

# Call for bosses to battle workplace alcohol abuse

By Natasha Bitá

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Beer o'clock ... women enjoy a quiet drink / Cameron Richardson

- Binge drinking a major workplace problem
- Estimated to cost business \$5.6bn a year
- Work a "good place" to tackle drinking

A SHOUT after work may be on the way out, as health authorities try to recruit big-brother bosses to curtail staff drinking habits.

A report on the social aspects of Australians' drinking, commissioned by the federal Department of Health and Ageing, reveals that 6.6 per cent of workers who drink alcohol have showed up to work drunk in a 12-month period, [The Australian reports](#).

One in 10 workers reported that they usually drank alcohol in the workplace, and nearly 9 per cent drank at "risky" levels at least once a week.

The report singles out the workplace as an "alcohol harm-intervention setting".

"Workplace interventions are likely to be cost effective and efficacious," it says. "Occupational health and safety and industrial relations frameworks exist that can incorporate alcohol-related issues."

The report, prepared by the [National Centre](#) for Education and Training on Addiction at Flinders University, says Australian business bears more than half the economic cost associated with alcohol use.

The bill for lost productivity through hangovers and sickies, staff turnover and early retirement due to alcohol use is calculated at \$5.6 billion a year.

One in six workers has reported physical abuse at work by a colleague under the influence of alcohol or drugs, the report found, while one in seven suffered verbal abuse.

"Due to the impact of alcohol use on workplace safety and productivity, employers are likely to be motivated to support interventions," the report, obtained by *The Australian* through Freedom of Information, says.

"Australia has largely overlooked the potential of the workplace as a setting in which to implement cost-effective strategies to prevent and address risky drinking patterns."

The report says peer-group pressure from colleagues may encourage even teetotaler workers to hit the bottle.

"While consumption of alcohol at work may be actively discouraged for safety reasons, workers may be pressured to join co-workers in regular 'end of the working day' drinking rituals," it says.

"In some work settings, workers who do not normally drink in their own leisure time may find it expected of them by their colleagues or workplace."

The report found that 44 per cent of the Australian workforce drinks above the safe level recommended by the National Health and Research Council, "at least occasionally".

The report labels Australia's drinking culture as "calculated hedonism".

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