

3 Use of alcohol

Alcohol is second only to tobacco as a cause of drug-related deaths and hospitalisations. The Institute estimates that in 1997 there were almost 4,000 alcohol-related deaths and just under 100,000 hospital episodes (AIHW 1999). Principal among alcohol-related causes of deaths and hospital episodes were cirrhosis of the liver, strokes and motor vehicle accidents.

Alcohol drinking status

In 1998 almost half (49%) of all Australians aged 14 years or over regularly drank alcohol (Table 3.1). The proportion of male regular drinkers (59%) was higher than that for females (38%). The 1998 survey also showed that:

- One in ten (10%) of all Australians aged 14 years and over were ex-drinkers and one in three (32%) were occasional drinkers.
- One in ten (9%) of all Australians aged 14 and over never drank alcohol, with fewer males (7%) than females (12%) reporting they never drank.
- Age-wise, persons aged 30–39 years had the highest proportion of regular drinkers (55%) while only 30% of all teenagers reported they were regular drinkers.
- Among the oldest age category (60 years or greater), almost three-fifths (59%) of males reported that they were regular drinkers compared with only one-third (33%) of women.

Table 3.1: Alcohol drinking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Drinking status	Age group						All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	
(per cent)							
Males							
Regular	33.0	63.2	65.0	62.0	62.7	59.1	59.4
Occasional	37.5	25.8	24.0	23.6	25.1	20.1	25.2
Ex-drinker	8.2	6.0	7.6	8.7	8.9	12.6	8.6
Never	21.3	4.9	3.4	5.7	3.2	8.2	6.8
Females							
Regular	27.3	40.1	44.3	42.7	35.7	33.0	38.1
Occasional	43.9	44.1	40.3	38.4	41.3	27.3	38.5
Ex-drinker	4.6	9.6	9.5	10.7	16.6	15.8	11.4
Never	24.3	6.2	5.9	8.1	6.4	23.9	11.9
Persons							
Regular	30.2	51.8	54.7	52.2	49.6	45.0	48.6
Occasional	40.7	34.8	32.1	31.1	33.0	24.0	31.9
Ex-drinker	6.4	7.8	8.5	9.7	12.7	14.3	10.0
Never	22.8	5.6	4.6	6.9	4.8	16.7	9.4

Frequency of drinking

The 1998 survey showed that, of all the recent drinkers (those reporting to have consumed alcohol at least once in the last 12 months), one in ten (11%) reported that they consumed alcohol at least daily, while one in six (17%) reported consuming alcohol at least weekly (Table 3.2). Furthermore, the survey showed that:

- As age increased the frequency of drinking also increased.
- Of those aged 60 years or over, more males (31%) than females (18%) were daily drinkers.
- Half of all females (50%) drank less often than one drink a week compared with 30% of males.

Table 3.2: Frequency of drinking: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Frequency	Age group						All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	
(per cent)							
Males							
At least daily	0.7 *	5.8	9.8	13.0	23.5	31.4	14.3
4 to 6 days a week	5.1	14.3	18.4	21.8	17.8	16.1	16.5
2 to 3 days a week	15.6	29.3	25.9	19.1	21.2	19.8	22.8
At least weekly	25.4	21.5	19.0	18.5	8.9	7.3	16.6
Less often	53.2	29.0	27.0	27.6	28.6	25.4	29.8
Females							
At least daily	—	2.1	4.5	7.6	7.1	17.7	6.6
4 to 6 days a week	2.0	5.9	9.0	14.6	16.8	10.1	10.0
2 to 3 days a week	10.6	19.8	19.4	14.8	11.8	13.6	15.9
At least weekly	25.7	19.7	19.4	15.6	10.7	13.4	17.3
Less often	61.7	52.4	47.7	47.3	53.6	45.2	50.3
Persons							
At least daily	0.3 *	4.0	7.2	10.3	16.0	24.9	10.6
4 to 6 days a week	3.6	10.3	13.8	18.3	17.3	13.3	13.4
2 to 3 days a week	13.1	24.8	22.8	17.0	17.0	16.9	19.5
At least weekly	25.6	20.7	19.2	17.1	9.7	10.2	16.9
Less often	57.4	40.2	37.0	37.3	39.9	34.7	39.6

Note: Base equals all recent drinkers.

