

## Media Release

# HSM ON THE HILL POLLIES UNITE: EMBRACE SOBRIETY AND BLOGGING

**18 June 2012:** The Libs and the Greens have joined a ‘coalition of the sober’; signing up for a break from alcohol, and agreeing to blog about their journey.

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare, Dr Andrew Southcott and Greens Health Spokesperson, Senator Richard Di Natale announced their participation in Hello Sunday Morning (HSM) at the launch of a report today in Canberra, which found that the innovative online initiative is successfully helping people change their behaviour and improve their health.

Since its launch in 2010, over 4,500 people have signed up to HSM, going without alcohol for anywhere between one and 12 weeks and blogging about their experience. With funding from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), HSM has been evaluated and has now established processes which allow it to more accurately measure its effectiveness.

An analysis of 1,768 blogs shows that over a period of three months of not drinking, participants embark on a journey of self-reflection. It begins with a focus on their own drinking and that of their peers, shifts to reflecting on the role alcohol plays in their lives, and finally, to looking at the role of alcohol in society, and how to best help and support others in their own HSM journeys.

Chris Raine, the founder and CEO of HSM and Queensland’s 2012 Young Australian of the Year, says the use of social media has been the key to successfully reaching young people and helping them to change their behaviour and improve their health.

“One blog at a time, HSM is making a difference in people’s lives. The combination of blogging and social networking creates a real sense of community and our online peer support counters the negativity and pressure that HSMers often face offline from family and friends, and it also holds participants accountable”, Mr Raine said.

When asked about their motivation for participating in HSM, participants’ responses fell into three broad themes: a desire for a better life, a personal challenge or intervention necessitated by serious mental or physical health issues related to or exacerbated by excessive drinking.

Surveyed about their goals, 70.5% said they hoped to improve their health. Interestingly, 23.6% wanted to learn how to socialise without alcohol.

What then are the goals of the participating politicians?

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare, Dr Andrew Southcott has a strong interest in effective measures to reduce the significant harms of alcohol use and misuse.

‘I’m personally looking forward to taking part and getting a first-hand insight into this successful initiative. It is important that we are open to new ideas that can assist in combating alcohol use and misuse, and that we find new ways of engaging and assisting those affected,’ Dr Southcott said.

A former GP, Senator Di Natale knows better than most, the health benefits of even a short break from alcohol.

‘As a nation we need to reassess our relationship with alcohol and Hello Sunday Morning is a good opportunity to reflect on that,’ Senator Di Natale said.

FARE has been working to prevent and reduce the harmful use of alcohol since 2001. FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn believes it is important to support innovative initiatives such as HSM, and to assist them to develop sound evaluation processes.

‘With the total cost of alcohol use and misuse put at a conservative \$36 billion each and every year, the stakes are incredibly high. Over the last ten years FARE has invested \$115 million, funded 1,400 projects and supported over 750 organisations, all with the aim of changing the way Australians drink. By supporting the thorough evaluations of programs such as HSM, we ensure that the lessons learnt can be confidently shared more widely by the Australian community,’ Mr Thorn said.

The Government declined an invitation to participate in today’s launch.

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**Michael Thorn, Chris Raine and Senator Di Natale are available for interview.**

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**Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** FARE is an independent, charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Since 2001, FARE has invested over \$115 million in research and community projects to minimise the impact of alcohol misuse on Australians. Through its national grants program and commissioned research, FARE has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. FARE works with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit FARE’s website: [www.fare.org.au](http://www.fare.org.au)