

# Poll Snapshot: Reasons for alcohol use and community concern about alcohol use

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## Key findings

This national poll asked Australians about their reasons for drinking alcohol (if at all), whether they were concerned about their own alcohol use or that of someone else, and whether they think Australian governments are doing enough to address the harms from alcohol. Key findings include:

- » For people who had an alcoholic drink in the past 12 months, the top reasons for drinking were to socialise (74.7%), to relieve stress (34.9%), because other people were drinking (20%) and to deal with anxiety (18.5%).
- » For people who had an alcoholic drink in the past 12 months, one in seven (14.1%) indicated that they are concerned with the amount of alcohol they are drinking, while one in five (19.8%) reported concern about the drinking of a family member. One in seven (13.8%) also reported that someone else has expressed concern about their alcohol use.
- » Almost a quarter (23.5%) of women and more than a quarter (26.4%) of young people (18-25 years) are concerned about how much alcohol a family member is drinking.
- » About one in five Australians (21.9%) think Australian governments are doing enough to address harms from alcohol.

## About the polling

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) commissioned Pure Profile to conduct polling of Australians to understand reasons for drinking alcohol and community concern about alcohol use. The polling was conducted online between 14 June and 18 June 2023. The sample comprised 1,004 people aged 18 years and over, residing in Australia. The sample is nationally representative for age, gender and jurisdiction. In reporting analysis by gender, only male and female respondents have been included, due to low sample size for respondents answering 'Non-Binary'.

## Background

We all want our families and communities to be healthy, safe and well, and free from the harms caused by alcoholic products.

However, alcoholic products cause significant harm to Australians, with one person dying every 90 minutes and one person being hospitalised every three minutes because of alcohol.<sup>1</sup> Alcohol causes more than 200 diseases and injuries and leads to preventable hospitalisations and deaths.<sup>2</sup> Alcoholic products also cause harm to the broader community, with 10 million Australians harmed annually.<sup>3</sup>

Alcohol is associated with, and can contribute to, mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. People with a mental health condition are more likely to drink alcohol at high-risk levels.<sup>4</sup> Mental health conditions and substance use disorders are prevalent in Australian society, together accounting for 12% of the burden of disease in Australia.<sup>5</sup>

Concerningly, there are indicators that alcohol harm is increasing, with alcohol-induced deaths at the highest reported rate in 10 years<sup>6</sup> and deaths from alcohol-related injuries having more than doubled over the past 10 years.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the number of Australians reaching out to alcohol treatment services is at its highest in a decade, with almost half (49%) of all alcohol and other drug treatment episodes involving alcohol as a drug of concern.<sup>8</sup>

It doesn't have to be this way. Governments across Australia can take action to ensure common sense measures are put in place so that families and communities are safe.



- 1 National Drug Research Institute (2018). *Media Release: Alcohol causes nearly 6,000 Australian deaths in one year, a third from cancer*. <https://ndri.curtin.edu.au/news-events/ndri-news/media-release-alcohol-causes-nearly-6000>
- 2 Rehm J, Gmel GE, Gmel G, Hasan OSM, Imtiaz S, Popova S, Probst C, Roerecke M, Room R, Samokhvalov AV, Shield KD, Shuper PA. The relationship between different dimensions of alcohol use and the burden of disease—An update. *Addiction*. 2017;112(6):968-1001.
- 3 Laslett A-M, Room R, Kuntsche S, et al (2023). Alcohol's harm to others in 2021: who bears the burden? *Addiction*. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1111/add.16205>
- 4 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020). *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019*. Drug Statistics series no. 32. PHE 270. Canberra AIHW.
- 5 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022). *Australian Burden of Disease Study 2022*. [doi:10.25816/e2v0-gp02](https://doi.org/10.25816/e2v0-gp02)
- 6 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022). *Causes of Death*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/2021>
- 7 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022). *Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/drug-types/alcohol>
- 8 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023). *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia annual report*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol-other-drug-treatment-services/alcohol-other-drug-treatment-services-australia/contents/about>

# Reasons for drinking alcohol

Most people (85.9%) reported that they had an alcoholic drink in the past 12 months.

People were asked about the reasons why they drink alcohol and were able to select multiple options. For people who indicated they had an alcoholic drink in the past 12 months, almost three quarters (74.7%) drank alcohol when they socialise, just over a third (34.9%) reported that they drink alcohol to relieve stress, one in five (20%) drank alcohol because other people were doing so and almost one in six (18.5%) reported that they drink alcohol to deal with anxiety (Table 1). This is concerning as alcoholic products exacerbate mental ill health. Fifteen per cent of people reported that they drink alcohol to get drunk.

Men (40%) were more likely to report using alcohol to relieve stress than women (29.7%), and men (17.8%) were more likely to drink alcohol to get drunk than women (11.8%).

Younger people (18-25 years) were more likely to report drinking alcohol to get drunk (31.8%) than older age groups (Table 2). A high proportion of people (74.7%) reported using alcohol when socialising and this was consistent regardless of age and gender.

