# Understanding alcohol sales data in Australia

## Researchers

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## Summary

The aim of this document is to highlight the importance of collecting alcohol sales data, to recognise the absence of uniform and effective data collection at present, and to discuss the ideal approach to measuring alcohol consumption at the state and territory level in Australia. The advantages and disadvantages of several methods of collecting consumption data are discussed, including what is already being collected by different jurisdictions.

Alcohol sales data are information collected from either retailers or wholesalers regarding the volume of specific alcoholic beverage types sold; to the public (in the case of retailers) or to retailers (for wholesale sales data). The World Health Organization recognises alcohol sales data as the gold standard method for collecting per capita consumption, especially in countries such as Australia that have limited illicit or home produced alcohol.

## Outcomes

Alcohol sales data is presently only collected by the state and territory governments of the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory, albeit each with different reporting requirements. New South Wales collects detailed sales data from licensees in the Kings Cross precinct, but does not collect any state-level data. Tasmania will commence the collection of alcohol sales data in 2016 and South Australia does not currently collect data.

The absence of consistent data collection across jurisdictions provides a range of challenges for policy makers. This lack of consistency shows the need for coordinated collection across the country.

## Recommendations

Reliable estimates of alcohol consumption at sub-national geographical levels are critical for monitoring, policy evaluation and program development and targeting. Therefore, it is crucial that all states and territories in Australia collect reliable and consistent data on alcohol sales. We recommend a system that collects:

* Transaction-level data on sales from wholesalers and producers to retailers who sell alcohol to the public. This level of detail will allow for monthly, quarterly or annual estimates of sales as appropriate.
* Retail outlet-level data, with standard public reporting of the data limited to appropriate geographical units (such as postcode), leaving open the possibility that more detailed data can be utilised for specific policy-relevant purposes.
* Data on price and volume should be included for each transaction.

Importantly, detailed beverage-specific data are required to fully understand patterns and trends in Australian drinking. Thus, an ideal data system should collect sales data broken down by:

* beer (distinguishing between low, mid and full strength beers)
* wine (distinguished by volume [bottled vs bulk] and strength [table vs fortified] of purchased wine)
* spirits (distinguishing between standard spirits [inclusive of liqueurs and aperitifs] and premixed ready-to-drink spirits)
* cider and other brewed products (distinguishing between high alcohol and regular products).

Our review of existing practice highlights that while several Australian jurisdictions currently collect alcohol sales data, practices vary substantially. Governments should be asking wholesalers and producers to disclose specific information regarding the sales of alcohol in order to best estimate per capita consumption at state and local levels. Such actions will enable the analysis of alcohol consumption across different regions, which supports the development and effective evaluation of public health policy measures that can be tailored to different regions and population groups.

[view the report](https://www.fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Understanding-alcohol-sales-data-in-Australia.pdf)