Type of alcohol consumed

Bottled wine, regular beer (with alcohol content more than 4%) and bottled spirits were the type of alcoholic drinks most Australians preferred (Table 3.3). Of the recent drinkers, almost half (49%) reported drinking bottled wine as opposed to one in five (21%) drinking cask wine. The survey also showed that:

- A higher proportion of females drink wine compared with males. The proportion of females drinking bottled wine was 57% and drinking cask wine was 24%. Among males, only 41% drank bottled wines; the proportion of males drinking cask wine was also lower, at 19%.

- The proportion of recent drinkers drinking low-alcohol beer increased with increasing age. Nearly one in ten (9%) teenagers reported drinking low-alcohol beer compared with nearly one in three (31%) persons aged 60 years or over.
- The consumption pattern for high-alcohol drinks by age category was opposite to that for low-alcohol beer, with a higher proportion (63%) of younger aged drinkers (aged 14–19 years) consuming bottled spirits compared with those aged 60 years or over (22%).

Table 3.3: Type of alcohol consumed: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Type of alcohol	Age group						All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	
(per cent)							
Males							
Cask wine	11.3	12.5	16.8	17.0	27.9	26.6	18.7
Bottled wine	13.9	37.9	45.4	45.0	50.7	38.2	40.6
Regular beer (>4% Alc/Vol)	66.9	73.7	60.1	52.2	45.9	25.2	54.3
Mid-strength beer (3%–3.9% Alc/Vol)	13.4	15.8	24.1	26.7	20.7	15.2	20.0
Low-alcohol beer (1%–2.9% Alc/Vol)	11.2	10.7	22.8	35.9	27.8	39.4	25.1
Premixed spirits (e.g. UDL)	30.6	19.5	8.9	7.1	6.1	1.6	11.0
Bottled spirits	62.3	59.2	37.8	30.2	30.7	22.3	39.4
Alcoholic soda (e.g. SubZero)	22.0	16.2	3.7	1.2	0.2 *	0.2 *	6.3
Cider	5.5	6.1	4.6	4.3	3.4	1.8	4.3
Fruit-flavoured 'coolers'	11.2	6.5	2.6	0.2	3.7	1.4	3.7
Other	10.4	4.5	4.4	3.8	1.6	2.8	4.2
Females							
Cask wine	13.7	15.8	24.7	26.9	25.2	34.6	23.8
Bottled wine	24.6	53.3	63.5	63.9	63.0	61.9	57.4
Regular beer (>4% Alc/Vol)	28.1	28.8	17.9	12.7	8.9	11.1	17.9
Mid-strength beer (3%–3.9% Alc/Vol)	8.3	5.8	6.9	4.7	4.5	5.0	5.8
Low-alcohol beer (1%–2.9% Alc/Vol)	6.8	5.2	13.9	17.2	12.9	22.0	13.2
Premixed spirits (e.g. UDL)	44.3	24.4	9.6	3.6	3.7	3.8	13.2
Bottled spirits	62.9	57.8	45.4	25.7	15.9	21.3	38.2
Alcoholic soda (e.g. SubZero)	46.3	25.6	6.2	2.3	0.9 *	2.1 *	12.0
Cider	13.3	8.8	6.9	3.8	2.1	2.9	6.1
Fruit-flavoured 'coolers'	24.8	20.7	11.3	7.5	9.2	4.0	12.4
Other	15.7	8.6	4.9	6.3	7.8	5.2	7.4
Persons							
Cask wine	12.5	14.1	20.6	21.9	26.6	30.3	21.1
Bottled wine	19.3	45.3	54.1	54.4	56.3	49.2	48.7
Regular beer (>4% Alc/Vol)	47.4	52.2	39.7	32.7	29.1	18.6	36.8
Mid-strength beer (3%–3.9% Alc/Vol)	10.8	11.0	15.8	15.8	13.4	10.5	13.2
Low-alcohol beer (1%–2.9% Alc/Vol)	9.0	8.1	18.5	26.6	21.1	31.3	19.4
Premixed spirits (e.g. UDL)	37.5	21.8	9.3	5.3	5.0	2.6	12.1
Bottled spirits	62.6	58.5	41.5	28.0	24.0	21.8	38.9
Alcoholic soda (e.g. SubZero)	34.2	20.7	4.9	1.7	0.6 *	1.1 *	9.1
Cider	9.4	7.4	5.7	4.0	2.8	2.3	5.1
Fruit-flavoured 'coolers'	18.0	13.3	6.8	3.8	6.2	2.6	7.8
Other	13.1	6.5	4.7	5.0	4.4	3.9	5.7

