# Australian attitudes towards alcohol policy: 1995-2010

## Researchers

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## Summary

This study examined trends in Australians attitudes towards various alcohol policies between 1995 and 2010. Using data from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, 2010), Wilkinson, Room and Livingston (2009) traced Australian attitudes toward alcohol policy from 1995 to 2004. This study supplements these analyses using data from the subsequent surveys in 2007 and 2010.

The NDSHS is a national household survey on alcohol, tobacco and drugs. Included within the survey are items on alcohol policies, with respondents being asked the extent to which they support or oppose a range of alcohol policy items using a five item Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong opposition and 5 indicating strong support.

In this context, ‘alcohol policy’ refers to policy that aims to reduce alcohol-related harms and includes controls of alcohol production, distribution and consumption.

In examining the trends in Australians attitudes towards various alcohol policies, this study investigated the:

* current support for alcohol policy items;
* changes in support for alcohol policy items over time;
* grouping of policy items and identification of trends in support for these groupings;
* differences in support for alcohol policy items by state and territory; and
* demographic predictors for support of alcohol policies.

## Outcomes

The study concluded that that the policies with the most support are stricter penalties for drink driving, stricter serving laws, monitoring late night premises and limiting alcohol advertising on television. Each of these items received a mean of over four on the Likert scale (between support and strongly support). No items had a corresponding level of opposition with a score of less than two. Those items with the least support were those of increasing the price of alcohol, increasing the taxes on alcohol and reducing the number of alcohol outlets.

When examining the proportion of Australians who supported particular alcohol policy items in 2010, three items had support above 75 per cent; these were stricter drink driving laws (86.1 per cent), stricter serving laws (84.6 per cent) and monitoring late night premises (81.2 per cent). The items with the least support were increasing price (28.6 per cent) and reducing outlets (34.8 per cent).

By considering the changes in support for alcohol policy items over time, the study concluded that there is increasing support for policies that restrict access to alcohol. This increase is more marked when policies are divided into groupings, with policies relating to controlling public spaces, price and availability and controlling hazardous behaviours having their lowest support in 2001 and 2004, with increases since that point. Alternatively support for limiting promotion and alcohol warnings peaked in 2007 and then decreased in 2010.

Between 2001 and 2010, increases in support were identified for eight specific alcohol policy items:

* increasing the price of alcohol (from 20.4% in 2001 to 28.6% in 2010);
* reducing the number of outlets that sell alcohol (from 29.0% to 34.8%);
* reducing trading hours for all pubs and clubs (from 32.6% to 49.6%);
* raising the legal drinking age (from 41.9% to 52.6%);
* restricting late night trading of alcohol (from 51.8% to 65.7%);
* strict monitoring of late night premises (from 74.3% to 81.2%);
* limited advertising for alcohol on TV until after 9:30pm (from 72.1% to 72.9%); and
* banning alcohol sponsorship of sporting events (from 45.5% to 49.5%).

Conversely, decreases in support were identified for six policy items:

* serving only low alcohol drinks such as low alcohol beer at sporting events or venues (from 65.3% in 2001 to 60.2% in 2010);
* increasing the number of alcohol free public events (from 66.9% to 62.5%);
* increasing the number of alcohol-free zones or dry areas (from 67.0% to 65.4%);
* stricter enforcement of the law against serving customers who are drunk (from 86.7% to 84.6%);
* requiring information on national drinking guidelines on all alcohol containers (from 72.0% to 66.0%); and
* increasing the size of standard drink labels on alcohol containers (from 69.8% to 62.9%).

Interestingly, the six policy items which were identified as having decreases in support were all popular alcohol policy items; all with support of 60 per cent or more respondents.

Differences were identified in support for policies across Australian states and territories. Respondents in NSW had stronger support for raising price and restricting availability, controlling public space and promotion limits and warnings. Victorians also supported raising price and restricting availability more than the rest of the country. Conversely, Queensland and South Australian respondents were more opposed to price and availability restrictions, Western and South Australian respondents were more opposed to controlling public space policy changes, Queensland respondents were more opposed to limiting promotion and alcohol warnings, and respondents from Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory were more opposed to controlling hazardous behaviour.

Demographic predictors of support for alcohol policy have remained consistent over the past decade, with females and older people more likely to support restrictive alcohol policies. Respondents with higher household incomes were consistently less likely to support alcohol restrictions than those in the lowest income categories.

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