

MEDIC

Panic on the streets of London Just what is a standard drink? Why meth is good for you Some of my best friends are journalists February 2012

matters of substance

# The Wire – reality TV

**MAYFAIR** 

HBO's The Wire has received high praise for its edgy portrayal of Baltimore's gritty underbelly, seen through the eyes of both drug dealers and law enforcement. But many also say "the best TV show ever made" is a very accurate depiction of the devastating consequences punitive drug laws have upon depressed communities.

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Te Tūāpapa Tarukino o Aotearoa

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#### **Quotes of Substance**

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I'VE JUST had one of the best weeks of my eight years with the Drug Foundation. I'm buzzing, I'm inspired, and I'm just a wee bit star struck.

I've been travelling with Christopher Kennedy Lawford, the UN's Goodwill Ambassador on Drug Dependence, Treatment and Care. Chris is JFK's nephew, the son of a Hollywood Rat Packer, and is himself a movie star. He's also just celebrated 26 years in recovery.

While here he met with many politicians, blitzed the media, toured treatment centres, and spoke at two major events. We tired him out but he generously said he would do it all again.

I drove him everywhere and was privileged to hear him share his story many times. Watching his interactions with others in "his tribe" [his words] was intensely emotional. People hung off his every word — they cried, he cried, and a couple of times I got dust or something in my eyes too.

Part of Chris' mission is to get more people in long-term recovery to speak out (a challenging concept for those used to anonymity). Chris argues not only will this spread a message of hope to those struggling, but it will also better inform the community and lessen the stigma around addiction.
Many Chris talked with were
open to that message, so
expect to see growing
numbers of people in recovery
'outing' themselves.

Does my refreshed enthusiasm for treatment and recovery signal a move away from the Foundation's advocacy for alcohol and drug law reform?

No. This year modernising New Zealand's drug law and expanding health interventions to more people remain priorities. But promoting recovery and championing law reform are part of the same mission.

My week with Chris also strengthened my belief that the criminal justice approach to 'the drug problem' is wrong. It reinforces the archaic view that drug dependency is a moral failing, and embeds a destructive stigma that harms so many.

After giving an inspiring speech at Parliament Chris was approached by a man 20 years in recovery. He said he fears that if his colleagues knew his history he would lose his job. He works in Parliament where our laws are made; the place that must fix our obsolete drug law in 2012.

Happy reading, Ross Bell. ■

Matters of Substance invites feedback and contributions. If you're keen to contribute a guest editorial or article, please first contact us: editor@drugfoundation.org.nz

#### FebFast

1–29 February, Nationwide, New Zealand Febfast is an alcohol awareness campaign running for the second year in New Zealand. It challenges ordinary New Zealanders to forgo alcohol consumption for a month to raise funds for programmes helping to reduce alcohol and other drugrelated harms among young people. www.febfast.org.nz

# 15th World Conference on Tobacco or Health

20–24 March 2012, Singapore The conference is held once every 3 years and attracts thousands of academics, health professionals, non-government organisations and public officials from more than 100 countries. The theme 'Towards a Tobacco-free World: Planning Globally, Acting Locally' encompasses a vision of a world that is free from the harmful effects of tobacco.

www.wctoh2012.org

#### 5th National Biennial Conference on Adolescents and Adults with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: It's a Matter of Justice

18–21 April 2012, Vancouver,

This conference will be essential for those living or working with adults with FASD. It will also be of critical interest for those supporting adolescents with FASD and planning for their futures. The conference will provide a forum to share research, experience and practice in order to discuss how we can effectively sustain and enhance the lives of adolescents and adults with FASD, their families, service providers and communities.

www.interprofessional.ubc.ca

#### International Society for the Study of Drug Policy Conference 30–31 May 2012, Canterbury,

United Kingdom
The 6th annual conference will
discuss a wide range of drug policy
issues, with a particular focus on
how can and do empirical studies
influence drug policy. The invited
keynote speakers include Professor
Thomas McLellan, University of
Pennsylvania and Dr Michel
Kazatchkine, Executive Director of
the Global Fund and member of the
Global Commission on Drug Policy.
www.issdp.org/conferences.php

#### Beyond 2012: Leading the Way to Action

6–8 June 2012, Fremantle, Western Australia The National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) will host Australia's 2nd National Drug and Alcohol Conference. The conference aims to highlight how the sector is able to lead the way to action in addressing the harmful effects of alcohol and other drugs and the associated harms among indigenous Australians.

www.nidaconference.com.au/

#### **Cutting Edge**

5–8 September, Wellington
Cutting Edge is the national addiction
treatment conference covering
alcohol, other drugs, problem gambling
and smoking cessation. The 2012
conference will be the 17th.
www.cuttingedge.org.nz

#### 2nd National Cannabis Conference

19 September, Brisbane, Australia The conference theme is 'From Genetics to Practice'. The topic areas have been chosen to respond to the developing evidence base on issues such as cannabis and mental health. The conference will include perspectives from health, education, youth services and criminal justice sectors.

www.ncpic.org.au

#### Safety 2012 World Conference

1–4 October 2012, Wellington
The Safety 2012 World Conference
is the 11th biennial, international
conference on injury prevention and
safety promotion, cosponsored by
the World Health Organization.
The conference will bring together
the world's leading injury prevention
and safety researchers, practitioners,
policy makers and advocates to
debate, discuss and share
information and experience.

www.conference.co.nz/ worldsafety2012

# 1st International Conference on Alcohol and Cancer

4–9 October, Chania, Greece It has become increasingly clear that alcohol is a cause for a number of cancers. This meeting will be an ideal platform for interactions between basic scientists and clinicians in all major aspects of alcohol-induced carcinogenesis. In addition, the conference is aiming to attract young scientists and graduate students. www.aegeanconferences.org



Donnie Andrews has lived *The Wire*. At 32, carrying out a hit for a drug lord, he shot and killed a man. As the victim lay dying, he looked his assailant in the eye and asked "Why?" Twenty-six years later, and eight since he was released from prison, Andrews still can't get that question out of his head. "That was the shock I needed," says Andrews, who grew up tough in one of those destitute and desperate neighbourhoods depicted on *The Wire*, a gritty HBO crime drama that many critics have rated as one of the best television shows ever made. By **Hamish McKenzie** 







Hamish McKenzie

THE WIRE, which ran for five seasons between 2003 and 2008, transcended standard cop dramas by contextualising the drugs trade-driven crime in Baltimore - a stand-in for any troubled American city - and allowing viewers to empathise with characters at all points on the crime spectrum, from enforcers to victims and even to violent perpetrators. People like Donnie Andrews.

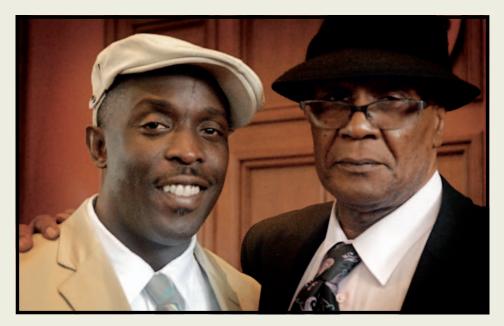
Andrews, who refers to himself as "the real Omar", was a 'stick-up' guy who robbed drug dealers - just like The Wire's famous Omar Little character. The Wire's creator David Simon has said that Andrews is one of the real-life figures on which Omar was based.

"This community creates warriors, because you have to be the toughest guy on the block," says Andrews, sitting in the tidy living room of his two-storey row-house in Baltimore's suburbs. He's dressed in a pin-striped shirt, a black vest, stylish thin-rimmed spectacles and a pair of Air Jordans. On a fish tank in the corner of the room sits a photo of him with his wife Fran Boyd and Simon, all posing with an Emmy Award that the writer won for the mini-series The Corner. That show focused on the life of Boyd, who was a long-time heroin addict before she started communicating with Andrews by phone while he was in prison.

Andrews wasn't supposed to be locked away for so long. Before his conviction, he had worn a wire and gone undercover to help bust the drug lord's organisation. As a result, prosecutors agreed to limit his sentence to 10 years. When it came time for sentencing, however, they reneged.

# **≤** You have to shock them back to reality and hope that it's sooner rather than later, before it's too late. "

After intense lobbying and legal efforts led by Simon and a couple of friendly lawyers, Andrews was finally released in 2005. He married Boyd and went to work as a consultant on The Wire, even taking up an acting role - he played Omar's jailhouse protector and accomplice in seasons four and five. Now he has started a non-profit organisation called Why Murder?, aimed at helping kids who are struggling to survive on Baltimore's mean streets the ones who, without intervention,



4 Until we come together as a people and say enough is enough, everything that's happening is going to continue.

'The real Omar' Donnie Andrews

might turn to murder.

"You have to shock them back to reality and hope that it's sooner rather than later, before it's too late," says Andrews, who says the problems they face are deeply ingrained in society. "Look at the actions of the children - the actions of the children are the actions of the community from which they came." Through Why Murder?, Andrews will offer mentoring programmes, summer camps and jobs training to give youth a chance to avoid some of the mistakes to which he fell prey. He has been inspired by New York's Harlem Children's Zone, which provides support for povertystricken children and their families. "Until we come together as a people and say enough is enough, everything that's happening is going to continue."

He'll have a struggle on his hands. As *The Wire* showed, Baltimore – and especially its underserved inner-city neighbourhoods – has serious problems. Unemployment is rife. In some parts of the city – for example, East Baltimore, Proposition Joe's turf in *The Wire* – unemployment is above 20 percent, and many of the jobs that do exist pay close to minimum wage: US\$7.25 an hour. A quarter of the population lives

in poverty, 10 percent more than the national average, and the number of heroin addicts is estimated to be in the tens of thousands.

You can trace that back to the loss of industry. Baltimore's once-thriving steel and shipping industries attracted hundreds of thousands of people to the city in the first half of the 20th century. But as the country began to look

66 Of the 234 murders in 2010, 82 percent of the victims had criminal records, and 70 percent had at some point been arrested for drug offences.

overseas for steel, those jobs started disappearing. Between 1950 and 1995, 100,000 industrial jobs left Baltimore, and the city lost a third of its population, which now sits at about 635,000.

Then came the 1968 race riots, provoked by the assassination of civil rights hero Martin Luther King.
Baltimore, in which African-Americans make up about 65 percent of the population, was further wounded. The arsons, lootings and killings that came

with the riots destroyed large parts of the inner city, causing residents to flee. It still hasn't fully recovered. Baltimore is home to 16,000 vacant buildings.

To say that the economic opportunities in the poorest neighbourhoods are limited is a joke. For many, the only way to survive is to turn to the decades-old drugs trade – 'The Game' – which has a history of providing for its workers. Three years ago, the Mayor estimated that one city street brought in US\$10 million of drug money a year.

Of course, The Game is also deadly. In a giant, profitable industry that doesn't enjoy the protection of law, disputes are often settled with violence. With close to 35 homicides per 100,000 people, Baltimore has the fourth-highest murder rate in the US. But those killings are selective. Of the 234 murders in 2010, 82 percent of the victims had criminal records, and 70 percent had at some point been arrested for drug offences. Last year brought slightly positive news — the number of murders fell below 200 for the first time since the 1970s.

The War on Drugs, which continues today, has to carry some of the blame. Aggressive policing of strict and punitive drug laws has put thousands of



urban males behind bars, removing them from communities that could use the breadwinners, and consigning generations of children to grow up in single-parent households. Police continue to use aggressive tactics to enforce drug laws, but the trade is as strong as ever.

