# Annual alcohol poll 2012: Attitudes and behaviours

The 2012 Annual Alcohol Poll was launched at 10am, Tuesday 17 April 2012 in Sydney. Carried out by Galaxy Research, the poll asked Australians questions including:

* Do you think Australia has a problem with excess drinking or alcohol abuse?
* Over the next five to 10 years do you expect alcohol-related problems to reduce or do you think they will get worse?
* Do you drink alcohol to get drunk?
* Are you comfortable with the amount of alcohol you consume?

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/FARE-Annual-Alcohol-Poll-Report_LowRes.pdf)

## Awareness of standard drinks and the Guidelines

[Our 2012 Annual Alcohol Poll](/wp-content/uploads/FARE-Annual-Alcohol-Poll-Report_LowRes.pdf) found that Australians are largely unaware of the number of standard drinks in various alcohol products. The poll found that the majority of people are unable to estimate the number of standard drinks within 10% of the correct answer for all four products. Let’s take a 4 litre cask of white wine for example. Only 3% of Australian drinkers are able to estimate the number of standard drinks in cask wine within 10% of the correct answer. For a bottle of red wine, 12% of people are able to provide estimates within 10%, for a bottle of spirits it is 26% and for 375ml of full strength beer it is 31%.

Of greatest concern is the large number of people that are underestimating the number of standard drinks. People were again given a 10% error margin for their responses. Even still, 66% of people underestimate the number of standard drinks in a bottle of red wine. For a 4 litre cask of white wine, the corresponding figure is 47%, it’s 31% for a bottle of spirits and 27% for a 375ml of full strength beer.

### Why is this important?

Having an awareness of what constitutes a standard drink is important for a range of health and social reasons. To know if you’re okay to drive, people need to understand how many standard drinks they’ve had. Also, to know if people are consuming alcohol at low risk levels and within the Alcohol Guidelines, people need to know how many standard drinks they’ve had.

### What can we do to improve awareness of standard drinks?

Australia’s official alcohol guidelines, the National Health and Medical Research Council Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol were last revised in 2009. Three years on, our poll has found that people are largely unaware of the guidelines. Only 14% of Australians stated that they are familiar with the content of the Guidelines.

A public education campaign is needed to inform Australians of what a standard drink is and how to consume alcohol while also reducing their risk of harms. The campaign needs to involve a range of media and should include messages targeted at different at-risk groups including young people, women of child bearing ages and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### Key findings

**Standard Drinks:**

* Only 3% of Australian drinkers are able to estimate the number of standard drinks within 10% in a four litre cask of white wine and 12% in a bottle of red wine.
* 66% of drinkers underestimate the number of standard drinks in an average bottle of red wine, while 29% estimate that a bottle of red wine contains four standard drinks or less.
* 38% are unsure of the number of standard drinks in an average 4 litre cask of wine and 29% are unsure of the number of standard drinks in a bottle of spirits.
* The average estimate for the number of standard drinks in a 4 litre cask of white wine is 26 standard drinks, which is ten standard drinks less than the actual amount.

**The Guidelines:**

* 61% of Australian adults are aware of the Guidelines, but relatively few (14%) are aware of the content.
* Regular drinkers (20%) are most likely to state that they are aware of the Guidelines.
* 37% of people who are aware of the Guidelines know that the maximum number of standard drinks a person can have to minimise long-term risks is two standard drinks in one day.
* 11% of people who are aware of the Guidelines know that the maximum number of standard drinks a person can have to minimise short-term risks is four standard drinks in one day.
* 33% of people who are aware of the Guidelines did not provide an estimate for the number of drinks to consume in one day to minimise long-term harms.
* 37% of people with an awareness of the Guidelines did not provide an estimate for the number of drinks to consume in one day to minimise short-term harms.

## Alcohol consumption during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Our 2012 Annual Alcohol Poll found that fewer than half (47%) of all Australians are aware of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and related disorders. When asked if alcohol consumption is harmful during pregnancy, the majority of Australians (70%) indicated that drinking alcohol while pregnant can be harmful to the developing fetus, with 67% believing that a woman should consume no alcohol at all when pregnant.

When asked about the harms of consuming alcohol while breastfeeding, a majority of Australians (73%) believe that this is harmful to the baby. However 20% believe it is okay in moderation, and 7% are unsure.

The poll again asked women who had been pregnant or had breastfed a baby to indicate whether a health professional had discussed alcohol consumption during pregnancy with them. Just over a third of women (37%) who had been pregnant or breastfed a baby could remember a health professional discussing harms of alcohol consumption with them during this time. This represents a decline from 2011, where the corresponding figure was 42%.

### Why is this important?

Alcohol consumption during pregnancy can result in life-long physical and intellectual disabilities that are collectively described by the term, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). These disorders include Fetal Alcohol Syndrome), partial FAS, Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder and Alcohol-Related Birth Defects1.

