Alcohol in Australia: Drinking patterns and harms

Alcohol-related harm is a whole-of-community problem; it is not an issue limited to a small number of ‘problem drinkers’.

Drinking patterns in Australia are cause for concern

- **Over 1 in 4** (28.4%) Australians aged 14 years or older consume alcohol at a level that puts them at risk of injury from a single drinking occasion at least once a month.³

- In 2010, **1 in 5** (20.1%) Australians aged 14 years or older consumed alcohol at a level that put them at risk of an alcohol-related disease or injury over their lifetime.³

- **Over half** (51.6%) of all drinkers consumed alcohol in excess of either of Australia’s low risk drinking guidelines for healthy adults in the 12 months prior to 2010.⁴

- The per capital consumption (PCC) of alcohol in WA is higher than the national average. In 2009-10, PCC of alcohol in WA (for people aged 15 years and older) was **12.4 litres**, compared to 10.3 litres for Australia.⁵

- The Indigenous population is more likely than the non-Indigenous population to abstain from alcohol. However, the prevalence of harmful alcohol use in the Indigenous population is about **twice as great** as that in the non-Indigenous population.⁶

Australians experience a range of harms from their own drinking

Drinkers experience a range of harms as a result of their drinking, including problems with finances and relationships, as well as physical, emotional and legal problems such as violence and drink driving.⁷

Recent drinkers aged **14 years and over** are more likely to experience verbal abuse, physical abuse and to have been put in fear by someone under the influence of alcohol compared to those who do not consume alcohol.³

**Over a third** (34.9%) of risky drinkers suffered memory loss at least once as a result of excessive alcohol consumption in 2010.³

Harmful alcohol use is associated with a range of **chronic diseases** including cardiovascular disease, some cancers, liver diseases and cognitive impairment.⁸⁻¹⁰

It is estimated that **5070** cases of cancer (or **5%** of all cancers) are attributable to long-term chronic use of alcohol each year in Australia.¹⁰
75% of all police responses in WA are alcohol related.\textsuperscript{12}

**Alcohol-related harms place a major burden on law enforcement resources**

- 75% of all police responses in WA are alcohol related, which means that 75% of the police discretionary operational budget is directed towards providing support for alcohol-related issues.\textsuperscript{12}

- In 2006, 19.8% of the WA Police budget was spent responding to alcohol related matters, a cost of $126 million at that time. In 2012, 19.8% of the WA Police budget represents $232.5 million.\textsuperscript{13}

- Nationally, police use one quarter of their budgets responding to alcohol-related incidents.\textsuperscript{14}

- Alcohol intoxication is a factor in almost 90% of all calls for police intervention between the hours of 10pm and 2am.\textsuperscript{14,15}

- Alcohol was involved in almost 20,000 assaults recorded by WA Police between 2009 and 2011, which represented 44.1% of all assaults during that period.\textsuperscript{16}

- 66.9% of victims of physical assault in WA in 2011-12 believed alcohol or another substance contributed to their assault.\textsuperscript{17}

- Drink-driving contributed to 19% of all deaths on WA roads in 2012.\textsuperscript{18}

- WA Police charge an average of 18,551 drivers each year with exceeding the lawful alcohol limit (5 year average).\textsuperscript{13}

**Alcohol affects people other than the drinker**

- Over 70% of Australian adults reported being affected by others’ drinking in 2008, and almost half reported severe harm such as property damage, and physical or sexual abuse.\textsuperscript{2}

- An estimated 367 people died and almost 14,000 were hospitalised because of the drinking of others in Australia in 2008.\textsuperscript{2}

- In a given year in Australia, 277 deaths of people aged 15 years and over are estimated to be due to another’s drinking and driving (this represents three quarters of all deaths due to others’ drinking).\textsuperscript{2}

- In 2005, 70,000 Australians were victims of alcohol related assault as a result of others’ drinking.\textsuperscript{2}

- 28.5% of Australians aged 14 years or older report being either verbally or physically abused or put in fear in the previous year by someone under the influence of alcohol.\textsuperscript{3}

- Alcohol use during pregnancy is a leading cause of preventable birth defects, including Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.\textsuperscript{11}
Alcohol places additional burdens on already stretched health resources

- In 2013, an average of 12 ambulances a day were called to attend to West Australians for the primary reason of alcohol intoxication (a total of 4,383 ambulance call-outs). This figure does not include other alcohol-related harms such as falls, assaults and road crashes.

- **Almost a third** of all injuries treated in WA hospital emergency departments are attributable to alcohol.

- Alcohol is involved in 45% of hospitalisations and deaths caused by violence injuries, nearly 1 in 5 injury deaths, and 1 in 8 injury hospitalisations in WA.

- There were more than 66,817 hospitalisations in WA for alcohol-related conditions between 2005 and 2009, representing 349,703 bed days at a cost of over $379.5 million.

- Each year, alcohol use is responsible for around 450 deaths in WA.

- Alcohol was responsible for 2.85% of the total attributable burden of disease and injury in WA in 2006.

- As many as 60% of the patients in the burns unit at Royal Perth Hospital are there because of alcohol.

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**References:**


