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More people seeking help for alcohol addiction

The impact of this year's hard-hitting television and radio advertisements for people with alcohol problems has undoubtedly contributed to the number of first-time callers to the national Alcohol Drug Helpline, according to CEO, Cate Kearney.

Of the total of 16,000 calls received at the Helpline in the past year, 12,000 (75%) were from first-time callers, statistics from the Alcohol Drug Association of New Zealand's annual report show.

The total number of calls represents a 5% increase on the previous year's calls, with the biggest rise in caller numbers occurring between April and June this year – immediately after the Alcohol Advisory Council (ALAC) television advertising campaign began.

71% of calls were alcohol-related, and this was consistent throughout New Zealand. The proportion of alcohol-related calls has continued to increase since 2005 and increased most significantly this year, corresponding to ALAC's social marketing campaign.

Kearney said that one 30-year-old woman, who'd phoned the Helpline after hearing the radio and TV ads, cried with relief after talking to the Helpline Counsellor.

"She'd had no idea until then that the Helpline existed and no idea what to do about a long-standing problem," she said.

ALAC Chief Executive Officer Gerard Vaughan said ALAC's monitoring of the advertisements showed 94 percent of all adults recalled seeing at least one of the three television advertisements. "What the Helpline figures show is that this high awareness is translating into help seeking among our target audience of people who binge drink," he said.

The Helpline statistics for the past 12 months also show that cannabis retains its place as the most frequently called about other drug.

Cannabis is the most commonly called about other drug in the South Island, while methamphetamine (P) calls are more common than cannabis in Auckland.

By far the most significant change over the past year has been the 31% reduction in P-related (methamphetamine) calls, down from 1700 to around 1200. Most of the reduction has been in the last six months.

Media Release

Kearney said the reduction had occurred mainly through a fall-off in calls from “concerned other callers”.

“There was a lot of community concern about P and we were getting a lot of calls from friends and relations of people with a P problem, but now it seems to be mostly the person with the problem that is calling,” she said.

People aged between 25 and 60 are the most likely to have a problem with alcohol, with the biggest spike in the 35 to 44 year age group of males calling about themselves.

Other drug-related calls came primarily from the same age 25 to 60 age band, with most people seeking help for drug problems aged between 35 and 45.

The greatest increase in calls is from the 45-60 age group and to a lesser extent from the 12-18 age group.

This year was the first that the Alcohol Drug Helpline was fully staffed by paid professionals. A year ago, the staff was a mix of paid employees and some volunteers. Two paid professionals now cover the phones from 10 am to 10 pm daily, with an answering service operating outside those hours, allowing callers to request a call back during operating hours. Emergency life-threatening calls are transferred/referred to 111.

New initiatives planned for next year include email counselling, revamping the Helpline website and two new 0800 lines dedicated to Maori and Pacific.

In the last year, the website received a steadily increasing amount of traffic, with a large surge (over double the number) in visits during May and June.

Background Information

ADANZ manages the national Alcohol Drug Helpline (0800 787 797).

The Helpline is an information, referral and intervention service, offering confidential assistance and support for drinking and drug-taking. It is funded by the Government at \$600,000 a year.

ADANZ also provides coordination services including networking forums, newsletters and other information, and advocacy around addiction and treatment public policy.

ADANZ also manages the Addictions Treatment Directory - an online database of all alcohol, drug and gambling treatment agencies available in every region of New Zealand.