People born with FASD experience poor memory; impaired language and communication skills as well as mental, social and emotion delays 2; the underlying brain damage can also lead to mental health problems, alcohol and other drug issues, disrupted school experience and problems with employment and the law in adulthood. People with FASD also suffer physical effects from prenatal exposure to alcohol including organ damage and sight and hearing problems. For these reasons the *National Health and Medical Research Council Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* recommends no alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Despite the 30 years of research demonstrating the harms of alcohol consumption during pregnancy there has been no concerted and comprehensive effort by the Commonwealth Government to raise awareness of these. This is reflected by the poll results which show that some people still believe that pregnant women can consume alcohol in moderation during pregnancy.

### What can to improve awareness of the risks of consuming alcohol during pregnancy and prevent future cases of FASD?

Currently in Australia the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social and Legal Affairs is undertaking an inquiry into FASD. This inquiry presents an opportunity for the Government to commit to a long-term strategy to prevent new cases of FASD and provide support to individuals, families and carers who are affected by the condition.

A comprehensive five-year National FASD Action Plan is now needed by the Government to ensure that work is coordinated, completed and implemented across Australia. The Action Plan should include measures that aim to prevent new cases of FASD and better support people with FASD to manage their condition. These measures should include a comprehensive public education campaign, mandatory pregnancy warning labels, the completion and piloting of a national standardised diagnostic tool and funding for FASD diagnostic services.

### Key findings

**Awareness of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome**

* 47% of all adult Australians are aware of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome  and related disorders.
* Men (34%), Gen Y (40%), and regular drinkers (40%) are least likely to be aware of FAS and related disorders.

**Awareness of harms drinking when pregnant and breastfeeding**

* A majority (79%) of Australians believe that drinking alcohol while pregnant can be harmful to the developing fetus. This remained largely unchanged from 2011 where the corresponding figure was 80%.
* 67% of Australians believe that pregnant women should not consume any alcohol in order to avoid harm to the fetus, 24% selected one to two drinks per day, 1% selected five or more, and 8% are unsure.
* Almost three quarters (73%) of Australians believe that drinking alcohol while breastfeeding is harmful to the baby, a further 20% believe it is okay in moderation, and 7% are unsure.
* Fewer than half of all women who have been pregnant or breastfed a baby (37%) indicated that a health specialist discussed the harms associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy or while breastfeeding with them.

## Licensing and alcohol related violence

Our 2012 Annual Alcohol Poll found that just under a third of adult Australians (31%) have been affected by alcohol-related violence, with 14% of Australian adults indicating that they have been victims of alcohol-related violence, while 22% have had a family member of friend affected.

When asked which problems associated with alcohol misuse that people are most concerned about, 76% indicated violence, while 24% indicated excessive noise around pubs and clubs.

For the first time the poll asked Australians if they believe that alcohol-related problems will reduce or get worse over the next five to 10 years. 79% of Australians believe that alcohol-related problems will get worse or remain the same, while only 12% believe that alcohol-related problems will decline.

For the first time the poll also asked Australians about how they felt about the number of alcohol outlets in their local area. Just over half of adult Australians (57%) believe that there are the right number of alcohol outlets in their area, however 29% think that there are too many, 5% think there are too few and 9% are uncertain.

### Why is this important?

Alcohol-related violence is a significant concern among Australians. A proven way to address alcohol-related harms is through licensing measures that include restricting the trading hours of licenced premises.

An example of the effectiveness of such restrictions is demonstrated through the reforms that were introduced in Newcastle. In March 2008, the NSW Liquor Administration Board imposed a number of restrictions on 14 licensed premises in Newcastle, which included shortened trading hours, a 1am lockout and prohibiting the sale of particular products, including shots, after 10.00pm.

These restrictions have now been in place for four years. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions three years on found that there was a:

* 35 per cent reduction in night-time non-domestic assaults requiring police attention;
* 50 per cent reduction in night-time street offences requiring police attention; and
* 26 per cent reduction in night-time assault-related injury presentations to the hospitals3.

Research is also increasingly demonstrating the link between the number of licenced outlets in an area and alcohol related harms. A recent study of the number of licenced outlets in Melbourne found that *a higher density of licensed premises, where the primary activity is alcohol consumption, (i.e. pubs) is associated with higher rates of assault-related hospital admissions 4.*

### What can we do to reduce alcohol related violence?

The Newcastle experience demonstrates that implementing evidence-based licensing controls can significantly reduce alcohol-related violence. This has been acknowledged by the Last Drinks campaign which represents a coalition of organisations that are now calling on a range of regulatory measures to be rolled out across NSW. These measures include:

1. Extending the trial of reduced opening hours across NSW for a period of twelve months.
2. Imposing a lockout from 1.00am for all hotels across NSW (unless a current earlier lockout has already been imposed).
3. Developing a model management plan based on the Newcastle trial to be adopted by all licensed venues.
4. Prohibiting the sale of shots, mixed drinks with more than 30mls of alcohol and ready mixed drinks stronger than five per cent alcohol by volume after 10.00pm.
5. Engaging BOCSAR to evaluate the impact of these measures on violent crime.

FARE is supports these measures and also calls on other states and territories across Australia to consider such measures, particularly in relation to reducing extended training hours.

