

MEDIA RELEASE

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Virtual support helps curb drinking

New research from La Trobe University's Centre for Alcohol Policy Research and VicHealth shows the benefits of online peer support group programs such as Hello Sunday Morning in helping people reduce alcohol consumption.

The report, published in the Health Promotion Journal of Australia by La Trobe Research Fellow Dr Amy Pennay and funded by VicHealth, used data provided by [Hello Sunday Morning](#), an online behaviour change movement set up in 2010 to help change people's relationship with alcohol.

In the study, blog data from 154 Hello Sunday Morning users was analysed, with 71 per cent of them being female. More than 2800 blog posts were studied. Hello Sunday Morning has 120,000 registered users worldwide, with about half of them coming from Australia.

Dr Pennay said the most common barriers to achieving temporary alcohol abstinence were stress, tiredness, pervasiveness of drinking in society and negative reactions from others.

"Attempting not to drink in environments where alcohol consumption is culturally normative is challenging, particularly at licensed venues and parties, but also at work or after-work contexts," Dr Pennay said.

"Stressful events, such as a bad day, and pressure from others to drink also creates challenges and makes abstention more difficult.

"Being part of the Hello Sunday Morning community is a useful strategy to combat alcohol cravings and deal with these external pressures," Dr Pennay said.

She said other strategies for successfully achieving a period of not drinking included socialising in environments or with people who are supportive of abstinence, engaging in new, non-alcohol related activities and substituting alcohol with other rewards.

"We believe it could be worthwhile for people who are looking to cut back to try some of these strategies coming into the new year," Dr Pennay said.

VicHealth Executive Manager of Programs Kirstan Corben said the research highlighted the need for increased social support for low-risk drinking to reduce the impact of alcohol on the health and well-being of Victorians.

"We know that most Victorians enjoy a drink and that alcohol is part of most social occasions. However we don't want people to feel pressured to have a drink in their hands, or get drunk, in order to have a good time," Ms Corben said.

“Having a supportive environment is critical for people who are trying to cut down on their drinking and this research clearly shows the benefits of peer support programs like Hello Sunday Morning.”

Hello Sunday Morning CEO Chris Raine said online communities were vital to shifting the drinking culture.

“We’ve definitely seen a shift in a more conscious drinking culture, where our online community becomes a support network, encouraging members to create a more positive relationship with how they choose to drink,” Mr Raine said.

[Read the full research paper.](#)

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