#### Good cop, bad cop

In The Wire, the Baltimore City Police Department is portrayed as prone to corruption but under-resourced; sometimes incompetent and brash, but in other parts, smart and effective. Statistic-altering bullies in management are contrasted with well meaning officers who want to serve their community.

When Baltimore Police Commissioner Frederick H Bealefeld III last year said that The Wire was a "smear that would take decades to overcome", David Simon responded with a letter to The Baltimore Sun (his former employer) saying the cop boss was focusing on the wrong issue.

"A more lingering problem might be two decades of bad performance by a police agency more obsessed with statistics than substance, with appeasing political leadership rather than seriously addressing the roots of city violence, with shifting blame rather than taking

responsibility," Simon wrote. "That is the police department we depicted in The Wire, give or take our depiction of some conscientious officers and supervisors."

Leigh Maddox is one person with split sympathies. A former captain in the Maryland State Police who retired from the force in 2007 and is now a lawyer who teaches at the University of Maryland School of Law in Baltimore, she's uniquely placed to offer insight into the way drug laws are enforced by

**≤** I never gave anyone 'top trooper' for referring people to treatment. ""

the police. She's also a spokesperson for drug legalisation advocacy group Law Enforcement Against Prohibition.

Maddox, who says the drug trade in Baltimore is "alive and thriving", characterises today's era of policing as "frustration policing".

"Everybody's frustrated because nothing seems to be working and things aren't getting better and poor people are getting poorer and rich people are getting richer and the middle class is shrinking,"

she says. "It's pretty much a mess."

There are many good cops who mean well, but the system is set up to encourage drug arrests, which are often conducted in ways that exacerbate already fraught tensions between police and poor communities. And while drug arrests aren't linked to police pay in Baltimore, they are incentivised in other ways. As a captain on the force, Maddox would hand out employee awards and assign better cars, better schedules and better training to those officers who made the most arrests. More socially conscious approaches went unrecognised. "I never gave anyone 'top trooper' for referring people to treatment."

One also has to consider the types of officers involved in drug policing. "The vast majority of officers that are making street-level drug arrests are probably between the ages of 21 and 26, and they're not being taught anything about collateral consequences of arrest, what an arrest does to someone's life," explains Maddox. "They're just being told, 'Go out and get 'em'."

She believes police should act as peace officers who have a role in the community that reaches beyond law enforcement. She also thinks federal 66 No one institution is going to solve the problems in the city. There's really no one discipline that can explain or explore how solutions can come about in an academic way.



government should allow the state to "thoughtfully regulate and control" drugs, starting with marijuana. "We've got to figure out a way to move drugs from the criminal justice framework into a health framework."

The Wire's depiction of the depressed communities was "spot on", she says. It got a lot of things right, including its depiction of the importance of the underground economy, the level of violence, how addiction destroys lives and how lack of addiction treatment kills. Ultimately, the show has set the city up for a renaissance, she reckons. "Because the community in Baltimore and the United States got an early education in the devastating consequences of our drug laws, it makes us as a community more open to reform."

Not everyone shares that optimism. For Dr Susan Sherman, an epidemiologist at Baltimore's Johns Hopkins University who specialises in the health of marginalised populations, *The Wire* "showed the complexities of how somebody becomes a Stringer Bell and why certain people have to die". It also showed the intractable problems of gang life and how difficult it is to escape those situations. Drug addicts fare no

better. "It's easier to go into jail than drug treatment," says Sherman, before adding, with a fair degree of understatement: "That's mildly flawed."

Even though she has used *The Wire* as a teaching tool in seminars, she doubts it has had much impact on the city's wellbeing. While there have been some advances in the city since the show went off air – some changes in the police ranks; a new, more progressive head of schools; and a new needle exchange programme – the socio-economic and public health problems are as bad as ever. "Where are the schools?" Sherman asks. "Why aren't there health clinics in schools? Where is the job training?"

Baltimore, she says, is essentially a conservative city, and short of a revolution, she doesn't see much hope for wide-scale change. "No one institution is going to solve the problems in the city. There's really no one discipline that can explain or explore how solutions can come about in an academic way."

#### Social justice

One of *The Wire's* most popular characters was Kima Greggs, a marriedto-the-job detective who struggles to balance her personal life with her calling as a cop. Greggs was played by Sonja Sohn, who grew up rough in Virginia and is the product of an African-American father and a Korean mother. Like many of the people depicted on the show, she struggled with drugs and sexual abuse from an early age.

While Sohn has long been social-justice minded, working on *The Wire* prompted her to take action on the street level. Soon after the show wrapped, she set up a non-profit group called ReWired For Change with the aim of supporting at-risk young people in underserved communities. Many of *The Wire's* principal actors – including Andre Royo (Bubbles), Wendell Pierce (Bunk) and Dominic West (McNulty) – are board members for the organisation, which promotes community development, crime prevention and cultural awareness.

"When I came to that town and started doing that job, I was uncomfortable shooting in those neighbourhoods," Sohn says over a Skype call from her home in Los Angeles. "I could see the differences between my life at the present, the childhood I had living in neighbourhoods like that and then looking in at neighbourhoods at that moment – that's when the fire rekindled



**1** I think that *The Wire* is responsible for contributing to government officials in that city paying attention to that population. There were many government officials who did not like the portrayal of city government in that show, and as a result, there has been an effort to change that perception... "

and it was the show that inspired me to make this turn in my life."

The Wire, Sohn reckons, helped shine a light on impoverished communities that were often overlooked by Baltimore's political class. "I think that The Wire is responsible for contributing to government officials in that city paying attention to that population. There were many government officials who did not like the portrayal of city government in that show, and as a result, there has been an effort to change that perception - and I think that any effort that goes into changing that perception can only be good."

That's not to say the show was perfect. The Wire has been criticised for skipping over non-governmental groups that work with under-served communities in Baltimore. "The show does an exceptional job of telling one side of the story," Rob English, organiser for Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development, told *Dissent* magazine, "but it's missing all the pastors, parents and teachers, principals, young people who are doing amazing work, radically trying to change and improve Baltimore."

Sohn sympathises with that view and stresses that people have been doing social work in Baltimore since long before The Wire came into being. "There are just some really good organisations in Baltimore and great people running them that are doing some work there," says Sohn. "That you did not see in the show. People often ask me, 'If there was another season of The Wire, what would you have liked to have focused on?', and I would like it to have focused on people doing social justice work in the city and in the community."

Sohn believes, however, that change for people within these communities ultimately has to come from the individuals themselves exercising their personal power. The drug problems, meanwhile, are just a corollary of deeper-seated issues.

"People seem to think that drugs are the problem," she says. "They're a symptom of the problem. The problem for me is always spiritual in nature, and everything else is second. When I say spiritual, I mean how are you living, and what choices are you making because of and despite the pain in your life?"

She says people in these communities use drugs to insulate themselves from the harsh reality of their lives. "I don't think anything that creates some space and some softness around your pain and suffering is inherently bad."

#### The next episode

Nearly four years since The Wire finished taping, Baltimore is left with most – if not all – of the same problems that formed the backbone of the show: a desperately poor underclass whose people have few economic opportunities to pull themselves out of their collective quandary; a powerful organised crime network that funds itself on the proceeds of selling illegal drugs; one of the highest rates of violence in the US; an underresourced police department; and treatment programmes that reach only a few of the many thousands of residents suffering from drug addiction.

According to one doctor, the city has made some positive steps in implementing harm-reduction measures in the last few years. "It's definitely something people talk more about and look at it as a more viable way of working with people with addiction," says Dr Chris Welsh, an addiction psychiatrist at the University of Maryland Medical Centre. "Ten years ago, people wouldn't have thought about it."

But even as problems are addressed in harm reduction, a new menace has sprung up. Welsh says the city has seen a dramatic surge in the number of hospital patients who need to be treated for drug overdoses. This time, however, it's not heroin or cocaine that are the culprits. Instead, these drugs are of the legal kind – prescription painkillers, stimulants and depressants - and the problem is as acute in the richer, whiter suburbs as it is in the impoverished inner city.

If David Simon ever wanted to do a sixth season of *The Wire*, he certainly wouldn't lack for material.

Hamish McKenzie is a writer based in the US.



# Pub crawl

The outspoken **Richard Boock** takes a look at the supposed alcohol-fuelled Waitangi Day mayhem in London and asks how in the name of Westminster did such a non-event become a case of national shame. HYSTERIA COMES in many forms. On 30 October 1938, a fledgling New York radio station started broadcasting Orson Welles' adaption of *The War of the Worlds*, causing so much alarm that thousands started to flee what they believed was a Martian invasion. Grown men fainted with fear, others donned hastily improvised gas masks; Central Park was over-run by the terrified. Townsfolk shot at a farmer's water tank, mistaking it for an alien tripod.

If you didn't know better a couple of weeks back, you might have been under the misapprehension a similar invasion had just occurred in London. Certainly, the message appeared grim. According to headline news throughout New Zealand, the English capital had been all but sacked, not by little green men on this occasion but by about 4,000 drunken Kiwis, running amuck under the guise of the annual Waitangi Day pub crawl.

You've probably heard the story. Debauchery and mayhem on the streets of London. Assaults on London-based Asians with (shock, horror) snowballs. Pubs being torn apart by plastered Antipodeans. All in all, a dark, shameful day for New Zealand's overseas reputation. Only problem? The entire controversy was an exaggeration; a wild embellishment dreamed up by a pub crawl critic and expat New Zealander named Dylan Clements.

It raised a couple of questions.
For starters, how discerning is the
Kiwi media? You'd have to say not very
on the strength of this effort. Checks,
balances? Don't be silly. All it took
was one attention seeker, a couple of
anonymous social media bleats and next
minute? Front page coverage throughout
the country, blaring bulletins on online
sites, newsflashes on breakfast
television. There was even comment
sought from the Prime Minister.

Second, who cut Dylan Clements's lunch? I mean, seriously, the man who's just become known as New Zealand's Biggest Overseas Embarrassment sounds like he could have done with a pub crawl more than most. Agitating against the event before it even started, complaining to the High Commissioner,



contradicting the evidence of the local police; he seems like a bloke in serious need of a hobby. May I recommend something involving a uniform?

Even more amusing has been Clements's reaction since realising he's made an arse of himself. Apparently feels like he's been "crucified" for speaking his mind, poor chap. You can just imagine the anguish he must be going through. Then again, maybe if he hadn't gone to the trouble of contacting The New Zealand Herald and The Dominion Post newspapers and agitating for nationwide attention, he wouldn't be feeling quite so exposed.

But just on that, doesn't it make you laugh when someone feels a need to preface their comments with a philosophical declaration? You know the type: "I'm not sexist, but (enter a completely chauvinistic observation)," or "I'm not a racist, but (add an offensive suggestion about Asians)." Clements's version? He assured us he wasn't a "prude" before launching into a lament that left him sounding like a cross

between Patricia Bartlett and that Family First pikelet Bob McCoskrie.

Now, of course, he's claiming he's been misunderstood. Faced with compelling evidence his account has been over-egged (including a statement from Westminster police that the annual pub crawl remains a favourite assignment for officers), he's tried to change his story. Forget the allegations of misbehaviour; the latest spin is that he only ever wanted more toilets and rubbish bins. So much for having the courage of your convictions.

