

New survey to probe NZ drug driving

New Zealand Drug Foundation

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Note: further information can be found below this release: key themes; questions and answers; key findings from a similar Australian survey.

Would you get behind the wheel after taking drugs? And what do you think about people who do?

The Drug Foundation wants to know about New Zealanders' drug driving behaviours and attitudes. It wants as many Kiwis as possible to complete a new online survey, whether they've ever taken drugs or not.

Director Ross Bell says that while we know a lot about drink driving, there has been very little research done around driving and other substances.

"We lack a clear picture of how many New Zealanders have driven after using drugs, which drugs people tend to drive on, and what they think about the risks of drug driving. This survey is the first significant attempt to start plugging those knowledge gaps."

He says it's important that a wide cross section completes the survey, and that respondents come from all walks of life.

"If we want to develop education and prevention initiatives that will actually work, and if our politicians want to make good drug driving policy decisions, then we need to understand the attitudes of all New Zealanders, whether they're regular drug takers or complete abstainers.

"The issue of roadside drug testing is a case in point. Until we have an idea of the scale of the drug driving problem and some knowledge of what people think, we can't be sure whether such measures are a worthwhile investment, or whether they would even work."

He says respondents are asked for their thoughts on a number of drug driving issues so it's also an important opportunity for New Zealanders to have a say.

The survey will run until the end of January 2009 and asks respondents about their experiences with various substances including alcohol, illegal drugs like methamphetamine and cannabis, and prescribed medicines like benzodiazapines and methadone.

International research suggests being under the influence of some drugs or combinations of drugs, including prescribed medications, can be dangerous when driving, but that many people do not fully understand the risks involved.

A similar survey conducted by the Australian Drug Foundation last year found that drug users were far less likely to think drug driving is dangerous compared to those who had never used drugs, but that respondents were generally uninformed about the impact drugs had on driving. It also found the more often someone takes a drug, the more likely they are to drug drive.

The Australian survey was completed by 6801 participants but at least 10,000 responses are wanted for the New Zealand version so that society's views are represented as accurately as possible.

The survey is completely anonymous so respondents can be honest about their drug taking without fear of legal reprisals. While there are general questions about age, gender, and employment status, no personally identifiable information is requested.

It is open to anyone old enough to drive and takes between five and 15 minutes to complete depending on responses. Take part in the survey at www.drugdrivingsurvey.org.nz.

Ends.

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Drug Foundation Drug Driving Survey – More information

Drug Driving Survey key themes

- There are many questions around drug driving in New Zealand. Little is known about how prevalent it is or about people's attitudes and perceptions regarding it.
- Such information is important if we are to develop effective policy, resources, education campaigns and road safety counter-measures.
- The opinions of all New Zealanders are sought, whether they've used drugs or not.
- The survey is comprehensive covering pharmaceutical as well as illicit drugs.
- Participation in the survey is anonymous and voluntary.
- We are heading into the end of year season where drugs and driving may become more important as a topic

Questions and answers about the Drug Driving Survey

Q. Who is conducting this research?

A. The New Zealand Drug Foundation, with funding from the Drug Policy Discretionary Grant.

Q. What is this research about?

A. Drug driving in New Zealand. We are interested in asking New Zealanders what they think about drugs and driving, what their drug driving experiences have been, how much they know about the effects and risks of driving on drugs, and what they think about roadside drug testing.

Q. Why is this research needed?

A. We lack a clear picture of the drug driving situation in New Zealand. We want to find out what proportion of New Zealanders have driven after using drugs, which drugs people tend to drive on, and what New Zealanders think about the risks of drug driving.

This information can then be used to develop policy, and education and prevention initiatives. Resources can be designed to fill the gaps in New Zealanders' drug driving knowledge so drivers can make better decisions about their safety behind the wheel.

Q. How are we going to ask New Zealanders about drugs and driving?

A. We are launching an internet survey so people can participate in the research online.

Q. Where is the survey located?

The survey is at www.drugdrivingsurvey.org.nz.

Q. Who should complete the survey?

A. We want as many people as possible to complete the survey to make sure we get as accurate a picture as possible.

Q. I've never used drugs, so will my input be of value?

Absolutely! Anyone can complete the survey, whether they have used drugs or not, no matter what age, and no matter how much they think they might know about drugs and driving. We are interested in the attitudes and behaviours of all New Zealanders and the survey won't be accurate if it is only answered by people who use drugs.

Q. What drugs will this research focus on?

A. This research will look at a variety of drug types, including alcohol, illegal drugs like methamphetamine (P) and cannabis, as well as prescribed medicines like benzodiazapines and methadone.

Q. Is the survey anonymous? – What about my privacy?

A. The survey is completely anonymous. There are general questions about age, gender, education, and employment, but none of these questions can be used to identify you. We are interested in what you know and think, not who you are. Ethics approval has been granted by the Ministry of Health's Health and Disability Ethics Committee.

Q. How long does the survey take?

A. That will depend on your responses. On average it takes between five and 15 minutes to complete.

Q. Is drug driving a problem in New Zealand?

A. We're not sure, and that's why we need to do this research. New Zealand has a wealth of information on drink driving, but very little on drug driving. International research has found that drug driving is usually less common than drink driving, but there has been very little research on how much drug driving occurs in New Zealand.

Q. Is drug driving dangerous?

A. International research has shown that being under the influence of some drugs, combinations of drugs, or drugs and alcohol can be dangerous when driving. Many people also overlook the risks of driving on prescribed medications. Different drugs are associated with different levels of impairment and risk, so we need to know which drugs people do and do not drive on.

Q. Should we have roadside drug testing?

A. Without data on the level of the drug driving problem in New Zealand it is difficult to know whether roadside drug testing is a worthwhile investment. This research will not only give us an idea of the extent of drug driving in New Zealand, but it will give New Zealanders the opportunity to have say over whether they think roadside drug testing is a good idea or not.

Key findings from a similar Australian survey

Drugs and Driving in Australia – A survey of community attitudes, experience and understanding was undertaken by the Australian Drug Foundation in 2007. Its research included an online survey that was completed by 6801 people.

Key findings from that survey include:

- Over half of the respondents who reported having used cannabis (51.3) and methamphetamines (52.7) in the previous 12 months also said they had driven within three hours of drug use.

- The drug most commonly associated with drug driving was alcohol, with 12.6 per cent of drinkers admitting to driving with a blood alcohol content over .05 in the past year. This was followed by cannabis (12.3 per cent), methamphetamine (6.9 per cent), ecstasy (5.8 per cent) and benzodiazepine (four per cent).
- Males were more likely to partake in drug driving than females.
- Young people were more likely to drive under the influence of alcohol, ecstasy and methamphetamines, but cannabis users of all ages were equally likely to drug drive.
- Drug users were far less likely to think drug driving is dangerous compared to those who had never used drugs.
- Respondents were well informed about the impact of alcohol on driving, but were uninformed about illicit and prescription drugs.
- Only 3.1 per cent of drivers experienced Random Drug Testing in the past year, but 42 think it likely they will be tested in the coming year.
- Overwhelmingly, respondents had little idea about how long to wait between illicit and pharmaceutical drug use and driving.
- The more often someone takes a drug, the more likely they are to drug drive.