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PREVENTING HARM FROM ALCOHOL AND DRUGS AT WORK: NATIONAL STUDY AND DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

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Background There has long been concern over the impact of alcohol and other drug (AOD) consumption on workplace safety, particularly within the construction industry. Until now there has been little scientific evidence on the relationship between AOD and safety. This research aimed to evaluate AOD within the Australian construction industry and to develop, through engagement with industry, mental health and e-Therapy experts, AOD specific education.

Methods Using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test a national assessment study evaluated the extent of general AOD use in the industry. A survey was distributed to 500 employees across Australia. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted. The researchers collaborated with AOD and e-Therapy experts to develop a web-based AOD program for managers. Researchers then collaborated with an industry-based mental health and suicide prevention organisation. A peer-based AOD education program was developed. It targeted social attitudes to impairment at work and was evaluated through a pilot study with 42 young apprentices.

Results The national assessment study showed that a total of 286 respondents (58%) scored above the cut-off score for 'risky' alcohol use with 43 respondents (15%) scoring in the significantly 'at risk' category. Other drug use was also identified as a major issue. The peer-based AOD education program was positively received by young workers. The pilot study showed an increase in both knowledge and awareness of alcohol and drug impairment and intention to seek help.

Conclusions A proportion of the industry is at risk of hazardous alcohol use. Other drugs are also a major issue. Several areas for consideration were identified. Results from the peer-based AOD education program were encouraging and support the need for further evaluation. Web-based programs can enable the provision of AOD education and support (and mental health information more broadly) to those living/working in remote locations.

Keywords Alcohol and other drugs, workplace safety, impairment, education