterstraat.

"It is important for government to have good information on the costs of alcohol abuse so it can respond effectively to the problem," said Mr Achterstraat. "If costs were increasing, this could be a trigger for a different approach," he added.

Alcohol abuse can cause a range of physical, emotional and social problems. Government agencies monitor and report incidents of alcohol-related harm. For example, NSW Police monitor the number of alcohol-related assaults and NSW Health monitors the number of alcohol-related admissions.

"The NSW Government should estimate the cost of alcohol abuse (every three years) and publically report the cost – so the government and the public know whether the problem is getting better or worse," said Mr Achterstraat. "The community also has a right to know this information so it can inform public debate on alcohol abuse and the best ways to combat it," he added.

Government agencies are doing a lot of good work to reduce the harm caused by alcohol abuse. A range of strategies have been introduced including public education campaigns, expanded police 'move on' powers for intoxicated people and management plans for problem areas like Kings Cross.

"There may be a case for 'abuser pays'. Where appropriate, alcohol abusers should pay for taking valuable resources away from more pressing work," said Mr Achterstraat.

"I'm pleased that some initiatives, such as a sobering up centre being trialled in the Sydney CBD, will attempt to recover the costs of alcohol abuse. I think the government should also consider other initiatives to ensure people who abuse alcohol pay for any costs they inflict," he added.

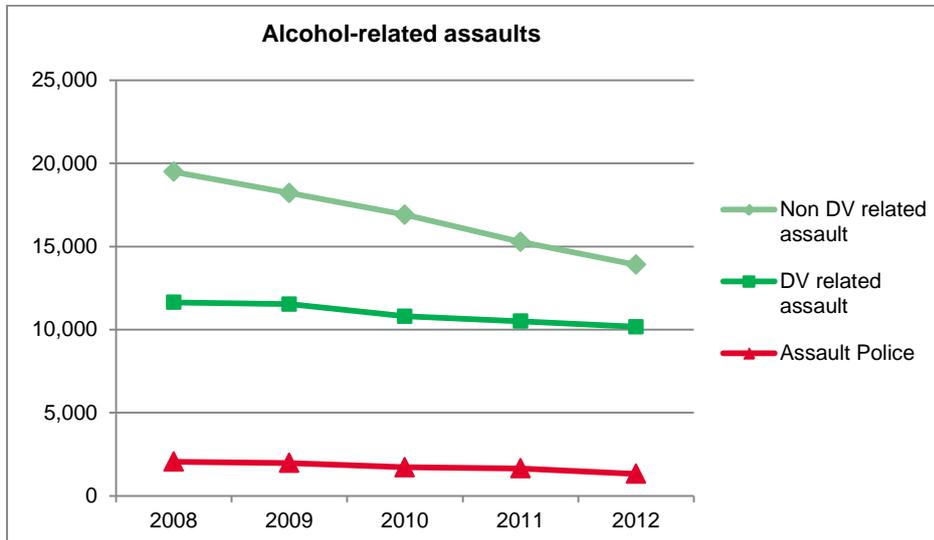
"Alcohol abuse poses a significant financial burden to both society and government. As a community we need to count the cost and decide what best to do," Mr Achterstraat concluded.

Further information:

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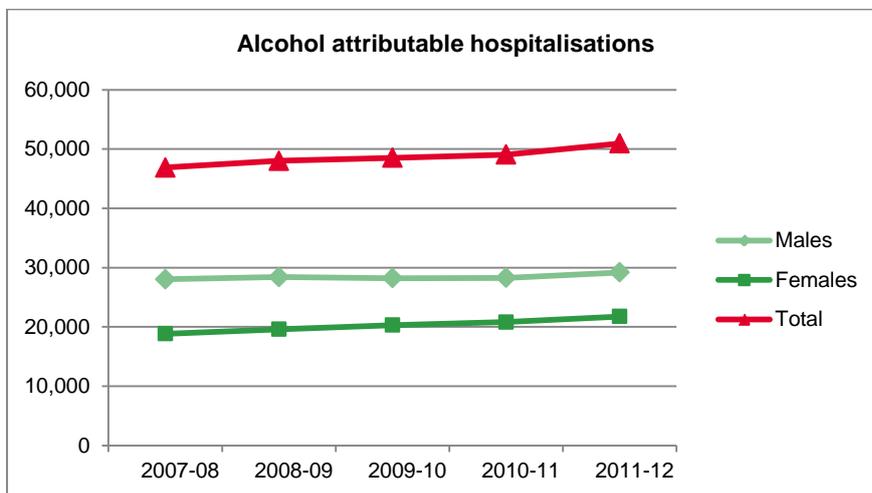
While alcohol related assaults have been decreasing over the past five years, alcohol related hospitalisations are on the rise.

Alcohol-related incident data collected by NSW Police



Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2013 (ref. jf13-11260).
 Note: 'DV' means domestic violence.

Alcohol-related activity data monitored by Ministry of Health



Source: NSW Ministry of Health.