

## Press Release

### Alcohol-related deaths on the rise in Ireland

**(12 July 2011)** Statistics published by the Health Research Board (HRB) today showed a rise in alcohol-related deaths in Ireland for the years 2004-2008. The findings are from the first ever national report on trends in alcohol-related deaths and deaths among people who were alcohol dependent from the National Drug-Related Deaths Index (NDRDI).

672 alcohol-related poisoning deaths were recorded during the period 2004-2008. Two thirds of those who died were men and the majority were aged less than 50 years. Annually, the number of deaths fluctuated from 111 to 170. Alcohol is the drug most frequently implicated in poisoning deaths in Ireland, with half of all alcohol-related poisonings involved another drug, most frequently benzodiazepines (61% - a prescription medication e.g. diazepam) and opiates (56%).

3,336 non-poisoning deaths of people who were alcohol dependent were recorded, with the annual number increasing from 508 in 2004 to 799 in 2008. The vast majority (89%) of the deaths were due to medical causes; with the remainder due to traumatic causes. Alcoholic liver disease (24%), cardiac conditions (17%) and respiratory infections (11%) were the most common medical causes of death among those who were alcohol dependent in all five years.

Two out of every three (65%) of those who died from medical causes were aged 64 years or younger with more than one third (37%) of the deaths in the 25–34-year age group the result of alcoholic liver disease.

Overall, the most common traumatic causes of death were as a result of a fall (40%) and hanging (19%). Those who died from traumatic causes were generally younger than those who died from medical causes, with half aged 49 years or younger at the time of their death.

Dr Suzi Lyons, senior researcher at the HRB noted that

“The type of deaths among those who were alcohol dependent recorded in the NDRDI correlate very closely with the international research on alcohol-attributable mortality, for example alcoholic liver disease, cardiovascular disease and cancer; and traumatic causes such as falls and drowning. But what we cannot do in this paper though is estimate the social cost of premature mortality of these individuals, the detrimental effect on the family and burden on society.”

Dr Lyons also said that the increase in the number of deaths recorded may be explained by a true increase in deaths or by improved recording practices

“Given that the per capita consumption of alcohol in Ireland is among the highest in Europe, that the majority (56%) of Irish people drink in a harmful manner, and that the NDRDI is a relatively new system, a combination of these factors is the most likely explanation” she concluded.

The World Health Organisation has identified a number of evidence-based strategies that have been shown to have an effect on reducing alcohol-related harm. These include: increasing taxes on alcohol, restrictions on days and hours of sale and a low legal blood alcohol concentration for drivers.

The full report can be found at [www.hrb.ie](http://www.hrb.ie)

**Ends**

#### Notes for editors

The Health Research Board (HRB) was established in 1986. For the last 25 years it has been Ireland’s lead agency in supporting and funding health research. The HRB’s mission is to improve people’s health, patient care and health service through leading and supporting research and generating knowledge and promoting its application in policy and practice. The HRB has supported research which has played a key role in innovation in Ireland’s health system and its economic development.