Note: Base equals all recent drinkers.

Usual place of alcohol consumption

Slightly more than three-quarters (77%) of all recent drinkers reported that their usual place of alcohol consumption is in their homes, followed by a friend's house (54%) (Table 3.4). Less than one in 20 recent drinkers reported public places as their usual place of alcohol consumption. The survey further showed that:

- Slightly more female drinkers (55%) nominated restaurants/cafes as usual drinking place compared with males (47%).
- Slightly more male drinkers (57%) nominated licensed premises as a regular drinking place compared with females (47%).
- Similar proportions of male and female drinkers (52%) reported that parties were the usual place of drinking alcohol.
- As age increased, the proportion of people reporting home as their usual place of drinking increased.
- Persons reporting parties as their usual place of drinking decreased as age increased. More than three-quarters of teenagers reported that parties were the usual place of drinking alcohol compared with less than one in three persons aged 60 years or over.
- Only 4% of regular drinkers reported that their usual place of drinking alcohol was public places.

Table 3.4: Where alcohol is usually consumed: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Place consumed	Age group						All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	
(per cent)							
Males							
In my home	52.8	69.0	82.4	92.4	88.0	83.2	79.8
Friend's house	53.4	64.5	62.9	54.6	45.1	36.7	54.0
Parties	75.2	67.6	56.7	46.1	43.3	26.5	51.7
Restaurants/cafes	17.2	54.0	57.9	48.7	46.0	36.8	46.7
Licensed premises	41.6	78.6	62.9	57.8	46.4	39.6	57.1
Educational institutions	7.0	5.8	1.1	1.6 *	0.6 *	0.6 *	2.5
Workplace	6.5	12.7	15.3	7.8	7.3	0.4 *	9.0
Public places	9.7	7.9	5.0	5.3	3.9	0.4 *	5.1
Car or other vehicle	6.4	8.7	3.4	1.6 *	4.3	—	4.0
Other places	8.2	4.8	3.3	3.3	2.0 *	0.4 *	3.4
Females							
In my home	46.1	67.0	80.7	81.1	82.0	79.5	74.6
Friend's house	56.0	60.3	58.3	49.7	55.2	46.2	54.5
Parties	78.2	66.1	56.2	40.9	38.4	36.3	52.0
Restaurants/cafes	24.9	62.8	63.7	54.2	55.8	52.0	55.1
Licensed premises	43.8	73.2	49.3	36.2	37.8	33.3	47.2
Educational institutions	2.1	2.7	0.5 *	0.3 *	—	0.9 *	1.1
Workplace	1.2	6.5	3.7	2.1	1.0 *	3.0	3.3
Public places	11.3	1.7	1.4	2.0	0.7 *	2.9	2.7
Car or other vehicle	4.6	1.3	0.4 *	0.8 *	—	—	0.9
Other places	11.0	3.2	1.0	0.1 *	0.4 *	1.6 *	2.3
Persons							
In my home	49.4	68.0	81.6	86.9	85.2	81.2	77.3
Friend's house	54.7	62.5	60.7	52.2	49.6	41.2	54.3
Parties	76.7	66.9	56.5	43.6	41.1	31.1	51.8
Restaurants/cafes	21.1	58.2	60.7	51.4	50.5	43.9	50.7
Licensed premises	42.7	76.0	56.3	47.1	42.5	36.7	52.4
Educational institutions	4.5	4.3	0.8	1.0 *	0.3 *	0.7 *	1.8
Workplace	3.8	9.7	9.7	5.0	4.5	1.6	6.3
Public places	10.5	4.9	3.3	3.6	2.5	1.6	4.0
Car or other vehicle	5.5	5.1	1.9	1.2 *	2.3	—	2.5
Other places	9.6	4.1	2.2	1.7	1.3 *	1.0 *	2.8

