



## YOUNG AUSSIE BINGE DRINKING IN DECLINE

**15 July 2015:** A new study examining Australian drinking patterns has identified a decline in underage binge drinking and an increase in the age at which many young people first drink alcohol.

It found the number of Australians aged between 14 and 17 who are binge drinking has decreased by half over the last 13 years, while the number of abstainers has more than doubled.

Funded by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and undertaken by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) the study, *Understanding recent trends in Australian alcohol consumption*, draws insights from five waves of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's National Drug Strategy Household Survey (2001 to 2013) involving more than 120,000 respondents.

While rates of heavy drinking have remained stable among young adults (18-29), and have even increased among Australia's older populations, it is the youngest cohort (14-17) who have most markedly reduced their risk of alcohol-related harm.

The current 2013 data shows 5.1 per cent of 14-17 year olds reported drinking 20 or more standard drinks in a session at least once in the last 12 months, down from ten per cent in 2001.

Similarly, the proportion of Australians aged 14-17 who had consumed five or more standard drinks on an occasion has also halved, from 41.8 per cent down to 19.8 per cent over the same period.

Report author Dr Michael Livingston was encouraged to see such promising trends.

"Young people have sharply reduced their drinking over the last decade; in particular Australian teenagers are drinking less alcohol, and in less risky quantities," Dr Livingston said.

More than half (57.3 per cent) of Australians aged between 14 and 17 are abstaining from drinking alcohol altogether, compared to 28 per cent in 2001.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says that these patterns of behaviour will significantly improve the health of young Australians.

"There is no level of safe drinking for those aged under 18, as alcohol can damage the developing brain, so it is extremely pleasing to see such a positive and significant shift in young people's drinking patterns," Mr Thorn said.

The decline in underage drinking is in line with worldwide trends, with similar patterns seen in the United Kingdom, Sweden and New Zealand.

While a shift towards socialising activities that don't revolve around alcohol, and a growing focus on healthy living may have contributed to the decline, Mr Thorn says the role played by public health sector should not be underestimated.

"By raising the awareness of alcohol harms, by supporting the introduction of secondary supply laws and by better informing and empowering parents that it's important that they say 'no' to providing



Foundation for Alcohol  
Research & Education

alcohol to their children, organisations such as FARE and the public health sector have undoubtedly created an environment conducive to the positive change we are now witnessing,” Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says the promising trends can be no excuse for complacency.

“Young people are leading the way in changing Australia’s relationship with alcohol, but there remain too many drinking at risky levels that put them and others in harm’s way. It is important that Australian governments at all levels continue to work together to ensure that this positive momentum continues. Just as importantly, we must continue to focus our attention on those groups of Australians that this study has identified as still drinking at risky levels,” Mr Thorn said.

**Michael Thorn and Dr Michael Livingston are available for comment.**

**Media contact:**

**Jeremy Henderson**

0425 559 710

[Jeremy.Henderson@fare.org.au](mailto:Jeremy.Henderson@fare.org.au)

---

The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.