# Alcohol and obesity: A systematic review scoping study

## Researcher

Dr Elizabeth Manton, Centre for Alcohol Policy Research

## Summary

In February 2013 researchers at the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research were requested by FARE to undertake “a systematic review of the interplay of alcohol and obesity”. Previously, FARE and the Australian National Preventative Health Agency (ANPHA) had identified a need for a review on the research relating to the energy intake from alcohol and how this might contribute to the overweight and obesity problem in Australia. ANPHA recognised that alcohol is an energy dense/nutrient poor ‘food’, one of the targets of their obesity campaigns.

In addition to the epidemiological relationship between alcohol intake and indicators of excess body weight, alcohol and obesity can also interact synergistically in relation to disease prevalence. For example, co-occurrence of obesity and excessive drinking may place adults at an increased risk for liver disease, a higher risk of colorectal cancer, or a higher risk of hepatocellular cancer.

The study examined existing systematic reviews on the association between alcohol consumption and body weight and/or abdominal adiposity.

## Outcomes

The study found that there were four conclusions that resulted from both systematic reviews:

1. It is unclear whether alcohol consumption is a risk factor for weight gain because studies performed to date have found positive, negative, or no associations.
2. Where there is a positive association between alcohol and body weight it is more likely to be found in men than in women.
3. The present data provide inadequate scientific evidence to assess whether beer intake is associated with general or abdominal obesity.
4. When considering beer, where there is a positive association it is more likely to be for abdominal adiposity than for general obesity for men and women.

## Recommendations

The lack of a connection between high levels of alcohol consumption and obesity means that separate public health policies are each needed.

It follows that, rather than as a contribution to policy on obesity, information about the energy content (calories/kJ) on the labels of alcoholic beverages can be justified in terms of consumer rights.

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/Manton-2013-Alcohol-and-Obesity.pdf)