



Alcohol Use in Western Australia.

Drinking patterns and harms



Alcohol “is not just a health issue or a public safety issue - it has a whole of society impact.”

- National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028

Alcohol use costs the WA community **\$3.1 billion** per year in policing costs, hospitalisations, road crashes and ambulances.¹ In 2018-19, the WA Government recouped just **\$5.3 million** in liquor licensing fees.²

Nationally, government revenue from alcohol taxation is estimated to be **\$6.78 billion**³, while the cost of alcohol to society has been conservatively estimated at **\$14.35 billion**, more than double the tax income.⁴

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that healthy men and women:

drink no more than **10 standard drinks** per week to reduce risk of long-term harm from alcohol;

and drink no more than **4 standard drinks** on a single occasion to reduce the risk of injury.⁵

West Australians continue to drink at risky levels

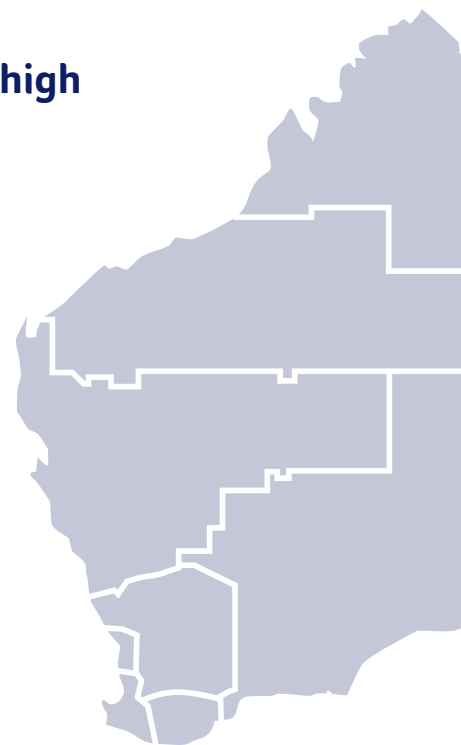
A considerable proportion of Western Australians drink enough to place themselves at risk of short- or long-term harm.

- **1 in 4** (25.9%) Western Australians drank alcohol in quantities that placed them at risk of injury, at least **once a month** in 2019.⁶
- **1 in 6** (17.2%) Western Australians drank alcohol in quantities that placed them at risk of **long-term harm** from alcohol in 2019.⁶
- Since 2010, the proportion of **WA young people aged 15-24 years** drinking at risk of long-term harm from alcohol has **halved**, from **30%** in 2010 to **15%** in 2019.⁶ However, the proportion of people in their 40s, 50s, and 60s drinking at risk of long-term harm has remained consistent.
- In 2019, **2 in 5** (44%) West Australians reported drinking to get drunk.⁷
- Alcohol sales data from 2011-12 (the latest available) show the per capita consumption (PCC) of alcohol in WA was higher than the national average. In 2011-12, PCC of alcohol in WA (for people aged 15+) was **11.94 litres**, compared to **10.04 litres** for Australia. This is equivalent to West Australians, on average, drinking **2.6 standard drinks per day**.⁸
- Compared to the national average, more West Australians drink at levels considered risky for immediate harm from alcohol (**25.9%** in WA compared to **24.8%** in Australia) and for long-term harm from alcohol (**17.2%** in WA compared to **16.8%** in Australia).⁶

Regional West Australians' alcohol use is particularly high

In some regions of WA, the annual amount of alcohol used per capita (in litres of pure alcohol) is particularly high.⁸

Region	Per capita consumption	Standard drink equivalent (per person per day)
Kimberley	16.1 litres	3.5 standard drinks
Gascoyne	14.9 litres	3.3 standard drinks
Goldfields	14.9 litres	3.3 standard drinks
Esperance	14.7 litres	3.2 standard drinks
Augusta-Margaret River-Busselton	14.2 litres	3.1 standard drinks
Pilbara	12.3 litres	2.7 standard drinks
State Average	11.9 litres	2.6 standard drinks



Drinking patterns among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

- Drinking patterns within and between Indigenous Australian communities vary greatly.⁹
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are less likely to drink alcohol compared to non-Indigenous Australians. However, of those who do drink, more are likely to drink at risky levels.¹⁰

Approximately
3 in 5 (59%)



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are current drinkers,⁹ compared to **3 in 4** (74%) in the whole of WA.⁶

Based on the low-risk drinking guidelines, **1 in 3** (34%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drank at high risk of harm from a single-occasion, while **1 in 5** (19.3%) drank at high risk of long-term harm from alcohol in 2019.⁶



Drinking patterns in Australia are of concern

Drinking patterns fluctuate over time. In Australia, for the past 25 years drinking levels have remained at around **10 litres** of pure alcohol per person aged 15+ per year.