Note: Base equals all recent drinkers.

Amount of alcohol consumed

To assess the amount of alcohol consumed in a typical day, the 1998 survey asked respondents to provide information on the number of standard drinks they usually consumed. The results show that more than half (51%) of recent drinkers usually consumed three or more standard drinks on a typical day (Table 3.5). Only a small proportion of recent drinkers (3%) reported that they consumed 13 or more standard drinks on a day. The results also showed that:

- One in ten teenagers drank more than 12 standard drinks on a day that they drank alcohol, with more male teenagers (14%) reporting drinking more than 12 standard drinks in a day than females (6%).

- As age increased, the proportion of people drinking excessive amounts of alcohol decreased. For example, only one-quarter of all teenagers who were recent drinkers consumed a maximum of two standard drinks on a day compared with 70% of persons aged 60 years or over.
- In general, for every age group, higher proportions of males seem to drink larger amounts of alcohol than females.

Table 3.5: Amount of alcohol usually consumed: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Amount	Age group						All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	
(per cent)							
Males							
13+ standard drinks	14.2	10.8	2.4	2.4 *	0.4 *	1.0 *	4.6
9 to 12 standard drinks	18.8	9.1	6.5	2.5 *	5.4	1.6	6.4
7 to 8 standard drinks	14.2	11.3	7.0	6.3	4.4	1.6	7.1
5 to 6 standard drinks	15.0	16.7	15.0	20.0	14.4	8.0	15.1
3 to 4 standard drinks	17.3	25.0	33.2	40.6	31.1	28.9	30.5
1 to 2 standard drinks	20.5	27.0	35.8	28.2	44.2	59.0	36.3
Females							
13+ standard drinks	6.0	3.8	0.6 *	1.2 *	—	—	1.7
9 to 12 standard drinks	8.2	4.1	1.2	1.1 *	—	0.1 *	2.1
7 to 8 standard drinks	12.7	6.2	2.1	0.8 *	0.1 *	0.1 *	3.1
5 to 6 standard drinks	19.1	14.5	8.0	4.3	6.7	0.6 *	8.4
3 to 4 standard drinks	25.2	26.8	26.6	19.6	15.1	17.4	22.3
1 to 2 standard drinks	28.8	44.7	61.5	73.0	78.2	81.8	62.4
Persons							
13+ standard drinks	10.1	7.4	1.5	1.8	0.2 *	0.5 *	3.3
9 to 12 standard drinks	13.5	6.7	3.9	1.8	3.0	0.9 *	4.4
7 to 8 standard drinks	13.4	8.9	4.6	3.6	2.5	0.9 *	5.2
5 to 6 standard drinks	17.1	15.7	11.6	12.3	10.9	4.6	11.9
3 to 4 standard drinks	21.3	25.9	30.0	30.4	24.0	23.6	26.6
1 to 2 standard drinks	24.7	35.5	48.2	50.0	59.4	69.6	48.7

Note: Base equals all recent drinkers.

