

# Alcohol's Harms to Others: Recommendations for Policy Responses

DECEMBER 2025

## Key findings

- Almost half of the Australian population are harmed by others' alcohol use.
- Alcohol harms others through interpersonal violence and aggression, family and domestic violence (family violence), sexual violence, child maltreatment, road trauma, workplace injury and community disruption.
- Alcohol's harm to others has financial, caring and service system impacts on individuals, families and Australian society.
- Alcohol is a major driver of family violence, especially against women and children. Up to 47% of police-reported family violence incidents involve alcohol.
- Among women who reported they had been physically or sexually assaulted in the last 10 years, over half reported that alcohol was a contributing factor in the most recent incident.
- One in six children (17%) are affected by someone else's alcohol use. Alcohol is an identified factor in up to 5% of child protection intake assessments and 13% of cases progressing to court.
- These harms are avoidable but remain overlooked in Australian alcohol policy.
- Strong national leadership is needed to improve regulation, close data gaps and invest in prevention.

## The problem

Almost half of the Australian population are harmed by others' alcohol use. Alcohol plays a major role in family violence in Australia, contributing to up to 47% of police-reported family violence incidents. Victims, mostly women and children, experience more severe violence and poorer outcomes when alcohol is involved. Yet, the role of alcohol is often overlooked in services and prevention responses.

Alcohol also drives child maltreatment, including abuse, neglect, and disrupted care. Children living in a home with heavy alcohol use face higher risks of experiencing poor mental health, school disengagement, and intergenerational harm. In 2021, one in six children (17%) were harmed by someone else's alcohol use.

Beyond the home, alcohol's harm to others extends across society:

- **Road trauma and interpersonal violence:** 261 deaths and 14,634 hospitalisations in 2020–21 were linked to others' alcohol use.
- **Workplace harms:** 8% of workers report being negatively affected by a co-worker's alcohol use.
- **Sources of harms:** Over 42% of adults experienced alcohol-related harm from a stranger in 2021. 21.8% of Australians are affected by people they know.

Alcohol-related harms to others are widespread and the estimated annual social cost in Australia is \$34.3 billion (2021). This relates to direct and indirect health, caregiving, and social services costs, lost and diminished quality of life, premature death, out of pocket expenses and lost productivity incurred due to the alcohol use of others.

Despite the significant harms, there is little by way of preventative measures. Poor screening and reporting across key systems serve to prevent critical evidence-based action.

## Why it matters now

Addressing alcohol's harm to others is essential for community wellbeing. Alcohol-related harm affects families, workplaces, and communities, yet current systems for prevention, regulation and data collection are not keeping pace with the scale of the issue.

Two critical areas of harm are family violence and sexual violence. Australia is at a crisis point, and evidence consistently shows that alcohol increases the frequency and severity of violence.

When heavy alcohol use intersects with disrespect, gendered social norms and power imbalances, the risks to women and children escalate. Alcohol harm prevention therefore needs to be tightly aligned with efforts to address the gendered drivers of violence.

The risks extend to children, who face higher rates of emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to family violence when a parent or caregiver has significant alcohol use issues. These harms are significant, long-term and generational.

While the National Alcohol Strategy (2019–2028) identifies harms to others as a priority, implementation has been slow. Many state and federal strategies on family violence, sexual violence, child safety, mental health and interpersonal violence still fail to meaningfully integrate alcohol harm.

Both National Cabinet, following the Federal Government's 2024 Rapid Review of prevention approaches, and the 2024–25 South Australian Royal Commission into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence have recognised and reaffirmed that alcohol increases both the rate and severity of violence within intimate relationships and families.

The Rapid Review and Royal Commission presented evidence-based solutions to Governments that would reduce alcohol-related harm, including better regulating the online sale and delivery of alcohol and restricting alcohol advertising. Reforms focused on regulation, data, and prevention offer a clear and achievable path to reducing alcohol's harm to others.

## Policy priorities

To reduce alcohol's harms to others, beginning with family violence and sexual violence, national and state leadership is needed to:

### » **Embed Alcohol Considerations in Policy and Practice**

- Mandate alcohol screening in all family violence, sexual violence and child protection cases.
- Fund trauma-informed, gender-responsive and self-determined interventions targeting heavy alcohol use and home-based prevention programs.
- Align alcohol policy with family violence, sexual violence, child safety, and gender equality strategies.

## » Reform Regulation to Reduce Harm

- Restrict outlet density and trading hours in high-risk areas.
- Regulate online sales and delivery to limit late-night and rapid home delivery.
- Enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship and promotion.

## » Mandate National Data Collection and Evaluation

- Require police, health, justice, and social services to record alcohol involvement in incidents and service use.
- Fund regular national surveys on alcohol's harms to others.

## » Invest in Prevention and Awareness

- Run evidence-based campaigns highlighting alcohol's social impacts, including in relation to family violence and sexual violence.
- Boost funding for family violence, sexual violence, child support, and mental health services.
- Reduce stigma and improve access to supports for affected carers, particularly men and regional populations.

## Conclusion

Alcohol's harm to others, including interpersonal, family and sexual violence demands urgent national attention. A coordinated response addressing alcohol-related harm in homes and communities is both achievable and overdue.

## About FARE

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is a not-for-profit organisation with a vision for an Australia free from alcohol harms – where communities are healthy and well and where laws, policies and programs are fair, equitable and just.

Working with local communities, people with lived experience of alcohol harm, values-aligned organisations, health professionals, researchers and governments across the nation, we are improving the health and wellbeing of everyone in Australia.

To learn more about us and our work visit [www.fare.org.au](http://www.fare.org.au)