Australians drink, on average, the equivalent of:

224	stubbies of beer;
38	bottles of wine;
17	bottles of cider;
4	bottles of spirits; and
33	cans of pre-mixed drinks per year. ¹²

- In 2017-18, Australia's per capita consumption of alcohol (per person aged 15+) was **9.51 litres** of pure alcohol.¹¹
- Accounting for non-drinkers, the average Australian drinker was estimated to have drunk **12.4 litres** of alcohol in 2017-18, which is equivalent to **2.7 standard drinks** per drinker per day.¹¹
- Almost **6 million** Australians drink alcohol to get drunk.¹³
- Australia's alcohol use is high by world standards. Globally, those aged 15+ drink an average of **6.4 litres** of pure alcohol per year.¹⁴

Harms from alcohol are extensive

Each week,

10 deaths,
315 hospitalisations and
160 family violence assaults

occur in WA as a result of alcohol use.^{15,16,17}

- Alcohol use was responsible for **4.5%** of the burden of disease and injury in Australia in 2015, making it the **sixth highest** risk factor for burden of disease and injury.¹⁸
- Alcohol use was the leading risk factor contributing to **disease burden** in Australian males aged 15–44 years.¹⁸
- Alcohol contributes to more than **200 different types of health conditions**, including liver disease, cancers, cardiovascular disease, stroke, respiratory diseases and sexually transmitted infections.¹⁴
- Alcohol is also involved in a range of **immediate harms**, including injury, assaults, family violence, and road traffic crashes.¹⁴

Australians experience a range of harms from their own drinking

- In 2017 in Australia, **4186** people died due to alcohol.¹⁹ That means **one person dies every two hours** due to alcohol in Australia.
- Alcohol is responsible for **40%** of the burden due to **liver cancer** and **28%** of the burden due to **chronic liver disease**.²⁰
- In 2015 in WA, **193** people died from alcohol-related cancer, **131** from alcohol-related injuries, **88** from alcohol-related cardiovascular disease, **82** due to alcohol-related digestive conditions, and **45** from alcohol-related infections.¹⁵
- **17.4%** of recent drinkers aged 14+ reported taking part in at least one risky activity while under the influence of alcohol, including going swimming, driving a vehicle, and abusing someone.²²
- **14%** of suicides in Australia are related to alcohol. This means that **every seventh suicide may not occur** if alcohol were not used in the population.²⁰
- In Australia in 2017, **759** people who died due to suicide had alcohol recorded as a contributory factor.¹⁹
- The overall rate of suicides among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2015 was **2.1** times higher than among non-Indigenous people. For the period between 2011 and 2015, **40%** of male suicides and **30%** of female suicides were attributable to alcohol use.²³
- **1646** people died as a result of an injury related to alcohol in Australia in 2017.¹⁹
- **7%** of all drowning deaths in WA had alcohol as a key contributing factor.²⁴
- **54%** of Australians aged over 60 years who drink at risky levels had experienced **at least one type of harm** as a result of their drinking in the last year, including being unable to remember afterwards, being unable to stop drinking once having started, and causing injury to self or others.²⁵

It is estimated that **3496** cancers in Australian adults in 2013 could be attributed to long-term chronic use of alcohol.²¹

Millions of Australian children are affected by others' drinking



Over a million Australian children are estimated to be affected in some way by the drinking of others, and **over 10,000** are in the child protection system because of a carer's drinking.²⁶

- In the Pilbara for the 12 month period ending on 30 June 2016, **half** of all domestic violence incident reports (**49%, 1066 incidents**) were associated with alcohol and of these, **33%** were estimated to involve children.²⁷ This is just one region of WA for which data are available.
- **94%** of young, risky drinkers experienced harm due to someone's drinking in the past 12 months in 2016 and 2017.²⁸
- Alcohol use during pregnancy is a **leading cause** of preventable birth defects, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).²⁹
- The prevalence of FASD in Australia or WA is not known. Australia's first ever prevalence study of FASD was conducted in Fitzroy Crossing in WA; **1 in 5** children born in the region has FASD, one of the highest prevalence rates in the world.³⁰
- **36%** of young people in a detention centre in WA were diagnosed with FASD. Given the challenges with a FASD diagnosis, this is likely to be an underestimate.³¹

Alcohol contributes significantly to violence in Australia and places a major burden on law enforcement resources

