Community Perception Of Drug and Alcohol Use

Griffith and Neighbouring LGAs
A survey was carried out in late 2014 covering the City of Griffith and neighbouring LGAs. The survey was developed to determine the communities’ attitudes towards alcohol and illicit drug use.

Griffith CDAT proposed that a survey could aid in the development of strategies and support agencies to implement harm reduction programs.

The community response provided a snapshot of the prevalence of drug use (legal & illegal) and alcohol consumption, the reasons why people use, and the perceived impact and harm of misuse.

The findings identified actions that need to address:

- Secondary supply of alcohol to minors
- Easy access to drugs by minors
- Reduce harm from alcohol and drug misuse
- An increase in alcohol and drug education and awareness that includes the whole community
- A collaborative approach by agencies and services

The communities that participated in the survey were from the following Local Government Areas (LGA):

- Griffith
- Carrathool
- Hay
- Leeton
- Murrumbidgee
- Narrandera
- Tumut
- Wagga Wagga
Drug Use

Survey respondents were:

- Male – 112
- Female – 159
- Equal response rate from all age groups

Majority of respondents were in full time and part time employment.

Low respondent rate

The findings identified that although there is a perception in the community that drug use is a serious problem, the statistics suggest otherwise. Only 6% of respondents identified that they take, or have taken illicit drugs. Of this, 31% of respondents were under 18 years.

Our overall result being half in comparison to the ADF national average of 12%.
Perception is greater than findings

80% of the respondents agreed that it is too easy for young people to get illegal drugs. 67.6% of the under 18 years respondents also agree with this statement.

83.8% believe drug use is a problem in our community however low proportion of respondents (6%) identifying they have used illegal drugs, the community perception of drug use is much greater than the findings show.

70% believe that drug use is creating many of the problems in their community while 58% believe that alcohol is the cause.

From the survey, it was apparent that participants ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that drugs are a problem with 60% indicating that it is a problem in certain community groups.

76% of respondents were aware of prescription and/or over the counter drug addiction with no one identifying that they were addicted to these medications.
A comparative survey was undertaken with 10 direct and indirect service providers in Griffith. This was to compare community perceptions with actual case work.

**Drug use effects more than the individual**

The top four responses rated very high with 91% of respondents identifying family and relationship problems/worries as a major impact of excessive drug use. This might suggest that most people had been impacted at some point directly or indirectly.

A comparative questionnaire was conducted with local agencies which identified that drugs significantly affected family systems. Family breakdowns, financial strains and domestic violence were common factors linked to drug use.
Large alcohol consumption

Of the 284 participants surveyed, 164 people over 18 years identified that they do consume alcohol. This equates to 79%.

15% of young people under 18 years stated they consume alcohol while 21% of adults identified they never drink alcohol.

Conclusions could be drawn to suggest that alcohol compared to other drugs may be socially more acceptable and is believed to be less harmful.

Comments made in the survey suggest that a significant issue is around underage drinking. Quotes like “A grave concern is the number of high school aged youth experimenting with alcohol.” and “More early intervention services for young people.”

On average, 52.7% of the people surveyed, consumed alcohol once a week drinking an average of 3 drinks.

4.24% stating they drink every day.
Perception is greater than findings

70.5% of the respondents agreed that it is too easy for young people to get alcohol. 63.2% of the under 18 year age group also agree with this statement.

76% identifying they drink alcohol and 66.9% believe it is a problem in the community. The high number of respondents that consume alcohol don’t perceive that alcohol is as much of a contributing factor to the problems in the community as compared to drug use.

Close to 60% of respondents believe that the problems with alcohol and drug use lie amongst some community groups.
Alcohol cont.

**Figure 6.** Major Impacts Respondents Identified As A Result Of Alcohol Consumption (%)

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**Alcohol consumption affects more than the individual**

Alcohol was the number one substance of choice. Drink driving, family and relationship problems identified as the major impact from excessive consumption.

Harm to others accounted for 89% of responses and 78% damage to belongings. This compares with the community’s top alcohol related crimes - malicious damage and alcohol fueled assaults. (BOCSAR, Griffith LGA, 2013).

Results confirmed that respondents are not aware of the link between Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and alcohol consumption.

Observation suggest that alcohol is part of the sport environment. Circumstantial evidence presented by the local magistrate at the Crime Prevention Forum illustrated that there is a culture of alcohol consumption at local sporting events and harmful role modeling by some adults.
“I drink because my friends do”

78% of the participants consumed alcohol socially or for relaxation. This could suggest that drinking is a part of our lifestyle and is seen as acceptable behaviour to fit into societal norms. It also highlights that alcohol is used as a relaxation drug and a reward.
Harm Reduction

Key Priorities

From the survey, the community has identified support for a number of harm reduction measures. These include:

⇒ Addressing secondary supply of alcohol to people under the age of 18 years. This also includes harsher penalties for people who do supply alcohol to underage people.

⇒ Explicit drug and alcohol education at school and in the community

⇒ Reducing alcohol advertising in public places

⇒ Restricting sale of alcohol to intoxicated persons

⇒ Legal age to drink alcohol lifted to 21 years of age

⇒ More recreational activities for young people

⇒ More severe drink driving penalties

⇒ Alcohol not being available or promoted at events where young people will be present
A comparative survey was undertaken with 10 direct and indirect service providers in Griffith. This was to compare community perceptions with actual case work.

Agencies identified 90% of their clients are affected by alcohol or drug misuse.

Some of the key impacts on the individual, family and community include:

- Unemployment
- Financial strain
- Depression
- Relationship breakdowns
- Poor health outcomes
- Child neglect
- Poor school performance
- Domestic Violence
- Increase in criminal activity
- Vandalism
- Theft
- Street violence
- Fear of safety at night
- High pressure placed on police
- Increased stress placed on hospital staff
From the people surveyed, majority said they would seek out help for drug and alcohol problems from a doctor or the local Community Mental Health / Drug and Alcohol Service.

- 90% of Agencies, who participated in the comparative survey, believed that prevention such as drug education would be the most effective.

- 70% believed a media campaign could be an effective strategy.

- 80% of the agencies identified the need for more specific harm reduction programs by local AOD services. They stated Griffith does not have the resources or are equipped to carry out these programs. For example ongoing recovery support and relapse prevention programs.

- There was a lot of support for a whole community approach, where 80% felt this could reduce drug and alcohol misuse in the community.
Community Alcohol & Other Drug Survey (2014) -


http://healthcultureandsociety2013.wikispaces.com/
+“Say+No+to+Drugs,+Say+Yes+to+Life”

http://www.clker.com/clipart-population.html

Agency Drug & Alcohol Questionnaire