

20 Alcohol-related disease

Disease characteristics

It is estimated that 77% of Australians consume alcohol, making it the most widely used drug in Australia. Thirty-six per cent of those consuming alcohol will usually do so at what is considered a harmful rate (over four standard drinks per day for males, over two standard drinks per day for females, and less than two alcohol-free days per week) (DHAC 2000a).

Alcohol consumption is considered by many health officials to be an important and intractable problem. The use of alcohol in Australian society cuts across a wide range of social groups, and it plays a role in most social gatherings and celebrations. Attributing related deaths is difficult (Makkai & McAllister 1998). However, it is presently causally linked to death from 35 diseases (see Appendix Table D.6).

Using data from the 1995 National Drug Survey, Makkai and McAllister found that while there did not appear to be a significant difference between the sexes in harmful/hazardous drinking. Males were more likely to indicate that they were moderate drinkers, and females were more likely to indicate that they were non-drinkers. They also found that for the period 1988–1995, the level of heavy drinking declined and the level of abstinence increased.

Deaths due to alcohol-related disease represented about 3.5% of all deaths, and 67,000 PYLL (about 7%) before the age of 75 making alcohol related disease a major cause of death in Australia. However, these results need to be offset against the known benefits of moderate alcohol consumption.

Age–sex distribution

The causes of death causally linked to alcohol are listed in Appendix Table D6.

There are about 3,500 deaths each year due to alcohol-related disease. In 1998, there were 2,344 male deaths and 1,193 female deaths attributed to alcohol consumption. The rate of death attributable to alcohol for males (252 deaths per million population) was 2.4 times the rate for females (104).

Mortality rates for males were highest among those aged 15–29, largely due to accidents and injuries involving consumption of alcohol, and for ages 50 and over, largely related to chronic alcohol consumption. For women, the effect of alcohol-related accidents and injuries was not so great and mortality rates generally increased with age, particularly from age 65 onwards (Table 20.1; Figure 20.2).

Twelve-year trends 1987–1998

Over the period 1987–1998, there was a significant downward trend in deaths due to alcohol-related disease. There was a significant decrease in mortality rates for males of 2.6% each year, with significant decreases for males aged 5 years and older. The decrease for females was 1.7% per year, with significant decreases for females aged between 20–29, 45–49 and aged 55 years and over (Table 20.1; Figure 20.1).

Comparisons by State and Territory, geographic region, Indigenous origin, country of birth and socioeconomic status have not been made for deaths attributable to excessive consumption of alcohol.