A disclaimer here. Let me be the first to admit that the idea of joining a few thousand Kiwis on a drunken pub crawl through London is about as close as you can get to my own custom-made nightmare. I'm as averse to public pissing and chundering as the next person. But let's keep some perspective. About 4,000 people on a pub crawl? No reports of police concern, arrests, injuries nor even negative coverage in the English media? Just one knob and a couple of random tweets?

You have to admit, it does raise again

66 And so much for the idea of a responsible media. In many ways, it highlights why so many people are moving away from the traditional flagships in favour of receiving their news via social media and citizen-journalist websites.

the question of how this nonsense could ever qualify for the front pages of *The New Zealand Herald, The Dominion Post* and the *The Christchurch Press*. I mean, to be fair to Clements, mainstream newspapers are usually turning away hundreds of these sort of oddball accusations and complaints on a daily basis. He had no reason to believe he'd be taken so seriously. In his wildest dreams, he's probably never been taken so seriously.

And so much for the idea of a responsible media. In many ways, it highlights why so many people are moving away from the traditional flagships in favour of receiving their news via social media and citizen-journalist websites. As many of those on the pub crawl were quick to point out on Twitter and Facebook et al., while some of Clements's observations were exaggerated, others were verging on make-believe. Almost all who commented were incensed at the misinformation.

Snowball attack? A remarkable feat, really, considering it didn't start snowing in London until about 4 hours

after the end of the pub crawl. Wrecking a bar and "viciously" abusing a publican? A quick check might have located the pub's bar manager, who described the event as "a great day" in which the only problem was a fire alarm being set off. And so it continued. For every claim made by Clements, there was an equal and opposite counterclaim, often from official sources.

It's a bit scary, really. There used to be a time when our most prominent media organisations would follow a few fundamental guidelines in their newsgathering techniques. Ancient stuff, such as securing at least two reliable sources before even thinking of publishing. But these guys take the cake; not only portraying one bloke's highly subjective meanderings as fact, but judging them more credible and influential than police reports to the contrary.

Makes you wonder who they'll expect us to believe next. Maybe the "Naturally, I finished my set," guy?

Richard Boock is a sports and media commentator.

## **Quotes of Substance**

# **▲▲** This is an outrageous slur ... of course I've taken drugs. **▼**

**Boris Johnson**, Mayor of London, responding to a contemporary who said Johnson had never taken drugs.

# **11** Fact is, quitting smoking is hard. Believe me, I know. **7**

Ex-smoker **President Barack Obama** gets personal in the video for the Great American Smokeout aimed at helping some of America's 46 million smokers stop.

**16** High-IQ individuals have also been shown to score highly on tests of stimulation seeking and openness to experience. It could be that illegal drugs are better at fulfilling a desire for novelty and stimulation. **9** 

Researchers attempt to offer an explanation after finding children with high IQs are more likely to experiment with drugs as teenagers and adults than their peers.

ceremony being over, the marriage was kiboshed by the behaviour of certain people in my husband's life. And also by a bit of a wild ride I took us on looking for a bit of a smoke of weed for me wedding night, as I don't drink.

Sinead O'Connor explains how it didn't take long to realise her fourth marriage wasn't going to last. I guess that's what happens when you go searching for marijuana hours after marrying someone who works as a counsellor for people with addiction problems.

continued on page 13 >

# Time for a Pacific focus



The Pacific region is an important gateway for drugs into New Zealand and Australia. It is also an emerging market for drug dealers. **Robert Ali** argues that we need to focus on the Pacific to effectively address drug and alcohol issues.

IT IS not unusual today to see media reports and public announcements on new Asia-Pacific region initiatives, often in the areas of security, refugees, climate change and health.

However, when you look into the detail of many of these initiatives, there is often little if any focus on Pacific Island countries and territories. This is especially the case for health and, in particular, drug and alcohol issues. This begs the question as to why these regions are so often linked together when they have markedly different drug and alcohol profiles and needs. The coupling together of these regions seems to ignore the substantial population and economic size of the Asian region

compared to the Pacific region.

In 2003, the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) was asked by the Prime Minister to establish a committee that focused on the drug issues and needs affecting the Asia-Pacific region. Thus the ANCD Asia-Pacific Drug Issues Committee (APDIC) was formed with a broad range of experts in Australia. The membership has changed, but the focus of the committee has remained unchanged in assisting the Australian Government, regional colleagues, countries and international organisations to better understand and address drug issues. An early decision of APDIC in response to the findings of its Asia-Pacific

Situational Analysis on Illicit Drug Issues was to acknowledge that the Asian and Pacific regions require distinct and separate approaches. Of course, within these regions, work is also needed to provide country-specific advice, given the heterogeneous nature of the countries in question.

The flagship Pacific project for APDIC is the Pacific Drug and Alcohol Research Network (PDARN), which is managed in partnership with the Burnet Institute. This is a unique and muchneeded network for the Pacific. Since 2005, key personnel from a range of Pacific Island countries and territories have come together annually to share and discuss what is happening at a country level and regionally in regard to drug and alcohol research, information, policy and programmes. With the assistance of international agencies such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Smart Program, Australian government departments, Fiji School of Medicine, University of the South Pacific, Massey University and Auckland University, a strong Pacific support network has developed.

Some may ask why the drug and alcohol issues in such a small part of the world in population terms should matter. The answer lies firstly in geopolitical spheres, as the Pacific Island countries and territories are our closest neighbours and provide a geographic link between Australia and New Zealand. The Pacific also consists of many economically and resource underdeveloped nations with young populations. Alcohol and other drugs can and do have a direct impact on the health, social and economic development of these countries. In the case of illicit drugs, there is growing evidence of Pacific Island countries and territories being targeted by organised crime as transit points for shipments to Australia and New Zealand. There are also examples of organised crime becoming involved in production of illicit drugs in the region due to the under-developed and weak governance structures that can exist.

More importantly, Australia and New Zealand have the expertise for responding to alcohol and other drug harms, as well as the capacity to assist our nearest neighbours in the development of local responses. Many of their identified harms are similar to ours, affecting individuals, families and communities. There is also an obligation for our relatively wealthy countries to assist when one considers the extent of influence and, in some cases, very profitable industries, including alcohol, that we operate in the region.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done in the Pacific region if countries are to effectively address the drug and alcohol issues that affect them today. A critical issue often discussed at PDARN meetings is the need to fund further research into the health and social impact of alcohol and other drugs as well as improved collection and collation of data, particularly in relation to hospital admissions, to properly inform policy decisions.

Some of the other issues that were canvassed and discussed at PDARN's most recent meeting in Fiji included the high levels of youth unemployment as a cause of increased alcohol consumption among young people; an increase in alcohol-related domestic violence and family breakdowns; an increase in alcohol-related road traffic accidents; an increase in high-risk behaviours due to intoxication including unsafe sexual activity with the risk of sexually transmitted infections and potentially HIV; and the lack of alcohol and other drug treatment facilities.

Perhaps the main issue facing Australia and New Zealand governments and, in particular, AusAID and NZAID is whether they can recognise and respond to the growing evidence of the links between development and drug and alcohol issues. To underestimate the importance of that link or the contribution we can make would be profoundly regrettable.

Robert Ali is an Executive Member of the ANCD and Chair of its Asia-Pacific Drug Issues Committee.

## **Quotes of Substance**

**a.6** It's a nationwide problem and a reflection of society. The more [drugs] that are used in society, the more we are going to see them in schools. **7.7** 

Post Primary Teachers' Association Junior Vice President **Doug Clark** says the problem of drug use in schools is a reflection of a nationwide issue.

# **11** I noticed also that Mr Smith's eyes were watery, and I asked him to exit the vehicle, which he did. **77**

A police officer recounts pulling over **John Andrew Smith,** a Georgian Republican and sponsor of a Bill that would require random drug testing for citizens on public assistance.

# **66** Who cares if I have or haven't got balls? At the end of the day, a home brew is a home brew. **99**

The aptly named **Rachel Beer** speaks out after being told her entry into a Queenstown beer brewing competition wouldn't be judged because she was a woman.

# **16** The already shaky case for the anti-ageing powers of resveratrol is looking a little shakier.

**Scott Hensley** at National Public Radio in the US reports scientists are now calling into question some of red wine's purported health benefits.

**Dipak K Das**, a top researcher from the University of Connecticut, has been fired for allegedly fabricating data published in 11 scientific journals and cited frequently in the mainstream media.

continued on page 24 >

# Should needle exchange programmes be introduced into prisons?

#### The case against

PRISON NSPs don't minimise harm; they only create greater potential for it. How can making it easier for prisoners to take drugs do anything other than increase drug use? Surely the best way to overcome dependence is stop using, and incarceration should be a time when prisoners are forced to face their addictions and seek help. Making drug use a more comfortable prison pastime does nothing to encourage that.

Similarly, these programmes are great for introducing inmates to drugs. If the tools for getting high are readily available, the likelihood of first-time use behind bars is only increased.

And then there's the question of moral responsibility. Injecting drug use is

illegal. Does that mean a prison guard who lets an inmate use the NSP becomes complicit to illegal activity? The point may be up for discussion, but prison guards should not have to face such a moral quandary as part of their everyday work. Prison NSPs also send out conflicting messages to inmates. When they are brought to prison, they are extensively searched for drug paraphernalia. Family and friends who visit are also subjected to searches. Once inside, however, prisoners are freely given the very items they were searched for. This makes little sense and is exactly what it appears to be – authorities condoning illegal drug use. But one of the biggest concerns is the threat to safety. Introducing NSPs to prison puts a powerful weapon into the wrong hands. Serious damage can be done with a

sharp syringe, and many inmates and guards fear they will be used as weapons. Prison guards say there are plenty of instances where they have been pricked, and in 1997, one Australian officer died after being deliberately stabbed with a needle full of HIV-positive blood.

Finally, there are better ways to minimise harm from blood-borne diseases in prison than by introducing NSPs. For example, for every syringe found in Canberra's Alexander Maconochie Centre, four illicit tattoo guns, which are also capable of transmitting infections, are discovered. Tackling that issue would reduce infections a whole lot quicker and be much more effective than giving inmates needles and telling them their drug use is perfectly acceptable.



#### The case for

NSPs in prisons are all about protecting drug-using prisoners who have the same basic human right to harm minimisation as anyone else. It eliminates needle sharing, which is one of the most efficient ways of transferring blood-borne diseases. One Australian ex-prisoner reported seeing the same needle shared throughout an entire unit for six months, amounting to an incredible risk. But internationally, no prison running an NSP has reported a new contraction of HIV, which makes it pretty clear it works.

Secondly, NSPs in prisons around the world have been shown to reduce drug use and increase referrals to substance abuse treatment. Regular contact with health professionals who administer the needles gives inmates more opportunities to seek help and find a way past their addiction – and it seems they are taking them.

Thirdly, NSPs create a safer prison environment. Syringes are hard to come by, so inmates tend to hide them well. Any guard searching a cell is very much at risk of accidentally pricking themselves with a potentially infected needle. And World Health Organization evidence reveals there have been exactly zero incidents of prisoners using syringes as weapons in prisons with NSPs, so fears that more syringes in prisoner hands will put guards at risk are groundless.

NSPs also contribute to a safer environment outside prison. The average sentence is just six months – plenty of time to get inside, get infected and get back out again to share your new disease with your family, friends and community. NSPs in prisons would markedly reduce this risk to us all.

Lastly, prison NSPs are extremely cost-effective. Royal Australasian College of Physicians estimates are that the \$150 million or so invested in NSPs worldwide has saved between \$2.4 and \$7.7 billion based on the reduced rates of contracted infections. There's no reason to think that a savings ratio of around 20 to one wouldn't also apply to prisons.

