Media Release

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Maroondah Smart Generation Supply Monitoring Program

Many communities across Victoria are concerned about teenage alcohol consumption with research showing that young people are more likely to develop social, cognitive and emotional issues if they use alcohol before they turn 18.

In communities where it is hard for adolescents to obtain alcohol, there is less teenage alcohol use and fewer alcohol-related injuries, assaults and deaths. These communities also have higher rates of school completion.

"Australia's national alcohol guidelines clearly state that the safest option for young people is not to use alcohol before they turn 18. The earlier a young person starts drinking, the more likely they are to have impaired brain development and alcohol problems later in life," said John Toumbourou, Chair in Health Psychology at Deakin University.

According to research conducted by the Australian Government in 2014, approximately 68% of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 reported drinking alcohol in their lifetime. When asked where they obtained their alcohol, over 80% reported getting it from three sources: parents/home, friends and acquaintances, or by purchasing it themselves from bottle shops.

These statistics are behind the decision by Communities that Care Knox (auspiced by EACH) to expand the Smart Generation Supply Monitoring program, currently being implemented in Knox, to include the Maroondah community. Smart Generation is a national program coordinated by Deakin University.

The program aims to help young people across Australia to become a 'smarter generation' by reducing high rates of underage drinking.

"We're pleased to be implementing the Smart Generation program in the Maroondah community. A core component involves monitoring alcohol sales in bottle shops, and our recent research shows that while some staff at Maroondah package retail outlets are complying with the law, others need to do much more," said Deborah Cocks, Communities That Care Knox Coordinator at EACH.

The Supply Monitoring program involves young people aged 18-22, but who look underage, going into local bottle shops to attempt to purchase alcohol without a valid ID.

The research showed that of the sample of bottle shops tested in Maroondah only 50% asked for ID from a young person attempting to buy alcohol. This is a concerning statistic, as bottle shop purchases are one of the three main sources of alcohol for teenagers.

"As part of this program, we sent letters to all Licensees and Managers, either congratulating them for not selling alcohol to a young person, or reminding them of the law and of best-practice in the service of alcohol. We encourage Licensees and Managers to discuss best-practice with their teams," said Ms Cocks

Ms. Cocks also urged all adults, including parents, not to supply or sell alcohol to children under 18:

"To reinforce the messages of the Smart Generation Program, we encourage parents to discuss alcohol with their children, and really support them by setting clear rules and guidelines about not drinking alcohol until they are 18. Parents sometimes have the fear that if they don't allow alcohol use at home, their children may rebel and use alcohol behind their backs, it's really supportive for children in our community when parents unite on this issue."

However, research shows that in families where parents set a rule that children are not to use alcohol, there are lower rates of underage alcohol use. In contrast, in families where parents allow moderate alcohol use, children are more likely to rebel with heavy and harmful alcohol use.

The Smart Generation Program is being implemented in a number of communities across Australia, and includes a school-based education program aimed at students and parents.

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For more information or an interview on the recent research and the Smart Generation Implementation in Maroondah, please contact Deborah Cocks, Communities that Care Coordinator at EACH on 03 9757 6297 or via deborah.cocks@each.com.au.

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