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## **Going on benders: young Victorians putting their health at risk**

"It is staggering that each month over 300,000 young people in Victoria drink in ways that put themselves at real risk of serious harm," says Dr Anne-Marie Laslett, an author of the *Victorian Alcohol Statistics Handbook 08: Alcohol use and related harm among young people across Victorian Local Government Areas 2006*. "Every week thousands drink until they are unable to remember what they have done."

In four years of data analysed on Victorian young people, 8,850 assaults, 4,891 family incidents, 2,135 serious road injuries, 11,455 hospitalisations and 194 deaths were attributed to alcohol.

The handbook highlights the numbers of young people within our communities that are putting themselves at risk, and the harms or consequences associated with the heavy drinking patterns described. With binge-drinking widespread throughout Australia, it is estimated that just over half of all Victorians aged 16-24 years consumed alcohol at rates that exceeded the recommended drinking guidelines at least once a month.

Health Minister Bronwyn Pike, who launches the Handbook today, said the results were alarming, providing all Victorians with a serious wake-up call on their alcohol consumption and its effects on the community.

"Alcohol is second only to tobacco as a drug that causes high levels of disease and death," Ms Pike said.

"The Bracks Government is committed to reducing the levels of alcohol abuse in the community and driving home, through awareness and education, that alcohol can cause serious harm to the drinker, their family and the community."

A useful resource for policy makers, planners and other interested people in the community, the alcohol statistics handbook is one of a series which provides accessible, easy to interpret information on alcohol use and related harm at statewide, regional and local area levels.

The highest rates of binge-drinking for young people occurred in the Hume region with nearly sixty percent of 16-24 year olds drinking at unsafe levels as compared to fifty one percent in Victoria overall.

"The handbook has information on the huge numbers of young people in every local community that put themselves at risk," says Dr Laslett, "National statistics are sometimes easy to disengage from - but this information relates to people we know and care about. The prevalent binge culture that adults and young people are part of needs to be questioned in light of accidents, injuries, fights, unsafe sex, health problems and many other consequences faced by people in our community."

The handbook is funded by the Drugs Policy and Services Branch, Victorian Department of Human Services.

A full copy is available to download from Turning Point's website at:  
<http://www.turningpoint.org.au>

**For more information on *The Victorian Alcohol Statistics Handbook 08: Alcohol use and related harm among young people across Victorian Local Government Areas 2006* please contact:**

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