

Alcohol and drug screening needed for the elderly

13 April 2015, by Kate Bourne

Concerns surrounding drug and alcohol consumption are widely discussed in relation to youth but, according to a University of Adelaide researcher, there is a need to explore this issue further with older Australians.

Dr Lynette Cusack, from the University's School of Nursing, says the elderly may not consume [alcohol](#) in the same quantities as younger people, but they can suffer from a unique set of alcohol-related health issues.

"Older people don't usually drink as much as younger people in a single sitting but they can drink more regularly and are more likely to drink alone. They can also underestimate the quantities they consume," says Dr Cusack.

"As people get older, chronic conditions and medication use increases, which can react badly with alcohol.

"Older people are also at an increased risk of fractures from falls because their muscles and bones are frailer," she says.

Dr Cusack says alcohol screenings in community settings would be useful to help health professionals accurately identify alcohol consumption in [older people](#) and the potential harmful effects.

"We don't currently have a universal tool for screening for a range of substances including [alcohol consumption](#) of older Australians and their understanding of how alcohol may impact their [health](#)," says Dr Cusack.

"However, such a tool is vital for over 65s to create awareness of the risks associated with alcohol and to assist [health professionals](#) and caregivers," she says.

Dr Cusack is leading a study to evaluate a

screening tool developed by the World Health Organization.

"ASSIST tool (Alcohol, Smoking, Substance Involvement Screening Test) was designed to screen for risky alcohol and drug use, and we have commenced a small evaluation of the tool with the help of over 65s in metropolitan Adelaide, regional South Australia and regional New South Wales," says Dr Cusack.

"The study will help us identify how we might need to alter the layout, font size and language used in the questionnaire, so that it can work more effectively for those over 65.

"Our aim is to ultimately develop a [tool](#), based on ASSIST, that can accurately screen for substance use including alcohol drinking habits of older Australians in a community setting, which will support healthy ageing," she says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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