Multiple drugs use with alcohol

When recent drinkers (those who had consumed alcohol in the 12 months prior to the survey) were asked whether they had also used other drugs, a little less than a third (30%) reported that they smoked cigarettes and a further one-quarter (21%) reported that they smoked marijuana (Table 3.6).

As age increased the proportion of recent drinkers who also smoked either tobacco or marijuana decreased (Table 3.7). In general, multiple drugs use with alcohol was higher among persons aged 14 to 29 years and lower among those aged 40 years and over.

Table 3.6: Polydrug use: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Other substances recently used	Males	Females		Persons
		(per cent)		
Tobacco	32.4	27.9		30.2
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(a)	5.4	5.6		5.5
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(a)	2.9	3.5		3.2
Steroids ^(a)	0.3 *	0.1 *		0.2 *
Barbiturates ^(a)	0.4 *	0.1 *		0.3
Amphetamines ^(a)	5.8	3.2		4.6
Marijuana/cannabis	24.3	18.3		21.4
Heroin	1.2	0.6		0.9
Methadone ^(b)	0.3 *	0.1 *		0.2 *
Cocaine	2.2	1.1		1.7
Hallucinogens	4.8	2.6		3.7
Ecstasy/designer drugs	3.8	2.0		2.9
Inhalants	1.1	1.0		1.0

(a) For non-medical purposes.

(b) Non-maintenance.

Note: Base equals all recent drinkers.

Table 3.7: Polydrug use: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998

Other substances recently used	Age group				All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	
	(per cent)				
Tobacco	35.0	42.3	31.9	23.4	30.2
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(a)	8.4	7.6	5.0	4.2	5.5
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(a)	3.4	5.8	3.3	2.0	3.2
Steroids ^(a)	0.1 *	0.5 *	0.1 *	0.2 *	0.2 *
Barbiturates ^(a)	0.3 *	1.0	0.1 *	—	0.3
Amphetamines ^(a)	8.5	13.7	2.9	0.6	4.6
Marijuana/cannabis	47.2	41.2	22.3	7.7	21.4
Heroin	1.4	2.3	0.6	0.3	0.9
Methadone ^(b)	0.1 *	0.5 *	0.1 *	0.1 *	0.2 *
Cocaine	1.2	4.4	2.1	0.5	1.7
Hallucinogens	10.1	10.7	1.6	0.5	3.7
Ecstasy/designer drugs	4.5	9.6	1.6	0.4	2.9
Inhalants	3.2	2.5	0.6	0.2 *	1.0

(a) For non-medical purposes.

(b) Non-maintenance.

Note: Base equals all recent drinkers.

Source of supply of alcohol for under-age drinkers

The proportion of recent drinkers aged 14–17 years obtaining their first drink through a friend or acquaintance was 41%, by far the most frequently cited source for alcoholic drinks (Table 3.8). However, among under-age male drinkers, parents were the most cited supplier of alcohol, with more than two-fifths (43%) reporting that their parents supplied their first alcoholic drinks. The survey also showed that:

- A friend or acquaintance as the primary supplier of the first alcoholic drink, even for the adult drinkers, with two-fifths (40%) of all adult recent drinkers reporting obtaining their first drinks through a friend or an acquaintance.
- A little over one in four (27%) adult drinkers reported that their parents offered them their first alcoholic drinks.

Table 3.8: First and recent source of supply for recent drinkers, by sex, Australia, 1998

