



Alcohol industry associations rebut research claiming increase in alcohol consumption in Australia

Joint media response from:

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Research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* on 3 August 2015 claiming alcohol consumption has increased in Australia is highly questionable, given the findings are based on the commentary of Australians on their alcohol consumption over one week, as opposed to actual sales data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), a much more accurate representation of consumption figures that can be supported by the alcohol industry's own sales data. Commentary around the drivers behind the findings are also largely speculative.

The ABS remains to be the authoritative source for alcohol consumption patterns in Australia - the Bureau's own statistics released in May this year found that Australians are drinking less alcohol overall than any time in the previous 50 years. These findings are reinforced by research from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), a provider of reliable, regular and relevant statistics on Australia's health and welfare.

This survey found that daily drinking has in fact declined significantly between 2010 and 2013 (from 7.2% to 6.5%) and was at the lowest level seen since 1991, with rates falling for both males and females. The NDSHS also found fewer people aged 12–17 are drinking alcohol and the proportion abstaining from alcohol increased significantly between 2010 and 2013 (from 64% to 72%). Furthermore, younger people are continuing to delay starting drinking—the age at which 14–24-year-olds first tried alcohol has increased since 1998 from 14.4 to 15.7 years in 2013.

In relation to risky drinking, we are in fact seeing a downward trend in risky drinking - the NDSHS found that the proportion of those who exceeded the risk guidelines (on a single occasion) at least once a month also declined significantly from 29% in 2010 to 26% in 2013. These are the statistics that public health officials should be focused on.

The facts continue to show that the overwhelming majority of Australians drink alcohol responsibly, with the relevant indicators on underage drinking in clear decline. The alcohol beverages industry remains deeply committed to the promotion of a responsible drinking culture, and to achieve this all sides of the debate should be committed to evidence-based policy making, rather than focusing on ad hoc public surveys.

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