We know that Australia has a drinking problem and whilst you might be in here today sober and enjoying a few series of lectures, there are many outside who are enjoying, in the sunshine, beer, maybe a glass of wine and just sitting back and relaxing and enjoying themselves. The unfortunate problem in Australia is that we're in the top 10 in the world for our bad behaviour when it comes to drinking. We drink too much, so we're drinking quite often and when we drink, we can drink one awfully large amount of alcohol in one sitting. Culturally here in Australia, it's a good thing when you've gone out and had your 20 drinks on a Saturday night. It's a brilliant story to tell your friends and talk about the wonders of what you actually did. People are proud when they have a hangover and they're written off from doing any activity whatsoever in the next 24 hours. So Australia celebrates drinking and we celebrate drinking to excess. So we definitely do acknowledge that we have a serious problem.

Okay just to unintended, give you some sobering statistics. In Australia, there are a significant amount of people that drink at what I call risky and high risk levels. So at present we can acknowledge that one in eight people, one in eight Australians are drinking too much. The cost to our community, so for us as tax payers exceeds $10 billion per annum. So for each and every person in this room, alcohol costs you in your taxes, $500. And this might be through simple things like admissions to hospital and all the health and services that we need to provide, to put some of those drunken louts into a police van and take them home on a Saturday night and the staff that are then left in a hospital on a Friday and Saturday night dealing with the fallout from our drinking behaviours. So the cost to us is large. It's something that we don't necessarily think about, it is something we do need to think about one awful lot more. If you look at our annual statistics, more than 30,000 people die from attributable things to alcohol, so it is quite problematic.

I'm going to ask you a couple of questions. Could you tell me how many standard drinks are in a glass of wine, in a typical serving in a pub on a Saturday night when someone pours you a glass of wine? How many standard drinks are in that glass? The answer can vary between 1.4 and 1.8. How about this bottle of Coopers? It's a beautiful pale ale beer, nice 375ml size. The answer is 1.3, it's actually nested there on the actual label. Who actually knows these things? Generally it's actually 15 - 20 year olds because they're counting how much bang for their buck they can actually get when they go out drinking. You see their aiming to actually go out and buy the drinks that have the most standard drinks in it. As for the rest of the population, quite often there's a lot of us that have no concept at all that that information's actually given to us on the label. So we do definitely not only have a problem, we also have a knowledge problem.
A lot of Australians do not understand how many standard drinks are actually in the beverages that they're actually consuming. So for many, if you go out to lunch, enjoy a glass of wine, hop in the car and drive, for a female, that's problematic. You have probably, if you've drunk it and then hop in the car within that first hour, you're above the legal drink drive limit. But these are things that a lot of us simply don't know.

So let's just have a little bit of a look at some of the research that we're actually doing. Our research has taken us from simple things like talking to people, exploring what they know about drinking and what we find in our research is that people don't really understand some of the terminology. They don't understand what a standard drink is and heck, how can we? It's really confusing. Alcohol levels vary in all of the beverages that we consume, so unless we stick to the same thing every single time, it's quite difficult for us to judge how much we're actually drinking and what we're actually doing. So knowledge itself is a problem. Our understanding of some things is actually a problem. Now as researchers, as a team when we go out to talk to people about their drinking, we also experience even more problems. If we ask people to tell us what they're actually drinking, they actually, unless they're young and they're trying to be a hero and typically that might be a male who wants to over-report, your average Australian adult will actually under-report with they drink. You see, a lot of us actually understand that drinking too much isn't always a good thing, so in terms of research, they're trying to actually downplay just how much they actually drink. What they will actually tell us and over-report to us, is how many days they might abstain from drinking. So again they don't give us an accurate reflection of what they're actually doing. So for us to understand the extent of the problem, is in itself one of the problems that we're actually addressing and dealing with.