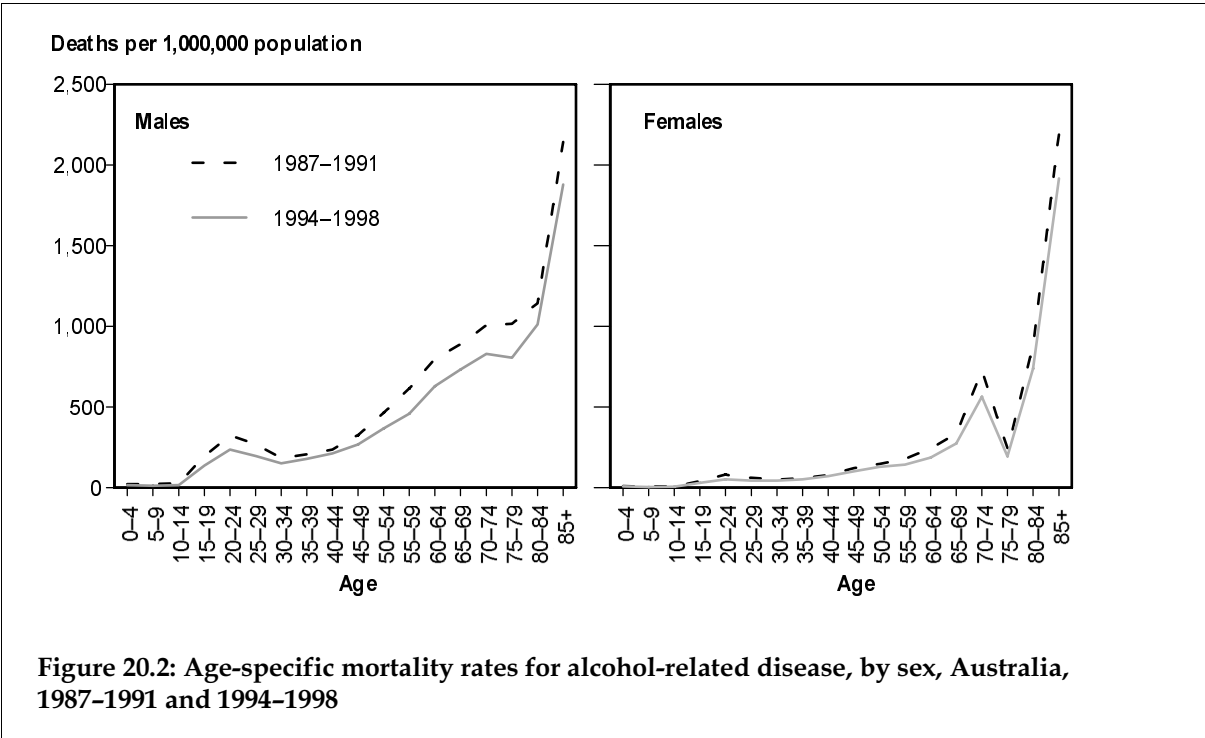
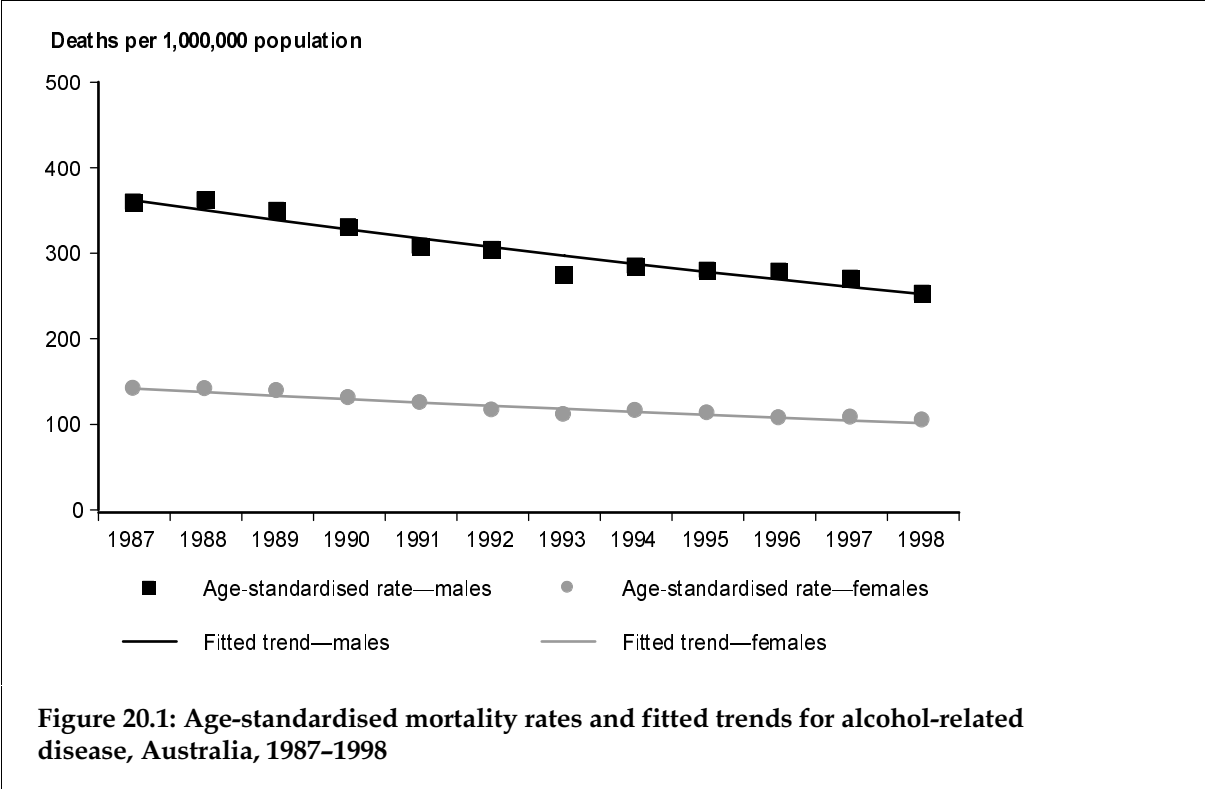


Table 20.1: Age-specific and age-standardised mortality rates for alcohol-related disease per million population, Australia, 1987–1998

