

# New AIHW data shows that alcohol continues to harm millions of Australians

## **29 February 2024:**

New data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has reported that alcohol continues to harm millions of Australians, with 31 per cent (6.6 million) of people aged 14 and over drinking at higher risk levels.

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2022-23 (NDSHS) published today, surveyed 21,500 people, and also found that almost one in ten Australians (9.2%) who drink alcohol do so at a level that may indicate an alcohol use disorder, but only 12.5% of them have been in a treatment program in the last 12 months.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) CEO Caterina Giorgi said it was worrying that so many Australians met the criteria for an alcohol use disorder, and yet so few were accessing supports.

“At a time when alcohol-induced deaths are at their highest rate in a decade, we need to address the stigma that prevents far too many people from reaching out for help, and make sure the services are there for those who do seek support,” Ms Giorgi said.

“We also need to make sure that common sense measures are introduced to prevent harmful predatory marketing tactics by alcohol companies targeting people who are most at risk.”

The new data also shows that one in five Australians (21%), or 4.6 million people, have been verbally abused, physically abused, or put in fear by someone under the influence of alcohol in the previous 12 months.

These harms have increased for women, with 2.4 million women being harmed in 2022-23, up from 2.2 million in 2019.

FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi said that the increasing number of women experiencing harm is concerning and alarming.

“The survey shows that an extra 200,000 women have been physically or verbally abused or put in fear by someone who is using alcohol. This is a concerning trend and something that we should be doing all we can to prevent.”

The NDSHS 2022-23 also asked people about their beliefs about alcohol and young people for the first time. It found that almost a quarter (24%) of people surveyed said they believed it was beneficial to give 16-to-17-year-olds a small amount of alcohol.

Ms Giorgi said this was a “concerning misconception” and that evidence-based public health messaging was needed.

“This data shows that more work is needed to raise awareness about the national alcohol guidelines, which advise that children and young people under the age of 18 do not drink alcohol,” Ms Giorgi said.

“We know from several studies that the younger a person drinks alcohol, the more likely they are to drink at riskier levels early and into the future.”

The *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*, recommend that children under the age of 18 years do not drink alcohol and for healthy adults, that they drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week, or four in a single session.

The NDSHS found that alcohol use among girls aged 14-to-17-years increased from 28% in 2019 to 35% in 2022-23, while for boys in this age group drinking fell from 32% to 27%. This increasing alcohol use among girls aged under 18 years departs from the declines in drinking that have been seen over the past decade.

The AIHW's National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) collects information on alcohol and other drug use, attitudes and perceptions in Australia.

The NDSHS is part of the National Drug Strategy 2016-27 which aims to prevent drug and alcohol harms.

**FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi is available for interview.**

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education** (FARE) is the leading not-for-profit organisation working towards an Australia free from alcohol harms. We do this through developing evidence-informed policy, enabling people-powered advocacy and delivering health promotion campaigns.

FARE has been working with communities across the country to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians for 20 years. To learn more about us and our work visit [www.fare.org.au](http://www.fare.org.au).