# Risky business: The alcohol industry’s dependence on Australia’s heaviest drinkers

## Researchers

1. Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)
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## Summary

Alcohol harms in Australia are extensive and well acknowledged: resulting in 5,500 deaths every year and a further 157,000 hospitalisations.

Faced with the evidence of those harms, the alcohol industry’s oft-cited defence is to reference official per capita consumption data which shows national alcohol consumption in decline, in an effort to argue that Australia has become a nation of responsible drinkers.

*Risky business*, a new report and video produced by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) dismantles that flawed logic, revealing that the decline in the amount of alcohol being consumed as a nation in fact masks alarming patterns of consumption in significant segments of the population.

## Outcomes

The findings contained in *Risky business* are drawn from an analysis of the study *Understanding recent trends in Australian alcohol consumption* by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR).

More than 3.8 million Australians average at least four standard drinks of alcohol per day, that’s twice the recommended health guidelines.

Over 1.9 million Australians drink on average more than six standard drinkers per day, three times the amount outlined in the Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health risks from Drinking Alcohol. Just under a million Australians consume on average more than eight standard drinks a day, equivalent to more than four times the recommended health guidelines.

The video also exposes the alcohol industry’s ‘dirty little secret’, that is, its economic dependence on risky drinkers.

The 3.8 million Australians averaging more than four standard drinks of alcohol per day represent just 20 per cent of all Australians aged 14 and over, yet this group accounts for a staggering 74.2 per cent of all the alcohol consumed nationally each year.

No surprise then that these almost 4 million Australians represent the lifeblood of the Australian alcohol industry. They are the industry’s best customers, targeted and branded by industry as ‘super consumers’. But while the alcohol industry sees ‘super consumers’, health professionals see risky drinkers.

The alcohol industry’s reliance on risky drinking is brought into sharp relief when examining the economic impact of measures to encourage ‘super consumers’ to drink within the guidelines. The total alcohol consumed as a nation would be reduced by 39 per cent, or 38 million litres of pure alcohol.

This knowledge explains the alcohol industry’s steadfast refusal to support alcohol policy measures that would effectively encourage and support Australians to drink within the recommended guidelines. But it does not excuse the industry’s consistent and continuing efforts to block and undermine measures that would save lives and reduce alcohol-related injury and disease.

This paper expands on the ‘super consumer’ story, providing greater detail on the alcohol consumption data underpinning the *Risky business* video, an overview of the Australian alcohol industry, and an analysis of the impact on the industry if ‘super consumers’, those Australians drinking at extremely harmful levels, where given the necessary support and encouragement to drink within the guidelines instead.

## Recommendations

It is clear from this analysis of drinking patterns that a reduction in alcohol consumption by the top 20 per cent of Australian drinkers (the segment which has been identified by the industry and labelled as 'super consumers') would have a dramatic effect on the alcohol industry's size, shape, viability, and overall profitability. Reducing alcohol consumption for the top 20 per cent of Australian drinkers to the levels recommended by the Australian Government’s alcohol guidelines, would see a 39 per cent decrease in the amount of alcohol being consumed.

It is for this reason that public health researchers and advocates refrain from working with the alcohol industry due to irresolvable concerns regarding its commercial vested interest. FARE calls on government representatives to do the same, and exclude the industry from influencing alcohol policy, if Australia is serious about reducing alcohol harms and saving lives.

https://vimeo.com/152113867

[VIEW THE REPORT](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Risky-business-The-alcohol-industrys-dependence-on-Australias-heaviest-drinkers.pdf)

[VIEW THE MEDIA RELEASE](https://www.fare.org.au/revealed-alcohol-industry-heavily-dependent-on-risky-drinking)