It's time to stop being squeamish, which puts us all in danger. No one likes the thought of prisoners shooting up, but the fact is, they are going to, and they will cause a lot less harm to all concerned if we can help them do it cleanly.

Those on the harm-reduction front are vocal in their support for the idea, but prison guards and their unions are not. They've threatened to boycott prison NSPs and strike or resign if they go ahead.

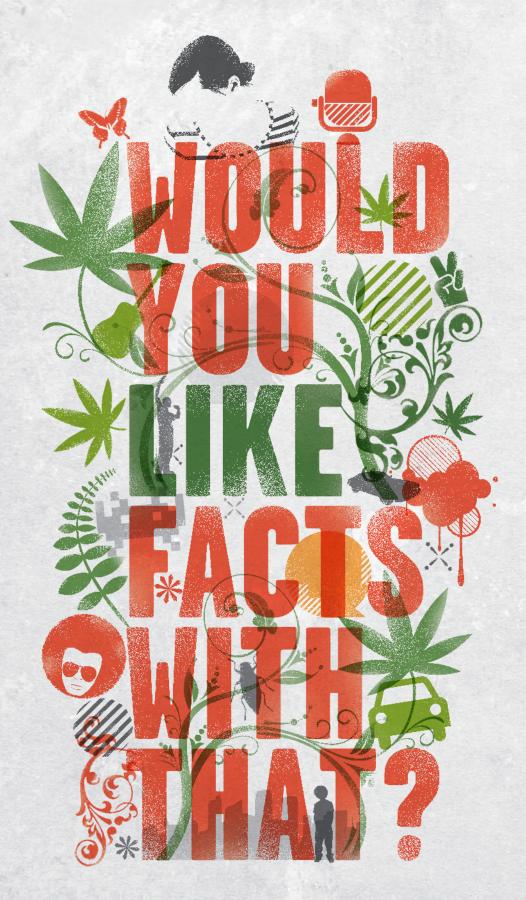
In this edition of Viewpoints, we provide arguments for and against yet another contentious issue.



## You decide

Should needle exchange programmes be introduced into prisons?

Vote now at www.drugfoundation.org.nz/viewpoints.





**DRUG DRIVING ISN'T A PROBLEM** 



**NEARLY HALF OF** RIVERS KILLED ON **UR ROADS ARE** ALCOHOL, OTHER DRUGS OR BOTH.

Things can go very wrong for people who drive after taking drugs. Feeling unreal may be fine at times, but when you're behind the wheel, you need to be in the real world.

There are some common myths about drug use and driving. Many people believe these myths when they're buzzed, but there is a lot of research that shows reality is very different.



# **DRUG DRIVING AND THE LAW**

- The Land Transport Amendment Act 2009 (LTAA) came into force on 1 November of that year. It allows police to better detect drug drivers and charge them with the offence of 'driving while impaired and with blood that contains evidence of use of a controlled drug or prescription medicine'.
- To be charged with a drug-driving offence, the officer must first have good cause to suspect the driver is impaired by a drug, the driver must then unsatisfactorily complete the compulsory impairment test (CIT), and finally, a drug or drugs must then be detected in the driver's blood sample.
- 479 CITs were carried out in the first 21 months of the new law.
- 63 drivers passed the test, 416 could not satisfactorily complete it.
- Of the 416 drivers who failed the CIT, 395 (95%) re turned positive blood tests for a qualifying dr ug or drugs.
- · The most commonly detected drug was THC (the active ingredient in cannabis), with 276 positive samples.
- 82 samples contained stimulants such as methamphetamine and ecstasy.
- Sedatives (either prescribed or illicit) were detected in 45 samples.
- Opioids (either prescribed or illicit) were detected in 39 samples.

# DRIVINGHIGH-ORG-NZ

Order Driving High booklets and posters from us by emailing facts@drivinghigh.org.nz.



THE EVIDENCE

OVER HALF OF ALL PARTY-DRUG USERS THINK THAT BEING HIGH MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO THEIR DRIVING ARIUTY

**58%** 

58% OF CANNABIS DRIVERS THINK THAT BEING STONED MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO THEIR DRIVING ABILITY.



USERS

NEARLY HALF OF TWO-THIRDS OF CANNABIS

AND A QUARTER OF FCSTASY USERS

METHAMPHETAMINE USERS

#### REPORT DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE.

THE MORE **ACTIVE THC** A DRIVER HAS IN THEIR SYSTEM, THE MORE LIKELY THEY ARE TO CAUSE A CRASH.

A THIRD OF ECSTASY USERS HAVE RECENTLY MADE THE DECISION NOT TO DRIVE AFTER TAKING ECSTASY.

59% OF CANNABIS USERS SAY THEY WILL BE LIKELY TO DRIVE UNDER THE INFLUENCE IN THE NEXT YEAR.

# ALAC's new low-risk drinking guidelines

The Alcohol Advisory Council (ALAC) has recently reviewed its low-risk drinking advice. Here, ALAC CEO **Gerard Vaughan** outlines the process and looks at some of the common questions around such advice. **Doug Sellman** from the National Addiction Centre takes a critical look at the review and asks if ALAC's new guidelines will reduce alcohol-related harm.



**Gerard Vaughan** 

SINCE 1994, our advice on low-risk drinking has been based on ALAC's 'Upper limits for responsible drinking' that was developed by an expert group consisting of alcohol producers, health promoters and problem intervention and treatment workers using a consensus approach. Since that time, considerable new evidence has emerged around the risks associated with alcohol consumption. There has also been a corresponding change to advice in comparable jurisdictions such as Australia and Canada, which has included both countries revising downwards their low-risk drinking levels. As an advisory organisation set up by legislation to provide the best evidence-based advice on the risks associated with alcohol, our Council decided to relook at our advice.

The review group consisted of an ALAC project group and ALAC Council experts. The group's conclusions were based on the most current and best available scientific research and

evidence using the primary resource material from the Canadian and Australian reviews. Both the Australian and Canadian guidelines and advice were developed by a committee of experts, informed by research literature reviews and studies, peer reviewed by international experts and informed by consultation. We also consulted with the

For the first time, our advice includes daily limits as well as the traditional per-occasion and weekly consumption levels.

international experts involved in both these countries' reviews.

Our advice around children and young people under 18 years also drew on the UK Department of Health's guidance document

So what's different? For the first time, our advice includes daily limits



as well as the traditional per-occasion and weekly consumption levels. Daily limits were introduced to reduce the lifetime risk of harm from alcoholrelated disease or injury.

We have reduced the men's peroccasion limit by one standard drink, and the recommended weekly limits for both men and women have also changed (see box for new advice). Also for the first time, we have introduced a suggested age limit for young people. This advice is based on an assessment of the potential harms of alcohol for young people, as well as a range of epidemiological research. The research shows that drinkers under the age of 15 years are much more likely than older drinkers to undertake risky or antisocial behaviour connected with their drinking and alcohol may adversely affect brain development and lead to alcohol-related problems in later life. ■

Our revised drinking advice is now available on the ALAC website – www.alac.org.nz.

## ALAC's low-risk drinking advice

# Reduce your long-term health risks by drinking no more than:

- Two standard drinks a day for women and no more than 10 standard drinks a week
- Three standard drinks a day for men and no more than 15 standard drinks a week.

# Have at least two non-drinking days every week.

Reduce your risk of injury on a single occasion of drinking by drinking no more than:

- Four standard drinks for women on any single occasion
- Five standard drinks for men on any single occasion.

# Advice for pregnant women or those planning to get pregnant

No alcohol.

There is no known safe level of alcohol use at any stage of pregnancy.

# Advice for parents of children and young people under 18 years

For children and young people under 18 years, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

- Those under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking alcohol, and not drinking in this age group is especially important.
- For young people aged 15 to 17 years, the safest option is to delay drinking for as long as possible.

If 15 to 17 year olds do drink alcohol, they should be supervised, drink infrequently and at levels usually below and never exceeding the adult daily limits.

ALAC'S NEW LOW-RISK DRINKING GUIDELINES

Thank goodness the new ALAC guidelines have dropped the moralistic terminology of 'responsible drinking' and opted instead for health-focused 'low-risk' drinking guidelines.

# A critical review



Doug Sellman

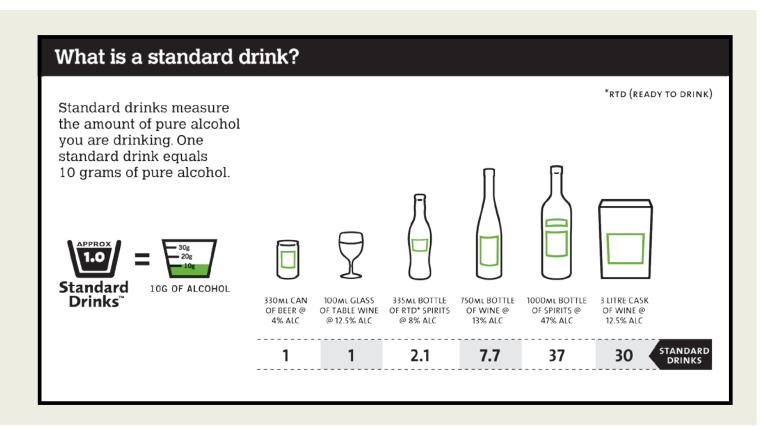
ALAC'S new drinking guidelines are in essence 15/5 and 10/4 for men and women respectively. These replace the upper limits for responsible drinking of 21/6 and 14/4 that have been in circulation for the past 18 years.

'15/5' refers to the number of standard drinks per week/standard drinks per occasion for men and '10/4' for women who are not pregnant or planning to become pregnant. The advice of two non-drinking days a week has been retained.

A standard drink in New Zealand is the same as in Australia (but not Canada) – 10 grams of pure ethanol (which is 12.7ml (millilitres) of pure ethanol). Grams are a measure of weight, and millilitres are a measure of volume. Canada and Australia have both undergone reviews of their drinking guidelines recently, and ALAC took note of each.

But putting drinking guidelines aside for a moment, when you look at the variety of definitions of what a standard drink is across various countries, you come face to face with a dog's breakfast, from 6 grams of pure ethanol in Austria to 19.75 grams in Japan. Canada's standard drink is 13.6 grams. Other countries that define a standard drink like New Zealand and Australia do, as 10 grams of pure ethanol, include Ireland, Italy, Poland and Spain. The UK's definition is 7.9 grams which translates into 10mls of pure ethanol, and the USA is close to Canada's at 14 grams.

Thank goodness the new ALAC guidelines have dropped the moralistic terminology of 'responsible drinking' and opted instead for health-focused 'low-risk' drinking guidelines. This is a major step forward in advancing rational thinking about how much to dose ourselves with our favourite recreational drug and should end the use of other unhelpful 'humpty dumpty' descriptions of low-level drinking such as 'moderate drinking' and 'social drinking'. It also hopefully trumps the term 'safe drinking' because there is no such thing as 'safe drinking', in the same way there is no such thing as 'safe smoking'. Every alcoholic drink increases the risk of



cancer (albeit at a very low level) in the same way that every cigarette does.

Low-risk drinking was defined in the Australian review as the level of drinking associated with a one-in-a-hundred chance of dying from an alcohol-related event over a lifetime. This was estimated to be close to two standard drinks per day for both men and women (contrasting with about five cigarettes per week for tobacco-related death). The new ALAC guidelines for reducing long-term health risks reflect this low level in the weekly guideline of 15 standard drinks for men and 10 standard drinks for women.