- Alcohol is an important **reinforcing factor** that contributes to the prevalence and severity of family and domestic violence in the WA community.³⁴
- Alcohol was recorded as a factor in **39%** of family and domestic violence incidents attended by WA Police between 2009 and 2014.¹⁶
- In 2019-20, WA Police responded to an estimated **8345** cases of family assault incidents involving alcohol.^{16,17} This means that more than **22** alcohol-related family assault incidents were attended by WA Police **each day**. The number of family assault incidents in WA has been increasing, and in 2019-20 was **14%** higher than the preceding 5-year average.¹⁷ Police responses often reflect only the more serious incidents.
- WA Police responded to an estimated **4043** incidents of non-domestic alcohol-related assaults in 2019-20.^{35,17} The number of non-domestic assaults has been steady over the past 5 years in WA.
- In the Kimberley region of WA, **75%** of family assaults and **66%** of all violence incidents involved alcohol use in 2016-17.³⁶ This is just one region for which data are available.
- Young people aged 14-19 years who are risky drinkers commonly experience **multiple harms from others' drinking**, including harassment (**40%** have experienced in public), unwanted sexual attention (**61%** have experienced), and being yelled at, criticised or verbally abused by a drinker (**35%** have experienced).²⁷

In 2006, **19.8%** of the WA Police budget was spent responding to alcohol related matters, a cost of **\$303 million** in 2019.^{32,33}



4.5 million Australians

aged 14+ were victims of an alcohol-related incident (**verbally abused, physically abused or being put in fear**) in 2019.⁶

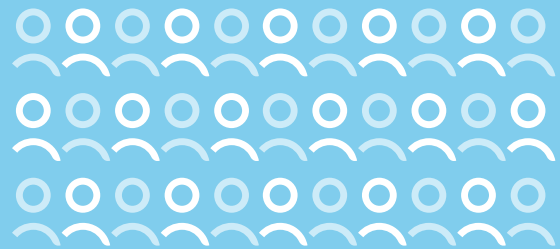
Alcohol-related presentations are a significant burden on the WA health system

In 2017, an average of **15 ambulances** per day were called to attend to West Australians for the primary reason of alcohol intoxication (**5324 ambulance call-outs**). Of these, 3554 cases required hospitalisation.³⁷ This does not include other alcohol-related harms such as falls, assaults and road crashes.



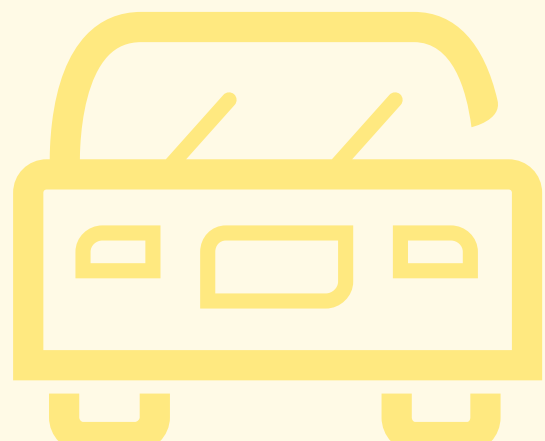
- More than **1 in 6** presentations to emergency departments in WA were related to alcohol in 2018, a 2am snapshot survey showed. WA had the highest rate of alcohol-related presentations in the country.³⁸
- Alcohol-related presentations to the Royal Perth Hospital emergency department cost an estimated **\$7.5 million** per year.³⁹
- An estimated **16,387** hospitalisations in WA were due to alcohol in 2012–13.¹⁵ Top causes of alcohol-related hospitalisations were alcohol dependence, falls, alcohol abuse, assault, lower respiratory infections and breast cancer.¹⁵
- Over the ten year period between 2010 and 2019, alcohol use was documented in **44%** of admissions to the Royal Perth Hospital Trauma Unit for domestic and family violence.⁴¹

33 people are hospitalised each week in WA due to alcohol-related assaults.⁴⁰



Alcohol continues to contribute to the road toll

- Alcohol was a factor in **20%** of fatal road crashes on WA roads in 2019.⁴² This means that **33 West Australians** lost their lives on our roads due to alcohol. Most of the fatalities (**76%**) in alcohol-related crashes occurred in regional WA.
- Alcohol was the **second largest** behavioural contributor to fatal crashes (after speed) in WA in 2019.⁴²
- More than half (**52%**) of West Australian drinkers surveyed by the Road Safety Commission admit to ever driving near or over the legal blood alcohol limit.⁴³
- Alcohol is expected to have been involved in **216** non-fatal road trauma admissions in WA in 2017.⁴⁴
- It is not only the driver's drinking that contributes to road traffic injuries. At a hospital trauma centre in Victoria, **25%** of pedestrians injured in road traffic crashes were intoxicated (i.e. had a blood alcohol concentration above 0.05g/100ml).⁴⁵



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