

A one-stop assessment to measure key health indicators in rural South Australia

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Aims: A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) identified several areas of concern in rural and remote communities including a higher prevalence of mental health problems, lower rates of health literacy and higher rates of alcohol abuse. The Health Check Pit Stop Project was a medical student led project which sampled the population on the Fleurieu Peninsula to determine the prevalence of some of the key health indicators raised by the AIHW data. The aim of this project was to assess the psychological wellbeing, alcohol consumption, tobacco use and health literacy among this population in rural South Australia and compare it to the national data.

Methods: The Health Check Pit Stop, a one-stop health assessment, was conducted at two community-based locations on the Fleurieu Peninsula. Volunteer participants attending the Pit Stop provided demographic and health data, including smoking status and alcohol consumption (AUDIT-C alcohol screen). Participants engaged in a standardised health literacy nutritional information questionnaire based on a representative nutritional label. Participants were also administered the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, a validated mental health screening tool used as a global measure of distress based on questions about anxiety and depressive symptoms. The data were compiled and compared to the national data along the key demographic and health parameters.

Results: 50% of participants reported levels of alcohol consumption that place them at risk compared to 19.5% of adults in the general Australian population. Moreover, 52.6% of females, compared to 47.4% of men reported risky levels of alcohol consumption. Participants reported lower ever and current smoking rates than the broader population (51.1% vs 58.8% and 6.6% vs. 18.3% respectively). 66.2% of participants had adequate or better health literacy. This compares to Australian Bureau of Statistics data which demonstrate that 41% of adults have adequate or better health literacy skills. 11.8% of participants screened positively for significant levels of psychological distress which closely matches national data. Gender differences for psychological distress also correlated to national averages.

Relevance and conclusions: Levels of psychological distress in rural South Australia are broadly similar to national averages and this population is less likely to have ever or currently use tobacco. The data suggested that half of individuals on the Fleurieu Peninsula are consuming alcohol at levels that significantly increase their lifetime risk of alcohol-related disease or injury and this rate is markedly higher than the national average. The proportion of women consuming excessive alcohol differs from national data showing a male predominance. Interestingly, levels of

health literacy are higher in this population suggesting that knowledge about health is not translating into healthy behaviours regarding alcohol but do correlate with reduced tobacco use. This is significant because it suggests that health education and knowledge in rural communities may not be effectively communicating the harms of excessive alcohol consumption and represents a potential area for future public health intervention. The use of a one-stop health assessment in the community may be an effective way to measure, and potentially modify, health behaviours in rural Australia.