The Australian 'low-risk' guidelines don't differentiate between men and women because data indicates that, for the majority of alcohol-related diseases, there is very little difference between men and women's risk at low levels of alcohol use. They argue that the slightly increased long-term risk of alcohol in women is offset by the higher risk of short-term injury in men at the same low doses.

But ALAC felt it was important to differentiate between men and women (like the Canadians) because, if the low-risk guideline made no gender differentiation, heavier-drinking women might not realise their drinking was putting them at even higher risk than their heavier-drinking men counterparts. I'm not particularly convinced by this argument and think an important clinical opportunity may be lost as a result.

The Australian guideline neatly translates into '14/4' for both men and women in terms of standard drinks per week and standard drinks per occasion, whereas the new ALAC guideline is '15/5' for men and '10/4' for non-pregnant women. This is not nearly as memorable as something like '14/4' for both.

Professor Sally Casswell has been sceptical of the utility of population-based drinking guidelines for a long time, primarily because they are part of ineffective population-based educational approaches beloved of the alcohol

industry and certain governments. We should all join Professor Casswell in this scepticism. She warns that drinking guidelines could be used as a justification for not taking action on the drinking environment and be a distraction from the things that actually do work to reduce alcohol-related harm. What works is raising the price of alcohol and age of purchase, reducing alcohol accessibility and marketing and increasing drink-driving limits, plus increasing treatment opportunities for heavy drinkers. These are the key elements of the 5+ evidence-based solution, and the way to go for influencing New Zealand's 700,000+ heavy drinkers to down-regulate their drinking, not wasting money providing general broad-based public education.

The main purpose of having drinking guidelines then is in clinical settings as part of brief assessment and intervention sessions. Widespread clinical use will have a significant impact on heavy drinking and therefore alcohol-related harm, but it needs practitioners

A key aspect of a brief intervention is comparing the person's current drinking in standard drinks with the drinking guideline and inviting comment. If the practitioner can't remember the guideline, the intervention loses potency and is unlikely to be successful.

everywhere, especially in primary care, to be involved. A key aspect of a brief intervention is comparing the person's current drinking in standard drinks with the drinking guideline and inviting comment. If the practitioner can't remember the guideline, the intervention loses potency and is unlikely to be successful. Hesitancy and waffle on the part of the practitioner will tend to translate into maintaining the person's heavy drinking. This is why a simple and easily remembered, gender-neutral guideline such as '14/4' or perhaps '12/4' is preferable.

There is a special edition of the journal *Drug and Alcohol Review* being published next month on the topic of drinking guidelines, co-edited by key figures in the Australian and Canadian reviews, including a paper by Professor Casswell. Let's wait and see what is revealed there before concluding what a pragmatic drinking guideline for clinical use might best be.

Finally, as well as being very clear there is no acceptable drinking level for pregnant women, the new ALAC guidelines provide drinking advice for those aged under 18 years. While the guideline states that those under 15 years shouldn't drink any alcohol at all, the advice for 15–17 year olds is less clear, no doubt reflecting our nation's ambivalence about alcohol use in this age group.

Doug Sellman is
Director of the National Addiction Centre.



1

# Why is the advice different for men and women?

The 2009 Australian guidelines have the same limits for both men and women. ALAC's drinking advice, like the Canadian guidelines, have different limits for men and women. These gender differences reflect the impact of alcohol on women, due to factors such as body size and composition, ability to metabolise alcohol and the higher risk of developing a range of health conditions.

2.

This advice suggests a daily limit of up to two standards drinks for women and up three standard drinks for men. Surely that equates to weekly limits of 14 (women) and 21 (men) rather than the 10 and 15 suggested?

No. The advice also emphasises at least 2 alcohol-free days a week.

3

# Isn't such advice nanny-state or wowserism?

Not true. This advice is exactly as the name suggests – advice. They clearly emphasise that drinking is a personal choice; if you do choose to drink, this advice is here to help you reduce your risk of alcohol-related harm.

4

# Can you save your weekly limit to use on the weekend?

No. This advice clearly provides separate daily and weekly limits with at least a couple of non-drinking days. The weekly limit of 10 drinks for women and 15 drinks for men is not for saving up for a weekend party.

**5**.

# How does the per-occasion relate to the daily advice?

The per-occasion advice relates to the risk of injury on that drinking occasion. It is for a special one-off event.

Consumption levels should still remain below weekly limits.

6

# Do you really think young people will take any notice?

Many parents are seeking advice on when they should expose their children to alcohol and what the risks are. This advice is primarily directed at parents, caregivers and others who can influence the decisions of young people rather than young people themselves.

7.

# So if I stick to these levels I will have no problems?

This advice is low risk. It is not no risk or safe. The universal advice is directed at healthy adults aged 18 and over. A population approach overlooks the fact that that there is significant variability in biological response to alcohol. There are a range of factors that can affect an individual's risk such as sex, body size and composition, age, experience of drinking, speed of drinking, genetics and nutrition.



There are lies, damned lies, and the expensive public relations of Big Tobacco. **Keith Ng** uncovers how Big Tobacco is astroturfing in New Zealand and calls out the media for forgetting about it.

IN MAY 2010, Rory McKinnon and I broke the story that Glenn Inwood, a lobbyist for Japanese whaling, was running an astroturfing campaign for Imperial Tobacco in New Zealand. Inwood operated a group called the Association of Community Retailers (ACR), which claimed to represent small retailers, but was in fact bankrolled by Big Tobacco to fight tobacco regulation and taxes (among, ominously, other things).

Imperial Tobacco admitted to a Select Committee that they paid Inwood to do this, and this fact was widely reported.

We were mightily pleased with ourselves, but the ACR continued to put out press releases as if nothing had happened. I thought Glenn Inwood was just doing it to save face. I mean, why would you continue to spend money on an organisation that was thoroughly exposed as a fake? It's not like our

journalistic establishment would just forget that the press release supposedly from Murray of Murray's Barbershop and Beauty Salon in Timaru is actually from a professional PR company paid for by Big Tobacco. Um, right?

Since our original story (and excluding those original stories on Inwood and Imperial Tobacco's admission), 36 stories were published in mainstream media that mentioned the ACR or one of its spokespersons.

**16** The confession became revelation, then accusation, then speculation, then nothing. **7.7** 

Eight of these were credited to NZPA. After writing about Imperial Tobacco's admission, they forgot about it a month later and started doing copy-paste jobs with ACR press releases. And when they

#### **Quotes of Substance**

#### **▲▲** She was some slut then. **୭**

After being prescribed medicinal marijuana, Joan Rivers admits she hasn't smoked pot since the "dark ages," when she would get high with Betty White.

# **1 1** don't know if it's ever been tested in court, but wouldn't even passing a joint around a room constitute a series of acts of 'supply'? ">"

Guardian journalist Leo Benedictus argues sentences for drug offences need to better reflect the offender's intentions

**▲** It was there and available. I was stressed, and it seemed safer than alcohol. You're not going to get a DWI while flying in the dental chair, so it was a drug of opportunity. ""

Dr Dennis Bohlin, a Manhattan dentist and an expert on addiction in medical professionals, talks about being a former nitrous-oxide addict.

## **66** I've had a few close calls before, but I've never been refused service. 77

Blenheim's John Fast, who walks with a limp because of back surgery, says he was discriminated against when Countdown staff refused to sell him alcohol because they believed he was drunk.

# people in their 40s and 50s staggering around and trying to relive their youth. It wasn't pretty. 77

A member of the crowd at The Class of '81 event at Villa Maria Estate near Auckland on the unruly older crowd who forced the bar to be shut an hour early.

didn't do copy-paste jobs, it was even worse. In one story on alcohol licensing, they took the ACR press release and went back to ACR for more comment so they could flesh out a 400-word story with no opposing voice and no mention of ACR's backers.

Then, in September 2010, news broke that Australian Big Tobacco spent \$6m on an astroturfing group called the Alliance of Australian Retailers. This reminded NZPA that the same thing happened here. The wording they used in that story was "[the ACR] was also revealed to have received support from the tobacco industry".

In their 3 November story, it was watered down to "the ACR has faced accusations of being a front for tobacco companies. It has said no tobacco company has a say in its public and political strategy of the ACR."

In their 4 November story: "There has been speculation about links between the ACR and the tobacco industry." And then they were simply "retailers".

The confession became revelation, then accusation, then speculation, then nothing. The fact that Imperial Tobacco said they paid a PR company to run this group simply faded from NZPA's institutional memory and ceased to be fact. Though to be fair to the late NZPA, no other organisation even mentioned the Imperial Tobacco/Inwood link since the original story.

And that was the last time the Imperial Tobacco/Inwood link was mentioned. There have been 18 stories about the ACR since 4 November. For all intents and purposes, the ACR was once

again a genuine grassroots group of community retailers.

Radio New Zealand needs to cop some flak too. Their bulletins desk also churned out eight stories on the ACR during this period, three of them lifted straight out of ACR's press releases. Their saving grace was that they were short.

The most dishonourable mention goes to *The Timaru Herald*, which ran six ACR stories during this time. It's no

# **66** Gibson is often quoted in The Timaru Herald as a local tobacconist, even as he recites his ACR lines. ""

coincidence that one of the ACR's founders, Murray Gibson, is based in Timaru – just a block down from *The* Timaru Herald. Gibson is often quoted in The Timaru Herald as a local tobacconist, even as he recites his ACR lines. It's not like they didn't know: they ran a story that was a lengthy denial from Gibson about the Imperial Tobacco links after Imperial Tobacco's admissions. After this story ran on the Public Address blog, then ran another denial from Gibson.

Staggeringly, his defence was, "We [ACR] don't need any money. We didn't pay Mr Inwood; we've never paid him at any time ... We've only received advice from him." So, in response to the accusation that he is the mouthpiece for Big Tobacco, he responded that he's never paid the guy Big Tobacco has admitted to paying and only receives

"advice" from them.

Inwood's firm is a PR firm. It's just not plausible that the "support" Imperial Tobacco is paying for is anything but PR. It's not plausible that this steady stream of press releases is written by someone who doesn't do it for a living. It's not plausible that Richard Green, Murray Gibson, Ashok Darji and Dipal Desai all have perfect grammar, write to 400-word limits in 50-word paragraphs, quote themselves in news style and use the Oxford comma.

The words that come out of the ACR are clearly written by a PR firm paid for by a tobacco company for the purposes of fighting tobacco control laws for the benefit of that tobacco company. To report their words as "retailers say" is fundamentally a lie.

It's not a coincidence that, just like in the rest of the world, the ACR main messages are that "tobacco control won't stop smoking" and "tobacco taxes = organised crime". It all comes from the same playbook.

And it's not a coincidence that they just happen to be in small towns. Using small-town shop owners is a deliberate strategy that's been used in the UK, Australia and America. It allows them to easily build relationships with local media who range from soft to downright useless. But their exposure there sets them up as good 'talent', which then allows them to go on national media (like TVNZ's *Breakfast* on 15 July 2011) as good honest country folk.

While this makes the New Zealand media look bad, here's the bad news: even the BBC does it. Last year, *BBC* 

Business interviewed Debbie Corris, owner of a small tobacconist shop in Whitstable, a seaside town in north-east Kent. On her Twitter feed, she is self-described as: "Owner and manager of an independent family-owned shop. As well as running the business with my brother I campaign on small business-related issues."

