# Aussie seniors urged to consider personal alcohol consumption

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New research exploring the links between the way older Australians socialise and consume alcohol has found that most drink five or more days per week, regardless of residential status or gender.

Dr Celia Wilkinson and Dr Julie Dare from Edith Cowan University led a research team that examined the alcohol consumption habits of retirement home residents and compared them with people in the same age group living in their own homes to examine the impacts of social interaction on alcohol consumption. A focus in the research was to identify factors that lead to increased use of alcohol and factors that constrain consumption in different settings.

The pilot study, ‘An exploration of how social context and type of living arrangement are linked to alcohol consumption amongst older Australians’ involved a questionnaire and qualitative interviews with 42 older Australians living in the greater Perth metropolitan area.

The study found that 30 per cent of participants were drinking above the current National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Australian Guidelines to Reduce the Risks from Drinking for lifetime risk of harms and 25 per cent of men were consuming alcohol at levels which placed them at risk of short term harm at least once a month, suggesting the current drinking guidelines need to be promoted more effectively to older Australians.

Dr Celia Wilkinson said results from the in-depth interviews highlight that alcohol serves an important social function for older people and is viewed as an enjoyable part of life, but there were also indications that this demographic has a greater appreciation of the social and financial costs of drinking, such as drink driving. Personal health concerns associated with alcohol did not feature as a constraining factor.

“Participants tended to focus on risky drinking in terms of behaviour which would lead to harm to others without considering the potential consequences to their own health. This is significant from a policy perspective and suggests we need better targeted health promotion messages that are more reflective of the drinking practices of this demographic,” Dr Dare said.

The study was funded with a grant of $9,447 from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE).

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn said the drinking of older Australians was an area of research largely ignored up until now.

“During Seniors Week in WA, we are asking older people to reflect on their own drinking habits. The spotlight is often on the alcohol consumption of young people, yet we know that older people’s daily drinking is putting them at greater risk of cancer and other chronic diseases,” Mr Thorn said.

## Key Findings:

* Most older people interviewed in both the retirement village and home setting consumed alcohol five to seven days per week.
* 30 per cent of the older people interviewed were drinking at levels that placed them at greater risk of long term harms, while 25% of men were drinking at levels that placed them at risk of short term harms at least once a month.
* There were no significant differences in the drinking behaviours of older people residing in retirement villages, when compared to those residing in a home setting.
* The majority of men (56%) and women (68%) interviewed showed no evidence of problem drinking using the CAGE instrument (Cut down on drinking, Annoyances with criticisms about drinking, Guilt about drinking, and using alcohol as an Eye opener).
* Many older people employed strategies to regulate their alcohol consumption including limiting alcohol if driving, not drinking alone, allocating alcohol free days and not drinking alcohol without meals.
* The majority of participants were not concerned with the drinking of older Australians but indicated they were concerned about young people’s risky drinking.

[view the report](https://www.fare.org.au/an-exploration-of-how-social-context-and-type-of-living-arrangement-are-linked-to-alcohol-consumption-amongst-older-australians/)

### Metadata