| Year | Age | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ASMR Aust 1991 | | |
|------|----------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------|-----|------------|
| | 0-4 | 5-9 | 10-14 | 15-19 | 20-24 | 25-29 | 30-34 | 35-39 | 40-44 | 45-49 | 50-54 | 55-59 | 60-64 | 65-69 | 70-74 | 75-79 | 80-84 | | 85+ | Crude rate |
| | Males | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1987 | 26 | 22 | 30 | 209 | 347 | 246 | 177 | 208 | 247 | 379 | 537 | 713 | 894 | 882 | 1,074 | 1,009 | 1,205 | 2,043 | 336 | 359 |
| 1988 | 25 | 24 | 30 | 217 | 368 | 303 | 195 | 205 | 296 | 320 | 477 | 573 | 858 | 869 | 1,085 | 1,120 | 1,178 | 2,335 | 338 | 361 |
| 1989 | 17 | 20 | 28 | 207 | 342 | 295 | 190 | 231 | 200 | 315 | 485 | 615 | 757 | 949 | 1,009 | 1,058 | 1,231 | 2,352 | 327 | 349 |
| 1990 | 24 | 26 | 23 | 177 | 305 | 278 | 186 | 190 | 227 | 326 | 445 | 594 | 767 | 875 | 991 | 954 | 1,027 | 2,204 | 311 | 330 |
| 1991 | 15 | 18 | 21 | 165 | 269 | 226 | 174 | 196 | 221 | 300 | 391 | 578 | 726 | 871 | 887 | 949 | 1,098 | 1,815 | 291 | 307 |
| 1992 | 15 | 18 | 18 | 140 | 242 | 216 | 158 | 173 | 235 | 289 | 443 | 529 | 731 | 945 | 870 | 943 | 1,143 | 1,902 | 289 | 304 |
| 1993 | 21 | 12 | 15 | 145 | 236 | 214 | 145 | 189 | 199 | 270 | 400 | 469 | 577 | 741 | 857 | 820 | 870 | 1,930 | 263 | 274 |
| 1994 | 14 | 10 | 18 | 140 | 230 | 205 | 134 | 193 | 226 | 267 | 344 | 501 | 668 | 756 | 888 | 944 | 1,136 | 2,006 | 273 | 284 |
| 1995 | 15 | 15 | 16 | 137 | 255 | 200 | 146 | 188 | 198 | 270 | 374 | 489 | 649 | 768 | 833 | 842 | 1,007 | 2,002 | 271 | 279 |
| 1996 | 19 | 12 | 19 | 142 | 244 | 188 | 169 | 189 | 216 | 277 | 390 | 452 | 648 | 707 | 862 | 767 | 1,099 | 1,896 | 273 | 278 |
| 1997 | 18 | 10 | 15 | 144 | 229 | 195 | 150 | 162 | 225 | 288 | 389 | 442 | 612 | 741 | 845 | 748 | 976 | 1,695 | 268 | 270 |
| 1998 | 13 | 10 | 13 | 122 | 219 | 197 | 155 | 168 | 203 | 241 | 350 | 423 | 576 | 671 | 726 | 747 | 840 | 1,841 | 252 | 252 |
| | Females | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1987 | 11 | 9 | 10 | 43 | 86 | 62 | 54 | 59 | 86 | 137 | 144 | 171 | 238 | 335 | 785 | 219 | 960 | 2,420 | 152 | 141 |
| 1988 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 42 | 92 | 70 | 50 | 58 | 87 | 142 | 154 | 183 | 280 | 294 | 754 | 282 | 894 | 2,176 | 152 | 141 |
| 1989 | 12 | 10 | 8 | 38 | 78 | 55 | 52 | 62 | 88 | 116 | 143 | 184 | 247 | 327 | 738 | 291 | 927 | 2,372 | 151 | 138 |
| 1990 | 8 | 11 | 8 | 38 | 76 | 51 | 38 | 63 | 58 | 115 | 157 | 179 | 224 | 366 | 708 | 228 | 849 | 2,174 | 142 | 130 |
| 1991 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 37 | 73 | 72 | 50 | 55 | 71 | 98 | 144 | 178 | 234 | 344 | 650 | 185 | 820 | 1,857 | 136 | 124 |
| 1992 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 31 | 70 | 54 | 44 | 53 | 52 | 111 | 129 | 159 | 221 | 315 | 598 | 170 | 748 | 1,986 | 130 | 116 |
| 1993 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 31 | 56 | 34 | 47 | 55 | 51 | 83 | 130 | 165 | 202 | 298 | 622 | 166 | 779 | 1,840 | 126 | 110 |
| 1994 | 13 | 7 | 5 | 27 | 51 | 45 | 39 | 55 | 73 | 133 | 112 | 149 | 245 | 277 | 568 | 207 | 782 | 1,990 | 134 | 115 |
| 1995 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 31 | 56 | 51 | 47 | 47 | 73 | 103 | 133 | 160 | 174 | 281 | 586 | 190 | 757 | 1,957 | 132 | 112 |
| 1996 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 28 | 43 | 43 | 33 | 47 | 67 | 97 | 126 | 160 | 187 | 271 | 566 | 191 | 734 | 1,868 | 127 | 106 |
| 1997 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 30 | 57 | 45 | 53 | 50 | 86 | 95 | 145 | 119 | 157 | 263 | 538 | 182 | 720 | 1,871 | 129 | 107 |
| 1998 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 34 | 49 | 38 | 49 | 56 | 58 | 89 | 127 | 132 | 161 | 274 | 532 | 206 | 676 | 1,860 | 127 | 104 |

Note: ASMR = age-standardised mortality rate.