The UK Tobacco Retailers Alliance (TRA) also has a Twitter feed: Debbie

# **16** The words that come out of the ACR are clearly written by a PR firm paid for by a tobacco company. ♥♥

Corris's. She is TRA's main channel. And who is TRA? No prizes for guessing: "The Tobacco Retailers Alliance is funded by the Tobacco Manufacturers' Association (TMA), which means we can offer a free membership to all independent retailers who sell tobacco, and we campaign on issues of relevance to both their businesses and to the industry."

Unlike the ACR, they're pretty transparent about being wholly funded by Big Tobacco. Yet, even the BBC didn't bother to Google her name or they made a decision similar to *The Timaru Herald's*.

When I first did this story, I was caught up with the subterfuge aspect. We only had the story because Inwood used his own PO box for the ACR. Without it, they could tell whatever lies they wanted, and we couldn't have known – let alone proved – anything. It seemed like quite a problem, the idea

that so much of our news comes from groups that could be hiding all kinds of interests and agendas.

Turns out, the problem isn't "What are they hiding?", but "Does anyone care?"

What this has shown is that, even when the agenda is Big Tobacco's, even when the connection is the second result on a Google search, even when their own organisation has reported on it, even when it's stated plainly on their website, even then, the PR industry can get their stories printed with no scrutiny. It's a complete and utter rout. You know, some of my best friends are journalists. And I like to think that they are the better ones. They always complain that they're under pressure and underresourced and that this sort of shit slips through the cracks. I'm sure it's true, but here we are, at the point where our biggest news organisations run stories without spending 10 seconds on a Google search or asking if something makes any goddamn sense.

If Richard Green says the tobacco displays ban will cost him \$10k for shelves, they run it. If Richard Green says the tobacco displays ban will cost him \$27k for shelves, they run it.

How many of the facts reported in our media are this dodgy? And if there is so much that we can't trust – and we can't distinguish between what can and cannot be trusted – at what point should we simply give up on them?

Keith Ng is a writer based in Wellington, and writes the On Point blog on www.publicaddress.net.

# *>*

## Fairfield College 'ecstasy' was BZP



THE drug that put students from Hamilton's Fairfield College in hospital late in 2011 was the class C drug BZP – not the class B drug ecstasy as had been suspected.

Six girls aged 13 to 15 were admitted to Waikato Hospital after taking the pills and were described by a nurse as "highly excitable" and acting "crazy".

The small, round pink pills with a bird stamped on them have been analysed by Environmental Science and Research.

Announcing the results of the analysis, police said they had charged a 38-year-old woman with possession of a class C controlled drug.

The woman's daughter, who is believed to have taken the drugs to school, was referred to Youth Aid, with more referrals to Youth Aid expected as the investigation continues.

# Opioid dependents counted

A RECENT New Zealand study published in the *International Journal of Drug Policy* has determined greater effort needs to be made to treat users' dependencies on opioids.

Opioid users were recruited from opioid substitution treatment (OST) services and dedicated needle exchanges in Auckland, Tauranga and Christchurch. Participants estimated the number of people they knew personally who were using opioids and who were and weren't receiving OST. From these estimates, a multiplier was applied to the known number receiving OST in New Zealand to arrive at the total population estimate.

The study suggests the total opioid-dependent population in New Zealand to be 9,142, of which half are not receiving treatment.

The results were lower than previous less-robust estimates, but still represented a substantial level of unmet need. It was determined that greater effort needs to be made to close this treatment gap.

# Antipodeans world leaders in drug use

GETTING high Downunder is more common than anywhere else in the world, according to new research. It seems Kiwis and Aussies have higher levels of marijuana and amphetamine use than any other region.

The findings indicate up to 14.8 percent of Oceania's population aged between 15 and 64 used cannabis in 2009, while up to 2.8 percent used amphetamines.

The Americas averaged about 7 percent, with North America on 10 percent.

Globally, cannabis was found to be the most widely used illicit drug, with an estimated 155–250 million users, and heroin and other opiates were found to cause the most harm.

Study author Professor Wayne Hall, of the University of Queensland's Centre for Clinical Research, said the most common harms from illicit drug use were dependence, overdose, accidents, violence, HIV and other blood-borne infections.

Hall said intelligent policy responses were urgently needed to address drug problems globally, particularly in high-income countries where rates of illicit drug use were found to be substantial.

# New warning labels target pregnant women



WARNING labels aimed at pregnant women will be added to all alcohol products in New Zealand and Australia.

The change comes after the Australian and New Zealand Ministerial Council on Food Regulation agreed to introduce labels warning of the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

Alcohol Healthwatch director Rebecca Williams said her organisation was looking forward to working with the government and public health experts to develop the warnings, but that they didn't go far enough.

She said health warnings for other alcohol-related risks, such as the risks of injury or addiction, were also needed.

# Repeat drink driving a 'man thing'

THE worst recidivist drink drivers in the country are men in their early 40s, and experts say the problem is a "man thing". They believe men featured more in statistics because of their attitude towards authority and their belief they were invincible.

Figures released under the Official Information Act show that, by December 2011, 5,955 drivers had been charged with drink driving for at least their third time, 86 percent of whom were male.

Since 2008, the number of repeat drink drivers charged has dropped by about 14 percent.

Police were using various measures to target recidivist offenders, including keeping a list of their vehicles and keeping an eye out for them.

They were reluctant to reveal too many of their tactics, saying their aim was to catch drink drivers, not to tell them how to avoid capture.

# Corrections told to read a book



JUDGES have ordered Corrections bosses to read an expert's book on rehabilitation after being shocked that Glen Fleming would be forced to wait years for drug treatment.

The Court of Appeal decision cited Roger Brooking's book *Flying Blind*, which slams the government's hardline approach to law and order.

Currently, long-term inmates must wait until they are eligible for parole before being offered drug and alcohol rehabilitation in prison, but judges quashed Glen Fleming's minimum non-parole term of 4 years so he could seek treatment sooner.

The Bay of Plenty man is

serving an 8-year sentence for manufacturing and supplying methamphetamine.

Roger Brooking, a drug and alcohol counsellor, said he comes across cases like Fleming's on a weekly basis, and his frustration at the lack of support and rehabilitation for prisoners led him to write Flying Blind.

"I'm pleased the Court of Appeal has taken the book seriously. It's a bit of a poke in the eye for National. They refused to accept copies of the book."

# Blanket Man lived life his way



WELLINGTON street personality Ben Hana, more commonly known as Blanket Man, has died aged 54 in Wellington Hospital.

His lawyer said he was suffering medical problems stemming from heavy alcohol use and malnutrition, and authorities had become increasingly concerned about his wellbeing.

Hana's change from family man to homeless person was spurred, in part, by a series of personal disasters, including killing his friend while drink driving. "It's something I can't talk about," he told *The Dominion Post* in 2010.

In June 2010, Hana faced cannabis and drinking charges in Wellington District Court and was ordered to be admitted to Wellington Hospital's psychiatric ward. However, it seems his vow to

turn over a new leaf was also short-lived when he returned to the streets after his release.

# Naki's calls for price parity supported

LIQUOR licensing inspectors are backing calls by Taranaki publicans to close the price gap between on and off-licensed premises.

Bar owners from around the region said they wanted to see some parity between the price of beer in bars and supermarkets and bottle stores.

Murray Clearwater, president of the New Zealand Institute of Liquor Licensing Inspectors, said they supported the minimum pricing regime proposed in the Alcohol Reform Bill.

"We believe the cost differential between liquor purchased from off-licensed premises and on-licensed premises does contribute to alcohol-related harm," Mr Clearwater said.

He said because of the price difference, many people chose to "front load" on cheap booze before they went into town, which created problems for bars.

He encouraged the government to move forward with its plans to implement a minimum price for alcohol as soon as possible.

#### Wet houses better by half

AN AMERICAN study suggesting homeless people should be allowed to drink alcohol in night shelters is fuelling calls to establish such 'wet houses' in New Zealand.

The Washington University study followed 60 homeless people in Seattle for 2 years and found homeless people who stayed in wet houses where alcohol is allowed cut their intake by half.

Lead author Assistant
Professor Susan Collins says
many homeless people are
dependent on alcohol and
refuse to stay in shelters that
have abstinence policies, but
once that barrier is taken away,
they moderate their drinking.

The director of New Zealand's National Addiction Centre, Professor Doug Sellman, was struck by comments from the study.

"The people said they no longer have to drink as heavy to keep warm, to put themselves to sleep or to forget about the fact they were homeless."

The head of the Wellington Night Shelter, Mike Leon, says a bid to set up a wet house in 2009 fell apart in the face of opposition from the community.

# Pizza promo a bloody shocker

A WELLINGTON couple saw red when their nine-year-old son came home clutching a pen in the shape of a bloody syringe.

Joel Crampton was given the Hell Pizza pen as a prize. On the side was written "Hell, creating addicts since 1996".

The pen, complete with a plunger and fake blood, was appalling, Joel's mum Mary Crampton said.

"It's a shocker of a prize. It looks like it's full of blood. I was completely shocked. They must think drug taking is cool."

Joel's father Dave Crampton said he was surprised the syringe-shaped pen was given out to a child.

"I can see the funny side, it is quite clever, but I don't think he'll be taking the pen to class when school starts."

Hell Pizza director Callum Davies said the pens were not supposed to be given out to children.

"I would like to know how it happened."

# Drunk taxi driver about to start shift

A COROMANDEL cabbie caught driving drunk was just about to start her shift, police say.

The woman, who was stopped in her taxi shortly before noon, allegedly blew a breath alcohol reading of 568mcg. The limit is 400mcg.

Waikato police highway patrol supervisor Sergeant Paul Scoble said the woman could have gone on to pick up passengers had she not been stopped.

"It's all the more concerning because people often rely on taxis to get them home safely after they had been drinking."

# Teens making better drink-driving choices

ALMOST 400 drivers were caught by police for drink or drug driving in a crackdown between October 2011 and January 2012, and some had children in the car.

Operation Profile started at Labour Weekend in 2011 and finished on 15 January. A total of 384 drivers were caught and appeared before the court on drink or drugrelated driving offences. More than 40,000 vehicles were stopped and drivers breathtested during this period.

Sergeant Owen O'Brien, officer in charge of the Western Bay of Plenty Traffic Alcohol Group, said police had mounted a highly visible campaign with the intention of detecting alcohol and

drug-impaired drivers.

He said his staff had noted an increase in the number of designated sober drivers but he was disappointed with some of the high alcohol readings obtained and the numbers of repeat drink drivers being caught.

However, prosecutions in the 15–19 age group have dropped, down from 27 per cent in 2008 to 20.4 per cent in 2011.

Senior Sergeant Ian
Campion said teenagers were
leading the way and urged
them to keep making the right
choices to get a safe ride home
using designated drivers,
taxis, family or friends. He
challenged parents to lead by
example and use positive
reinforcement when teenagers
made good decisions.

#### Ban plan slammed



PATEA people are at odds over a permanent liquor ban for the town

The Patea Community
Board insists it is urgently
needed and recently voted
to ask the South Taranaki
District Council to introduce
a bylaw banning all liquor in
public areas between the
70kph signs at the northern
and southern highway
entrances.

But at least one representative of the town's Maori community reckons the proposal amounts to nothing more than decision making by a bunch of elderly people who are out of touch.

