

MEDIA RELEASE

19 September 2011

Response to Alcohol Policy Coalition

The Alcohol Policy Coalition yesterday claimed once again that wine has no positive cardiovascular benefits and media reports quoted the CEO of Heart Foundation Victoria, Kathy Bell, as saying red wine has “no special, protective qualities”.

As an initial response we would refer the APC, Ms Bell and the media to the following studies published by the *British Medical Journal* and the US Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web links to the relevant research or articles are included.

This constant barrage of media releases from the anti-alcohol lobby trying to convince the public that all alcohol is bad all the time is misleading, especially when each release invariably acknowledges (as Ms Bell did yesterday) that to reduce your lifetime risk of alcohol-related harm, you should drink no more than two standard drinks on any day.

That is exactly what the Winemakers' Federation of Australia has consistently argued. It is widely accepted that excessive drinking, particularly over an extended period, is a significant health risk, but moderate consumption is an accepted part of a healthy lifestyle for those who choose it – see the second item below.

Research around the different aspects of alcohol and health is complex and regularly changing. Selective quoting to hammer a political agenda is of no value to consumers attempting to make informed choices.

British Medical Journal

Two studies **(1)** published in the *British Medical Journal* this year show that people who drink in moderation are up to 25% less likely to develop heart disease than those who drink no alcohol and that moderate consumption leads to a “significant” increase in some cardiovascular markers, including serum high density lipoprotein cholesterol levels.

Both papers were based on systematic reviews and a meta-analysis of studies published between 1950 and 2009, involving millions of people.

In a subsequent article in a professional journal **(2)**, the findings were acknowledged by Prof Garry Jennings, director of the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute in Melbourne, and Prof James Tatoulis, chief medical adviser to the National Heart Foundation.

While stressing that no-one should take up drinking on the strength of the findings and highlighting the risk of excessive consumption, Prof Tatoulis noted that “epidemiological studies conducted over the past 50 to 60 years” reinforce the benefits of light-to-moderate drinking and that “doctors should not admonish patients for light to moderate drinking”.

US Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A new study **(3)** by the US Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirms that moderate alcohol consumption is one of four healthy lifestyle behaviours that help people live longer.

According to the CDC, the four lifestyle behaviours were: having never smoked, eating a healthy diet, getting regular physical activity, and moderate alcohol consumption. Each was “significantly associated with a reduced risk of mortality”.

The CDC researchers concluded that these low-risk lifestyle behaviours “exert a powerful and beneficial effect on mortality.”

(1) *Effect of alcohol consumption on biological markers associated with risk of coronary heart disease: systematic review and meta-analysis of interventional studies.*
www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.d636

Association of alcohol consumption with selected cardiovascular disease outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.d671

(2) “Compelling” evidence won’t change drinking advice (published in MJA InSight, an electronic newsletter for medical specialists, GPs and other health professionals)
www.mjainsight.com.au/about-us

(3) *Low-Risk Lifestyle Behaviors and All-Cause Mortality: Findings From the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III Mortality Study*
<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/cgi/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300167>

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