**Table 1. Reasons for drinking alcohol by gender (multiple choice) (N = 868)**

I DRINK ALCOHOL...	TOTAL		GENDER			
	N	%	MALE		FEMALE	
			N	%	N	%
To relieve stress	303	34.9	175	40.0	128	29.7
To deal with anxiety	161	18.5	92	21.1	69	16.0
To get drunk	129	14.9	78	17.8	51	11.8
When I socialise	648	74.7	322	73.7	326	75.6
Because other people around me are drinking alcohol	174	20.0	93	21.3	81	18.8
Other	120	13.8	57	13.0	63	14.6

**Table 2. Reasons for drinking alcohol by age (multiple choice) (N = 868)**

I DRINK ALCOHOL...	TOTAL		AGE (YEARS)							
	N	%	18-25		26-41		42-57		58+	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
To relieve stress	303	34.9	33	30.0	120	48.2	91	39.7	59	21.1
To deal with anxiety	161	18.5	20	18.2	59	23.7	53	23.1	29	10.4
To get drunk	129	14.9	35	31.8	51	20.5	36	15.7	7	2.5
When I socialise	648	74.7	88	80.0	195	78.3	165	72.1	200	71.4
Because other people around me are drinking alcohol	174	20.0	31	28.2	63	25.3	45	19.7	35	12.5
Other	120	13.8	2	1.8	14	5.6	34	14.8	70	25.0

## Concern about alcohol use

For people who indicated they had an alcoholic drink in the past 12 months, one in seven (14%) reported that someone has expressed concern about their alcohol use (Table 3). Men (18.5%) were more likely than women (9%) to report that someone has expressed concern about their alcohol use. The age group least likely to report that someone has expressed concern about their alcohol use was the oldest age group (58+ years).

**Table 3. Has someone expressed concern about your alcohol use, by gender and age (N = 868)**

	YES		NO		UNSURE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	120	13.8	717	82.6	31	3.6
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	81	18.5	336	76.9	20	4.6
Female	39	9.0	381	88.4	11	2.6
<b>Age</b>						
18-25 years	17	15.5	90	81.8	3	2.7
26-41 years	43	17.3	197	79.1	9	3.6
42-57 years	39	17.0	178	77.7	12	5.2
58+ years	21	7.5	252	90.0	7	2.5

People were also asked whether they are concerned about the amount of alcohol that they and people they know use. Fourteen per cent indicated that they are concerned with the amount of alcohol they are drinking (Table 4). One in five (19.8%) reported that they are concerned with the amount of alcohol that a family member is drinking, and 15 per cent reported that they are concerned with the amount of alcohol that a friend is drinking.

Men (18.2%) were more likely to report concern about their own alcohol use than women (10.3%). Women were more likely to report concern about a family member's alcohol use – with almost a quarter (23.5%) of women concerned about how much alcohol a family member is drinking.

Over a quarter (26.4%) of young people (18-25 years) are concerned about how much alcohol a family member is drinking (Table 5). A quarter (24.8%) of young people (18-25 years) are also concerned about the alcohol use of a friend.

**Table 4. Concern about alcohol use by yourself and others, by gender (N = 1004)**

I AM CONCERNED WITH THE AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL...	TOTAL		GENDER			
	N	%	MALE		FEMALE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
That I am drinking	142	14.1	89	18.2	53	10.3
That a family member is drinking	199	19.8	78	15.9	121	23.5
That a friend is drinking	151	15.0	76	15.5	75	14.6
I am not concerned about my alcohol use or that of anyone I know	599	59.7	291	59.4	308	59.9

**Table 5. Concern about alcohol use by yourself and others, by age (N = 1004)**

I AM CONCERNED WITH THE AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL...	TOTAL		AGE (YEARS)							
	N	%	18-25		26-41		42-57		58+	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
That I am drinking	142	14.1	16	12.4	48	16.5	47	18.2	31	9.5
That a family member is drinking	199	19.8	34	26.4	66	22.7	43	16.7	56	17.2
That a friend is drinking	151	15.0	32	24.8	57	19.6	34	13.2	28	8.6
I am not concerned about my alcohol use or that of anyone I know	599	59.7	68	52.7	152	52.2	153	59.3	226	69.3

## Need for government action

Australians were asked whether they think Australian governments are doing enough to address the harms from alcohol.

One in five (21.9%) Australians think Australian governments are doing enough to address harms from alcohol, while just over half (53.4%) think Australian governments are not doing enough and a quarter are unsure (24.7%; Table 6).

Men (25.9%) were more likely than women (18.1%) to think Australian governments are doing enough to address harms from alcohol. Opinion was consistent between age groups; in all age groups the most common answer was that Australian governments are not doing enough to address the harms from alcohol.

**Table 6. Opinion on Australian governments addressing harm from alcohol, by gender and age (N = 1004)**

	YES		NO		UNSURE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	220	21.9	536	53.4	248	24.7
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	127	25.9	252	51.4	111	22.7
Female	93	18.1	284	55.3	137	26.7
<b>Age</b>						
18-25 years	31	24.0	72	55.8	26	20.2
26-41 years	71	24.4	141	48.5	79	27.1
42-57 years	56	21.7	140	54.3	62	24.0
58+ years	62	19.0	183	56.1	81	24.8

Gender and age trends regarding opinion on government action were similar among those who had an alcoholic drink in the last 12 months, compared to the wider group.

**Table 7. Opinion on Australian governments addressing harm from alcohol among people who drank alcohol in past 12 months, by gender and age (N = 862)**

	YES		NO		UNSURE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	197	22.9	452	52.4	213	24.7
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	120	27.5	221	50.7	95	21.8
Female	77	18.1	231	54.2	118	27.7
<b>Age</b>						
18-25 years	27	25.2	60	56.1	20	18.7
26-41 years	64	25.7	120	48.2	65	26.1
42-57 years	50	22.0	121	53.3	56	24.7
58+ years	56	20.1	151	54.1	72	25.8

## Further information

For information on support services for yourself, or if you are concerned about the alcohol use of a family member, see: [www.fare.org.au/resources/support/](http://www.fare.org.au/resources/support/).

## About FARE

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

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

