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Parenting influences on adolescent alcohol use

Following a tender process in March 2004, the Australian Institute of Family Studies was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing to undertake a multidisciplinary review of parenting influences on adolescent alcohol use in Australia. The project commenced in May 2004 and was completed in October 2004.

The Institute thanks the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing for the opportunity to be involved in this important project. The report has been prepared for a wide audience including policy makers, practitioners, researchers, families and communities. It is hoped that the report will provide an impetus for more effective prevention and early intervention policies and practices concerning young people's use of alcohol.

PARENTING INFLUENCES ON ADOLESCENT ALCOHOL USE



Report prepared by the
Australian Institute of Family Studies
for the Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

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Australian Institute of Family Studies

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Foreword

While there is widespread acknowledgement of the problem of adolescent abuse of alcohol, the pathways to it remain contentious. The influence of parents on these pathways has been unclear. This report, *Parenting Influences on Adolescent Alcohol Use*, provides invaluable new insights into the influences that parents exert on adolescent alcohol use.

The report's messages have an elegant clarity and answer a number of key questions. Among these are: Should parents delay adolescents' introduction to alcohol? What role do parents play in guiding responsible alcohol use? How do parents exert an influence? What other sources of influence are there – for example, from peers, the wider culture and the media? Which interventions have been demonstrated to work, and how widely available are these in Australia?

This report provides answers to these questions. For example, it demonstrates the long-term benefits of delaying adolescents' uptake of alcohol. It also shows the ways in which parents can guide patterns of use once adolescents have started consuming alcohol. It explodes a popular myth that parents have little impact in this area by showing that they can and do influence their offspring's alcohol use, especially through their supervision and monitoring behaviours, the closeness of their relationships with their children, and through positive behaviour management practices. While parents have a greater influence than many would admit, the peer group, cultural norms, and the law also play substantial roles. Successful modification of the patterns of teenage drinking will need to target all these spheres of influence.

While there is very little Australian research and very few intervention programs with proven success, this report shows some productive ways forward, both through investment in research and evaluation, and the implementation of evidence-based interventions.

The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing is to be congratulated for this most valuable investment in addressing an issue of such widespread community concern. The authors of the report, Louise Hayes, Diana Smart, John Toumbourou and Ann Sanson, are to be especially commended on completing a significant and groundbreaking report.

This volume should provide an excellent resource for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers, to work together to address a social issue of urgent priority. I am delighted that the Australian Institute of Family Studies could contribute to such a productive collaboration and look forward to its impacts on policy and practice.

Professor Alan Hayes

Director

Australian Institute of Family Studies

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