Source	Recent drinkers <18 years		Recent drinkers 18+ years	
	First obtained	Now obtain	First obtained	Now obtain
(per cent)				
Males				
Friend or acquaintance	34.0	39.2	38.3	4.0
Sibling	6.0	10.7	3.0	0.1 *
Parent	43.2	21.5	28.1	0.6
Spouse or partner	—	1.6 *	0.3 *	1.0
Other relative	4.6	2.0	3.6	1.0
Stole it	1.0 *	—	2.9	—
Purchased it—shop	0.5 *	17.4	11.8	89.3
Other	2.8	7.6	2.8	4.1
Can't recall	7.9	Not asked	9.1	Not asked
Females				
Friend or acquaintance	47.7	47.2	41.3	6.2
Sibling	2.4	2.2	3.0	0.2 *
Parent	34.4	24.0	25.5	0.5
Spouse or partner	0.4 *	2.6	5.4	10.4
Other relative	2.1	1.2 *	2.5	1.9
Stole it	1.3 *	1.4 *	0.9	—
Purchased it—shop	0.4 *	18.0	8.4	75.1
Other	1.8	3.5	2.1	5.7
Can't recall	9.5	Not asked	10.8	Not asked
Persons				
Friend or acquaintance	41.0	43.4	39.7	5.0
Sibling	4.2	6.3	3.0	0.1 *
Parent	38.7	22.8	26.9	0.6
Spouse or partner	0.2 *	2.1	2.8	5.5
Other relative	3.3	1.6	3.1	1.4
Stole it	1.1	0.7 *	1.9	—
Purchased it—shop	0.4 *	17.7	10.2	82.5
Other	2.3	5.4	2.5	4.8
Can't recall	8.7	Not asked	9.9	Not asked

Note: Base equals all recent drinkers.

Correlates of alcohol use

The analysis of alcohol correlates shows that alcohol use is associated with employment and educational attainment. For example, nearly two-thirds of tertiary-qualified persons are regular drinkers and 58% of currently employed persons are regular drinkers (Table 3.9). Further, the data highlight that:

- The highest proportions of non-drinkers were among students (22%), persons from a non-English-speaking background (25%), and widowed persons (23%).

- Retired/pensioners had the highest proportion of persons who were ex-drinkers (17%).
- Students (41%) had the largest proportion of occasional drinkers.
- The area which had the highest socioeconomic status also had the highest proportion of regular drinkers (56%).
- In urban areas there were proportionally more persons who never drank (11%) and more persons who were regular drinkers (49%) compared with rural and remote areas (6% and 47% respectively).
- Nearly one in four (25%) persons born in non-English-speaking countries reported not to have consumed alcohol compared with 8% Australian-born.

Table 3.9: Correlates of alcohol use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998

Characteristics	Drinking status			
	Never	Ex-drinker	Occasional	Regular
	(per cent)			
Education				
No qualification	10.3	13.6	35.8	40.3
HSC or equivalent	8.1	8.3	30.1	53.5
Trade/diploma	4.6	8.2	27.9	59.3
Tertiary	5.6	7.0	27.6	59.8
Employment status				
Currently employed	4.9	7.0	30.0	58.2
Student	21.9	6.6	40.5	31.1
Unemployed	12.5	10.9	34.4	42.2
Retired/pension	12.4	16.5	32.3	38.8
Occupational status				
Upper (white)	4.8	7.7	27.0	60.4
Middle	7.0	9.0	32.4	51.6
Lower (blue)	9.4	12.8	36.6	41.2
Country of birth				
Australian born	8.0	10.0	32.8	49.2
Other English-speaking born	3.6	10.8	26.8	58.8
Non-English-speaking born	24.5	10.3	32.7	32.5
Socioeconomic area				
1st quintile	8.7	13.4	31.2	46.7
2nd quintile	11.3	10.9	33.6	44.2
3rd quintile	8.9	9.9	34.2	47.0
4th quintile	8.8	9.7	33.7	47.8
5th quintile	8.6	7.1	28.3	56.1
Geography				
Urban	10.7	9.4	30.5	49.4
Rural/remote	6.0	11.7	35.6	46.7
Marital status				
Never married	11.6	7.8	35.6	45.0
Widowed	23.0	10.7	34.3	32.0
Divorced/separated	4.6	10.7	34.7	49.9
Presently married	8.0	11.0	29.5	51.5
Social influences				
At least 50% friends use	3.9	6.0	31.1	59.1
Less than 50% friends use	24.7	22.5	35.3	15.2