A lot of the things that I suggested before also impact us. People perceive the risks of drinking as a positive thing. They think hangovers are a great thing. They think drinking too much is a great thing. So if we tell you about the risks of drinking, the average Australian, you're actually informing them a whole lot more and it's actually just reinforcing a lot of the positive things that they actually feel. So again as a team of researchers, these are problems that we're left dealing with. We also know from the research that people actually aren't well informed. So when I asked you questions before and said how much is in that drink of wine and how much is in that bottle of beer, I can just about bet that a series of people in the room aren't actually correct. There also is a very good likelihood that many actually are. You see that's one of the areas that we have the most problems with when we're actually out there researching. So funded by Road Safety bodies for example who have a strong interest in working out why people are still drink driving so much, we can actually show that it's their knowledge of standard drinks that is one part of the problem. Now of course there are repeat offenders and they just simply drive because they want to and they think they'll be okay and they won't get caught, but there are a group of people out there, so a mother who's had a glass of wine before going to pick up her son from a sporting expedition in the afternoon who gets caught drink driving. Now she thought she would be fine. She thought she would be safe. So these are the sorts of people that we're trying to attempt to educate to say, hang on, maybe you've actually had one too many.
So some of the work that we need to actually do is look at how people are actually served alcohol. So if we're out in bars and we're out in pubs, what is getting served? And quite often if we get the glass and we measure how much is actually in there, the glass of wine is actually two standard drinks. So for a lot of women, when you can only have one standard drink per hour to be okay and safe and hop in the car and drive, that in itself is problematic. We need half serves, we need something that we know we could actually drink that is okay. Either that or the next one actually has to occur, we need to not drink at all and so maybe some of the work we need to do is look at lobbying government to say, look maybe a zero alcohol limit is the better way to go. But my preference would be, can we work to get to a better world where it's easier for all of us to just order and be okay and know that it's not such a bad thing.

Some of the research that we've actually been dealing with has actually taken us out to bars and pubs to actually look at young Australians and ordinary Australians and actually watch what they're actually doing. So some of this work covertly observing, like we don't identify what we're doing, until we're actually asked, has simple things like people putting notes back under my table sort of saying, I'm watching you too as people start to understand that they're being observed. But that behaviour is all aimed at, we are seeking as a research team to understand just what people are actually doing. So we're not asking you anymore to tell us what you think, we're actually counting it and through the measurements and what the pubs are actually doing, we can actually track just how much consumption's going on and later on actually measure that back to the person to see how accurate this actually is. So the unfortunate thing about this body of work is it's probably going to highlight that not only does Australia have a problem currently, it's actually even worse than we currently think it is and that's where this work is actually starting to take us.

One of the other things we deal with is things like, once we understand that we have knowledge problems, we understand we need to actually educate people, so with one of our recent projects, we actually ran a series of on line tests and encouraged people to actually take these tests and then come back and retest again, because you see, we know through education that if we educate, people will get a better understanding and we can actually do good things, right? Well nearly. For two in three people it might increase their knowledge and for one in three it actually has a detrimental impact. They start to overestimate, they become more wrong than they originally were which in itself becomes a really serious research problem. How can we deliver knowledge, how can we educate people, what can we actually do? So the natural answer from this one was, it was a very text based thing, and of course people learn in different ways and so now we need to go forward and keep testing to work out what other formats might be more effective than others.

And then just to give you a sense of some of what we actually do, because when I was kindly introduced before, a lot of our work is about behaviour change. Today I've just spoken about alcohol and the problem associated with that, but in social marketing and behaviour change, they're also dealing with things like people applying sunscreen, how
we can get hospital workers to wash their hands more, how we can get people to stop smoking and the list goes on. So there's quite a few different areas that we're actually engaging with. But for the knowledge project itself and alcohol, what we're actually looking at is what else can we do, so how can we deliver knowledge more effectively? How can we actually track, measure and once we know what people are doing, how can we stop people drinking as much in a pub? So you can see that in the next few weeks we're going out to one pub in Brisbane, we will be sitting there and doing a benchmark study to understand what today's behaviour is and then as a team of marketers, coming up with a solution that might be palatable, so the pub can still sell things, but maybe they can sell slightly smaller quantities and overall have people drinking less. That might not be such a bad thing. So there's a series of projects that we've got underway. Where looking at message testing, framing different messages to understand how we can get messages across more effectively, that might actually get the end result that we actually want.