"They've exacerbated something that doesn't really exist because it's far too hard and innovative to come up with something that would be a better option for them," said Debbie Ngarewa-Packer, Chief Executive of Te Runanga o Ngati Ruanui.

"There are no police issues with liquor licensing for the past 20 years in Patea, so what on earth is all this ruckus and where are the facts and the stats on what exactly our young, gorgeous Maori people are doing in Patea?

"Where are the hordes of these youths that are drunken, unruly and deserve to be banned?"

#### Blueprint II

THE Mental Health Commission is developing a new 'Blueprint' for the mental health and addiction (MH&A) sector in New Zealand. It will update the 1998 Blueprint. The Commission says it will propose a bold vision for the sector that will require innovation and changes in how the MH&A needs of New Zealanders are met over the next 10 years.

The themes in Blueprint II will reflect Health Workforce New Zealand's initiatives related to the MH&A workforce and will inform the Service Development Plan currently under development by the Ministry of Health. The Commission will continue to seek feedback from the wider sector until the end of the consultation period in March.

A final document and associated advice on policy settings and implementation will be completed by the end of May 2012. Upon completion, the government will review Blueprint II and

decide whether to accept its recommendations.

# Popular beverage costs compared



WHICH is the most expensive beverage in New Zealand, and how much are you really spending? Website interest.co.nz has a sobering look at the cost (per cup) of beer, wine (the good stuff), wine (the average sort), fizzies and juice.

While Australians each drink an average of 89 litres of beer a year, Kiwis are much more modest at just 78 litres. Using the retail price of a standard 6-pack (\$12.99), which costs \$1.64 a cup, that brings the cost of a year's beer drinking to around \$620.

Wine is a little more expensive. Of course, there are specials and cheapies, but assuming a standard bottle of wine comes in around \$13.99 (\$4.66 a cup) and you consume one bottle a week, that's close to an annual cost of \$730.

But what if your palate is a bit more refined and you prefer a touch of quality? You might be looking at \$22.50 a bottle (\$7.50 a cup), which rockets your annual price up to \$1.170.

Juice is certainly cheaper. You might fork out a bit more for the real deal, but a standard cup of reconstituted OJ will set you back \$0.73. If you drank five cups a week, you'd be spending around \$189 per year (a small price to

pay for excellent vitamin C levels).

Fizzy looks like it's the cheapest option, with Coke weighing in at \$0.44 a cup (even cheaper than milk). Five cups of this a week and you're paying just \$114.

Of course for those watching their pennies, and waistlines, water is the obvious choice. But *Matters of Substance* understands, sometimes, water will cost you even more than beer.

# Ambulance at the bottom of the cliff



WELLINGTON is installing a permanent triage base on Courtenay Place to help people who experience alcohol-related harm.

The ambulance, which is in part funded by ACC, will be based in the Wellington hotspot on Friday and Saturday nights for the next three years.

Capital & Coast DHB's Dr Geoff Robinson expressed concern that having a triage centre in Courtenay Place condoned drinking.

"What message does it give? That drinking is so OK that we will dedicate an ambulance?" Dr Robinson said

People who repeatedly present at the triage centre would be referred to counselling and alcohol treatment via information sharing between Wellington's DHBs and drug and alcohol help agencies.

# Former sheriff of the year busted in gay sex-for-meth deal



PATRICK J Sullivan Jr was the loved Republican Sheriff of Arapahoe County in Colorado for nearly 20 years before he retired in 2002. Sullivan was named National Sheriff of the Year in 2001, but things have taken a turn for the worse since then. He was recently arrested by the very same department he used to run for offering a man drugs in exchange for sex.

Police had begun an investigation into Sullivan's activities after several individuals alerted the authorities he might be involved with methamphetamine.

He was taken into custody without incident and booked into Arapahoe County Jail, which also goes by the name Patrick J Sullivan Jr Detention Facility. Oh dear!

## Guess why so many foster-care children are taking antipsychotics

MORE than 8 percent of American children in foster care have received antipsychotic medication, and just over a quarter of those in foster care who also receive disability benefits take these drugs, according to a recent study in the journal *Paediatrics*.

Children in foster care are more likely to suffer from psychiatric and behavioural problems than those who have stable families. Typically, these children have been neglected or abused. It seems foster-care children are about twice as likely as those outside the system to receive psychiatric medications.

These numbers suggest the influence of pharmaceutical company marketing. Ninetynine percent of youth receiving antipsychotic medications in the study were given atypical antipsychotics – the newer generation of these drugs, which are expensive and mostly unavailable in generic form.

All of the major manufacturers of these drugs have been fined by the Food and Drug Administration at some stage for illegal marketing practices – in part, for marketing the drugs for unapproved use in children – with some convicted of criminal charges.

# Head of UNODC announces senior advisory group on human rights



IN A speech delivered to both the UN's Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Crime Commission, Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), announced the creation of a new senior advisory team on human rights.

According to Mr Fedotov, the group is designed to ensure "human rights are fully integrated into all our policies and programme design".

It includes the development of a human rights planning tool to ensure policies and programmes integrate human rights from the start and include them as part of evaluations, something Harm Reduction International has been calling for since 2008.

Harm Reduction
International has documented the involvement of UNODC-supported and sponsored programmes in the use of the death penalty and executions for drug offences.

# Mexico disbands entire city police force

THE entire police force in the major Gulf Coast port city of Veracruz was recently dissolved, with Mexican officials sending the navy to patrol in its place.

The Veracruz State Government said the decision was part of an effort to root out police corruption and start again from zero. State spokeswoman Gina Dominguez said 800 police officers and 300 administrative employees were laid off.

Armed marines barricaded police headquarters and navy helicopters were flying above the city where 35 bodies were dumped in September. It was one of the worst gang attacks of Mexico's drug war.

Mexico's army has taken over police operations several times before, notably in the border city of Ciudad Juarez and the border state of Tamaulipas. But Veracruz is the first state to completely disband a large police department and use marines as law enforcers.

# Pot still popular with US teens

IN 2011, a nationally representative sample of 47,000 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students from the United States, attending 400 public and private secondary schools, participated in the Monitoring the Future 2011 survey.

Some of the more important findings from this year's survey include the following:

- Marijuana use among teens rose in 2011 for the fourth straight year – a sharp contrast to the considerable decline that had occurred in the preceding decade. Daily marijuana use is now at a 30-year peak level among high school seniors.
- 'Synthetic marijuana,' which until earlier this year was legally sold and goes by such names as 'K2' and 'Spice', was added to the study's coverage in 2011; one in every nine high school seniors (11.4 percent) reported using the drug in the prior 12 months.
- Alcohol use and occasions of heavy drinking continued a long-term gradual decline among teens, reaching historically low levels in 2011.
- Energy drinks are being consumed by about onethird of teens, with use highest among younger teens.

#### Toxic home brew kills



A BATCH of homemade liquor has killed 36 people in an eastern Indian state, with a further 136 people hospitalised after drinking the toxic brew.

Officials said more and more people were turning up with symptoms of liquor poisoning, and the local hospital quickly became overcrowded.

Local residents ransacked four breweries after some of the deaths were reported, and police said they have arrested four alleged bootleggers so far. Deaths from cheap alcohol are common in India.

#### Global Fund and **SABMiller Beer**

A MAIOR conflict of interest has been identified after the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) included SABMiller, the world's second largest beer brewer, as a recipient of funding in support of the brewery's Tavern Intervention Programme for Men in South Africa.

Big Alcohol has a significant presence in South Africa, with the country having one of the highest levels of alcohol consumption per drinker, which the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates to result in 1.1 million life years lost per year. Alcohol is also the third leading contributor to the disease burden in South Africa, which highlights the irony of Big Alcohol receiving funding awards for its work against disease.

SABMiller's Tavern Intervention Programme for Men is an initiative to educate male drinkers about alcohol and disease. According to a WHO bulletin, the basis of the funding award is because this "reflects the successful attempt of a highly profitable industry to position itself as committed to a public health objective".

What they seem to have missed is that SABMiller's aggressive marketing in South Africa is still one of the greatest contributors to the problem.

#### Rebanning syringe exchange funding "murderous"



**CONGRESS** in the United States has recently voted to reinstate a ban on federalfunded syringe exchange programmes, just 2 years after the ban was lifted.

Laura Thomas, an active campaigner for funded syringe exchange programmes, wrote, "Reinstating the ban is murderous. It's saying people who use drugs should contract fatal and expensive diseases and die. Allowing the ban to go through is shameful.

"This is very literally a life or death decision, and the cry of 'blood on their hands' is appropriate, for both the Republicans who insisted on this and the Democrats who let it happen...

"Users who participate in exchange programmes come to get new syringes for a lot of reasons, but the biggest one is they want to stop the transmission of HIV and hepatitis C in our community. I only wish this Congress shared their concern."

## **Bolivia officially** withdraws over coca

AS OF 1 January 2012, Bolivia no longer answers to a major United Nations (UN) drug treaty. The withdrawal is a protest against the UN's classification of the coca leaf as an illegal substance, but it is unlikely to prompt a major revision of the treaty.

Bolivia first announced

intentions to withdraw from the 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs in mid-2011. The petition became effective in 2012.

Bolivia is the first country to abandon the UN narcotics treaty in 50 years. The Convention makes signatory countries cooperate in tracing and seizing drugs, as well as extraditing traffickers.

Nearly simultaneously, Bolivia asked the UN to be readmitted to the Convention if the UN removes the coca leaf statute. Used as the raw material to make cocaine, the coca leaf is also widely used for traditional and medicinal purposes in the Andes.

# Old hippy stoners "nicht sehr gut"



**GERMANY** is struggling to cope with a rapid increase in 'pensioner hippies' who are still hooked on drugs nearly half a century after the end of 'Flower Power'. They include 60-plus grandmothers spaced out on LSD and 70-year-olds in court for dealing dope.

The 'stoned grandparent' phenomenon has begun to alarm legal and welfare authorities in the country's most populous state, North Rhine Westphalia, where the number of pensioners convicted of drug offences has almost doubled over the past decade to about 120 a year.

The problem has led to a scheme to help geriatric specialists familiarise themselves with addiction and old age.

In one incident, a narcotics crime squad in Dortmund arrested a 69-yearold drug dealer nicknamed Opium Grandpa. Another case involved a 73-year-old who required medical treatment after consuming too many hash cookies.

# Toking less harmful than smoking

SMOKING a joint from time to time won't damage the lungs, even after years of drug use, according to a study that disproves one of the major concerns about marijuana that smoking dope is as risky as lighting up a cigarette.

Study results published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found the lung capacity of people who smoked marijuana was not diminished by regular toking, even among those who smoked once or twice a week.

Only heavy marijuana users - those who smoked 20 or more joints a month saw a negative impact on the pulmonary system, but that level of marijuana use is unusual, researchers said. In fact, they said, it may be marijuana smoke doesn't affect lung function the way tobacco does simply because people don't smoke as many joints as they do cigarettes.

Heavy marijuana use may indeed turn out to be just as risky as cigarette smoking, but that will be tough to prove because so few people smoke as much pot as they do tobacco. For occasional users, smoking marijuana was actually associated with a small but statistically significant increase in lung capacity, though that may be related to the deep breathing

pot smokers use to draw the drug into their lungs.

# Cambodia's anti-drug chief gets life for trafficking



THE former head of Cambodia's anti-drugs office has been sentenced to life in prison for masterminding a drugs ring.

Lieutenant General Mok Dara, Secretary General of the National Authority for Combating Drugs until his arrest in January 2011, faced more than 30 counts of bribery and drug trafficking.