### Key findings

**Experiences with alcohol related violence**

* 31% of Australians have been affected by alcohol-related violence, including 14% who have been victims of alcohol-related violence, and 22% who have had a family member or friend affected.

**Outlet density**

* 57% of Australians think that there are about the right number of alcohol outlets in their neighbourhood. 29% think there are too many, 5% think there are too few, and 9% are uncertain.
* Baby boomers (35%), people with household incomes below $40,000 (40%), and non-drinkers (47%) are most likely to think that there are too many alcohol outlets in their neighbourhood.
* There are no significant gender differences in the perceptions of the number of alcohol outlets.

## Alcohol Advertising

Our 2012 Annual Alcohol Poll found that 68% Australians believe alcohol advertising and promotion influence the behaviour of people under the age of 18 years.  The Poll also found that 64% of Australians support a ban on alcohol advertising on television before 8.30pm.

For the first time, the poll asked Australians which organisation they should direct alcohol advertising complaints to and found that only 4% of Australians correctly identified the Advertising Standard Bureau.

Also for the first time, the poll asked about where Australians were most likely to come across alcohol advertising and sponsorship. The poll found that Australians were most likely to come across alcohol advertising and sponsorship on television (65%), followed by sporting events (49%), newspapers and magazines (47%) and pamphlets and catalogues (41%).

### Why is this important?

Alcohol advertising and promotions can be very pervasive, ranging from alcohol logos on sporting uniforms to advertisements in newspapers. A conservative estimate of total alcohol advertising expenditure in Australia in 2007 was $128 million. However this underestimates expenditure because it does not take into consideration the amount spent on sponsorship or merchandise.

Of particular concern is the influence of alcohol advertising and sponsorship on young people’s perceptions of alcohol and their drinking intentions. Studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between exposure to alcohol advertising, and drinking intentions and behaviours 567. In 2010 a survey of children aged between 9 and 15 years in Western Australia found that 75% of children and adolescents recognised Bundy Bear and correctly associate him with an alcoholic product 8.  Alcohol sponsorship of sporting events has also been shown to result in children and young people associating alcohol with sport 9.

### What can we do to change advertising and sponsorship of alcohol advertising?

With only 4% of Australians knowing where to direct their alcohol advertising complaints, , improvements are required in Australia’s alcohol advertising complaints system. An independent regulatory body is needed to replace the current alcohol industry run quasi-regulatory system, the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Codes (ABAC).  The ABAC has been shown to be ineffective through a formal review of the alcohol industry’s self-regulation of advertising 10. The review found that many complaints were not investigated in a timely manner, some complaints were not investigated at all, and very few complaints were upheld.

An independent alcohol advertising body should be administered by government and be mandatory. The code should also cover the sponsorship and other promotions of sport and events as well as point of sale promotions.

An additional measure to assist with reducing exposure of alcohol is to address the loophole in the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice. Currently, alcohol advertising can be shown before 8:30pm on weekends and public holidays as an accompaniment to live sporting events. This is problematic because these are times when children and young people may be exposed to advertising and sponsorship.

In both 2011 and 2012, a vast majority of people agreed that alcohol advertising and promotion influences the behaviours of young people and supported a ban on alcohol advertising on television on weekend and weekdays before 8.30pm. This consistent finding demonstrates that Australians are largely supportive of such measures.

### Key Findings

**Regulating alcohol advertising**

* 68% believe that alcohol advertising and promotions influence the behaviour of people under 18 years.
* The vast majority of Australians (83%) indicate that they do not know how to make a complaint about alcohol advertising, while 17% of people surveyed suggested that they did know. However, when asked who they would direct a complaint to only 4% of Australians correctly identified the Advertising Standard Bureau.
* 64% of Australian adults support a ban on alcohol advertising on weekdays and weekends before 8.30pm, while 24% of people are opposed to the measure, and 12% are undecided.

**Advertising and sponsorship**

* Australians are exposed to alcohol advertising and sponsorship in a variety of ways with television being the most common source (65%).  Sporting events (49%), newspapers and magazines (47%), and pamphlets and catalogues (41%) are also commonly reported as sources of alcohol advertising or sponsorship.
* Men are more likely than women to come across alcohol advertising or sponsorship at sporting events, while women are more likely than men to come across alcohol advertising and sponsorship in pamphlets and catalogues.

## Community attitudes on alcohol by voting intentions

The snapshot of community attitudes on alcohol by voting intentions is drawn from the 2012 Annual Alcohol Poll: Attitudes and Behaviours. Conducted by Galaxy Research, the poll explores community attitudes and behaviours relating to alcohol.

The polling found that a majority of Australians (76%) believe that Australia has a problem with alcohol; a majority view also held by Coalition voters (75%), ALP voters (79%) and Green voters (81%).

A majority of voters from each of the three major parties were also in agreement that more needs to be done to reduce alcohol-related harms, led by Coalition and ALP voters (77%) and 71% of Green Voters.

[view the snapshot report](/wp-content/uploads/FARE-Annual-Alcohol-Poll-voting-Intentions.pdf)

## References

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