

## **FebFast letter to editor – Jerril Rechter, CEO VicHealth**

29 January 2016

February isn't too late to turn the New Year around and make a small change that could have a huge and lasting effect on your health and lifestyle. Just one month without alcohol can reduce your risk of injury and long term illnesses.

This year I'll once again be one of thousands taking a break from alcohol for 29 days as part of FebFast, the annual fundraising challenge encouraging people to say no to alcohol.

Disturbingly, most people don't think excessive alcohol consumption is a problem.

A 2015 national survey by VicHealth found that although half (46%) of us are drinking at risky levels – five or more standard drinks on a single occasion in the last three months – eight out of 10 Australians aren't worried about their alcohol intake.

In Victoria, alcohol is one of the top 10 avoidable causes of disease and death and is estimated to cost the nation \$4.3 billion annually. Liver disease, cardiovascular disease, cancer and depression are just some of the more than 60 serious illnesses that can be linked to risky alcohol consumption.

But here's the good news: contrary to recent suggestions by York University lecturer Ian Hamilton that campaigns like FebFast aren't that effective, we know that FebFast works in helping people reduce their alcohol intake.

A recent VicHealth evaluation of FebFest found that almost half of participants surveyed who had given up alcohol for the month of February, had also reduced their alcohol consumption on an ongoing basis after FebFast had finished.

FebFasters report feeling healthier and losing weight. They get more sleep, save money, they're more productive at work, and instead of nursing a hangover, have more time and energy to get outside and get active.

I'd love to see Victorians join me and take a break to assess their relationship with alcohol and take steps to reduce their alcohol consumption.

Give yourself a break and join me in taking up the challenge. Sign up for FebFast at [www.FebFast.org.au](http://www.FebFast.org.au)

*Jerril Rechter, VicHealth CEO*