The case, which lasted several weeks, was one of the largest to go through Cambodia's court system and involved the testimonies of scores of witnesses. Despite the evidence against him, Dara maintained he was innocent throughout the proceeding.

In November a former Cambodian police chief was sentenced to four years in prison after confessing to accepting more than \$100,000 in bribes.

# Wikipedia 'wife beater' wipe fails

STELLA ARTOIS used to market itself under the slogan "reassuringly expensive" but became popularly known in Britain as the "wife beater" beer because of its high alcohol content and perceived connection with aggression and binge drinking.

Now it appears there have been attempts by Portland Communications, which is run by Tony Blair's former adviser Tim Allan, to improve the brand's online reputation on behalf of the brewer.

Under the user name
Portlander10, it removed
reference to Stella Artois from
the Wikipedia page entitled
"Wife beater" and replaced it
with a generic reference to
lager or beer. Portland also
tried to remove the reference
to "wife beater" on the
Wikipedia page for Stella
Artois, but other users spotted
the edit and reversed it.

#### \$30 million butt rub



IT'S reasonably common for people to make asses of themselves when they are drunk, causing damage to their own reputations and other people's property. Regardless of what mischief they get up to, it is unlikely they'll be as mortified when they've sobered up as Carmen Tisch, a 36-year-old American who was caught rubbing her butt against a \$30 million painting.

Tisch was charged with felony criminal mischief after she caused over \$10,000 worth of damage to "1957-J no.2" by the late Clyfford Still in a Denver museum by punching, scratching and attempting to urinate on the abstract oil painting.

A spokeswoman for the Denver District Attorney's Office says, "You have to wonder where her friends were."

And that's an important message: friends don't let

friends go on a drunken rampage in an art gallery.

# 'Downton Abbey effect' boosts sherry sales



THE popular *Downton Abbey* drama series set in the early 20th century has managed to return sherry to the spotlight in the UK. The series, which focuses on the life of an aristocratic family during the years preceding World War I, highlights the connection between fortified wines and the customs of that particular era.

According to retail chain store Marks & Spencer, which serves more than 21 million customers per week, sherry sales have increased by 15 percent in the last 3 months.

The boost has also benefited from the recent inauguration of several establishments devoted exclusively to the drink, in what is known as the 'sherry bar' phenomenon.

# Caffeine poisoning on the rise

RESEARCHERS have found a growing number of people are reporting caffeine toxicity from energy drinks in Australia, especially teenagers.

According to a study published in *The Medical Journal of Australia*, nearly 300 calls were made to the New South Wales Poisons Centre regarding adverse reactions to energy drinks between January 2004 and the end of 2010, with more than a third of people

attending hospital.

The authors say the report is a "warning call" for health authorities to better educate the public on the risks associated with high-energy drinks and to require beverages to display health warnings similar to those found on over-the-counter caffeine tablets.

Caffeine toxicity can mimic amphetamine poisoning, cause seizures, psychosis, cardiac arrhythmias and even death, but the most common symptoms reported include irregular heart rate, tremors, stomach upsets and dizziness.

Teenagers were the most common age group affected, and energy drinks were often consumed with other substances, mainly alcohol.

# Demi not laughing

ACTRESS Demi Moore's recent trip to the emergency room was reportedly spurred by symptoms of a seizure triggered by inhaling the drug nitrous oxide, more commonly known as 'laughing gas'.

The drug is used legally as an anaesthetic and to reduce patients' anxiety at the dentist's office, but it is also sold in small cartridges intended for use in making whipped cream. These containers can easily be misused by people seeking a high. Although addiction to nitrous is uncommon, its abuse can have serious consequences.

"People who use a lot can [appear to have] something like a seizure," says Dr Dennis Bohlin, a Manhattan dentist and expert on addiction in medical professionals, who is himself a former nitrousoxide addict.

"That happened to me,"

he says. "Your face and teeth clench, and you have muscle contractions that can appear like a seizure."

#### Cocaine seized at UN



A BAG containing 16kg (35.5lb) of cocaine was recently found at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

The drugs were in a bag that arrived at the organisation's mailroom, setting off a security alert. The white bag raised suspicions when it was being scanned because a poor imitation of a UN logo had been stamped on it, apparently in an attempt to pass it off as official baggage.

Inside the bag, the drugs were hidden in hollowed-out notebooks, UN Undersecretary-General for Safety and Security Gregory Starr said.

"In my humble opinion, this was the work of narcotics traffickers that were trying to ship something into the United States, and their plan must have gone wrong," he

Another UN spokesperson confirmed neither the UN nor anyone located at its headquarters was the intended recipient of the shipment.

# CDC says gang violence not so drug-related

GANG homicides are less likely to be drug-related than many people think and more likely to be the result of factors such as retaliation to on-going gang violence, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported.

The CDC's data focuses on five cities with a high prevalence of gang homicides. According to the report, the cities had 856 gang-related homicides and 2,077 nongang homicides.

The finding that drugs played less of a role than previously thought by the public could be important for policy makers, because it could shift the focus in how society attempts to prevent gang deaths.

"Violence, including gang homicides, is a significant public health problem," said Linda C Degutis, the Director of the CDC's National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control.

"Investing in early prevention pays off in the long run. It helps youth learn how to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence and keeps them connected to their families, schools and communities and from joining gangs in the first place."

# Pot puts Texas town on the map



**NESTLED** among the few remaining businesses that dot a rundown highway in a dusty west Texas town stands what's become a surprise destination for marijuanatoting celebrities: the Hudspeth County Jail.

Willie Nelson, Snoop Dogg and actor Armie Hammer have been among the thousands of people busted for possession at a Border Patrol checkpoint outside the town in recent years, bringing a bit of notoriety to one of Texas's most sparsely populated counties.

**Hudspeth County** cameos aren't only for outlaws: action movie star Steven Seagal, who's already deputised in Louisiana and Arizona for his reality show Steven Seagal Lawman, has signed on to become a county officer.

Locals already have found ways to rub shoulders with their celebrity guests.

Deputies posed for pictures with Snoop Dogg after authorities said they found several joints on his bus. When Nelson was busted there in 2010, the county's lead prosecutor suggested the singer settle his marijuana charges by performing Blue Eves Crving in the Rain for the court. Nelson paid a fine instead, but not before the County Commissioner played one of his own songs for the country music legend.

## Designer drug wreaks total ruin on UK dance floors

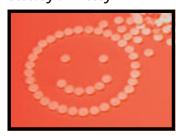
THE latest drug popular with clubbers in the UK is 'Roflcoptr', which is a street-speak acronym for "Rolling On the Floor Laughing Crapping Our Pants Totally Ruined". As with other drugs linked to electronica and other forms of club and dance music, Roflcoptr produces a state of euphoria and sometimes hallucinogenic experiences.

Its official name is

methoxetamine, and it comes in the form of a snortable white powder. As a chemical, methoxetamine is linked to a class of anaesthetics, which explains the relaxed state the user enters on taking the drug.

The drug is readily available because it does not appear on a list of banned substances, so is technically a 'legal high'.

## Calgary cops consider ecstasy amnesty



CALGARY police have raised the possibility of offering an amnesty to quell a spate of fatal overdoses linked to a tainted version of the party drug ecstasy.

Noting the money-making drug is clearly lining people's pockets, police have questioned whether an amnesty would be a way to get some of the deadly drugs off the streets before there are more victims.

They say the issue is currently being discussed to complement a high-profile public education campaign focusing on steering potential users away from ecstasy that may contain PMMA, a compound linked to most of the deaths.

Cops have linked nine deaths to ecstasy in the city and surrounding area since June 2011, with the bulk of those since the end of December.

Substance and Substantiation

# Is meth really all that bad for you?

In November 2011, scientists from Columbia University published a study on the effects of methamphetamine use. What made this study stand out was that it not only questioned received wisdom about the damaging effects the drug has on the brain, but it also suggested meth could actually improve some brain functions.

MYTHBUSTERS takes a closer look

Methamphetamine is an 'attractive' high because it causes the brain to release extraordinary amounts of dopamine, leading to extreme feelings of pleasure and motivation. The brain naturally releases dopamine, during sex and when we eat. Simply, it's the chemical responsible for our urge to feed, procreate and survive. Without dopamine the body lacks motivation and feels depressed and fatigued.

Dopamine also plays a part in controlling the way we move. Not enough dopamine, and you can't move at all. Too much, and the body is subjected to uncontrollable movements like twitching. Dopamine also controls the flow of information within the brain, affecting our memory, attention spans and problem-solving abilities.

Meth's danger is that it slowly kills off the brain's dopamine receptors, making it harder and harder for a prolonged user to feel pleasure. The user enters a downward spiral of needing to get high again and again to feel that pleasure, all the while doing his or her body and brain more and more damage. Research suggests the damage it does to the brain's cognitive abilities may be permanent.

Meth also contains numerous other deadly chemicals such as anhydrous ammonia (found in fertilisers), red phosphorus (found on matchboxes) and lithium (found in batteries).

Based on these facts, how could any research suggest meth may possibly be good for you?

These researchers, led by Dr Carl Hart, Associate Professor of Psychology at Columbia University, examined more than 40 studies of the effects of methamphetamine, including those on short-term effects and cognitive tests done on long-term meth users who had quit. The researchers suggested some of the purported effects of meth use may have been exaggerated. And, they said, flawed research may be preventing people dependent on meth from getting effective treatment.

They acknowledged the damage meth does to the brain, but refuted a number of claims about the extent of the damage. Previous research had suggested meth irreversibly lowered a person's intelligence and impaired cognitive functions. This conclusion had been reached by the noticeable differences seen when juxtaposing meth users with a control group of non-users participating in comparative tests.

Hart and his colleagues revealed a number of flaws in this method of research.

The first was that the users and the control groups were incorrectly matched. In order for an accurate comparison, the users and control groups needed to be the same age and to have shared a similar education.

The second was that just because one group does better than another does not necessarily mean the lesser group is "impaired", as was claimed. What's more, the differences were still within the normal expected range, showing that

the lesser-achieving group was not really all that significantly impaired.

Furthermore, it was revealed that, in some tests of cognitive abilities, such as of attention span, memory and learning, people who use meth actually scored better than the control group. This had been dismissed as an anomaly, but Hart's research suggests short-term meth users may have heightened abilities — not surprising considering some forms of pharmaceutical methamphetamine are actually approved treatments for ADHD.

Mythbusters is not surprised to find there may have been some exaggeration going on about the reported harmful effects of a drug, but there is still a whole lot scientists don't know about methamphetamine. The jury may still be out on whether or not meth may have some benefits, but at this stage, we're siding with Hart and his fellow researchers and not condoning the use of methamphetamine, even in small, recreational doses.

Meth's profoundly addictive nature makes it one of the most dangerous drugs around, and we suggest that, if you want to improve your cognitive functions, more sleep and increased fruit and vegetables might be the better option.

Hart hopes his research will lead to new approaches to dealing with rehabilitation for meth users and that claims of impairment that stigmatise a drug and its users will be made more cautiously in the future. We don't think there are too many myths to bust around that.

# TWO NEW ALAC YOUTH RESOURCES

specifically researched and developed to help young people create positive change, in their lives and their communities.

Helping youth identify the impact of alcohol on their lives and their communities.

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'The Catalyst' is designed to support young people who want to make a difference in their neighbourhoods, schools, communities, or other social groups by showing what they can do about alcohol harm.





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