



AUSTRALIA'S HEALTH TRACKER BY AREA: ALCOHOL REPORT

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Australian health tracker by area: Alcohol report

Introduction

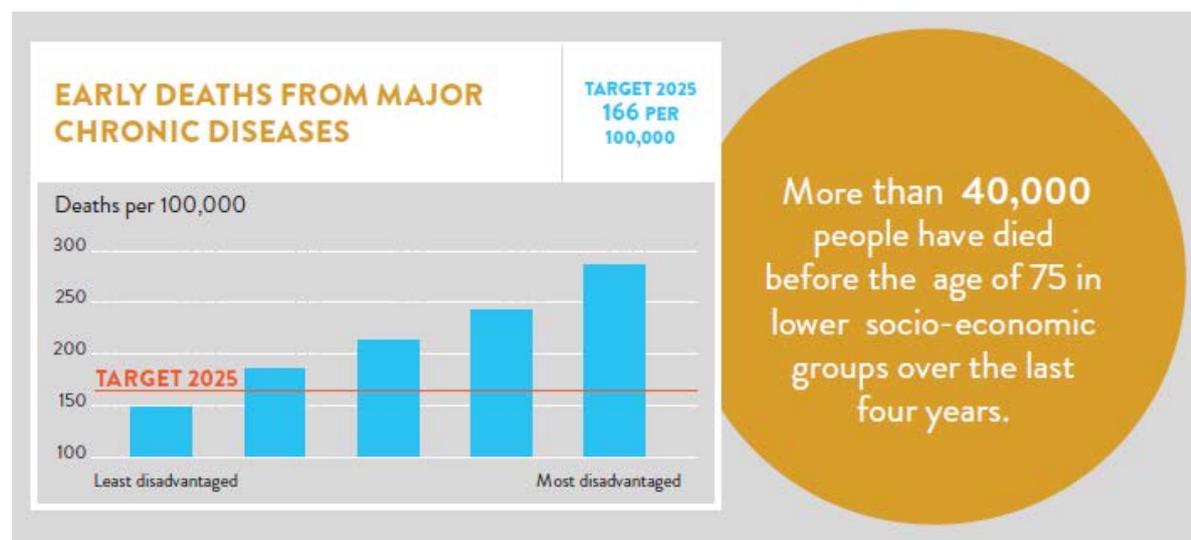
[Australia's Health Tracker by Area](#) is an interactive website that collates the most up to date Australian data on **chronic diseases, conditions** and their **risk factors** in Australian communities.

Although many Australians enjoy good health, many more are at risk of developing chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, some cancers, diabetes and dementia. Low levels of physical activity, poor diets, smoking and risky consumption of alcohol are the major lifestyle contributors to chronic diseases. A reduction in these risk factors can significantly improve the health of many individuals and prevent disease.

An estimated **one in two people living in Australia have a chronic disease** [1]. More worryingly, evidence suggests that **up to one third of chronic diseases can be prevented** [2].

Impacts of socio-economic disadvantage on health

It has been well established that communities of low socio-economic status experience poorer health outcomes. Australians in the two lowest socio-economic quintiles – ten million Australians – are at much greater risk of poor health and **early death**. More than 40,000 people have died before the age of 75 in lower socio-economic groups over the past four years [3].



Alcohol and health

High levels of alcohol consumption are linked to major chronic diseases including: cancer [4], heart disease and stroke [5, 6]. Alcohol is also a cause of cancer and consumption at **any level** increases cancer risk.

In this report, we use the 2009 National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) definition of risky drinking: no more than two standard drinks on any day [7]. This week, the NHMRC released the latest Australian alcohol guidelines for consultation recommending that healthy men and women reduce the risk of harm by drinking no more than 10 standard drinks per week and no more than four drinks in one day [8].

Risky alcohol consumption is responsible for:

- 4.6% of Australia's burden of disease [9] including
 - 12.8% of breast cancers
 - 4.3% of bowel cancers
 - 6% of cardiovascular disease
 - 6.4% of liver disease and
 - 34% of injuries
- Globally it contributes to an estimated 33% of the mental illness disease burden [10] and 22% of suicide deaths [11].

Approximately 5,500 deaths and 157,000 hospital admissions [12] are attributed to alcohol consumption in Australia each year, and alcohol-related harm costs the economy more than \$14 billion per annum [1].

Risky alcohol consumption in Australia

Overall Australia's average risky drinking rate is trending downward, with the latest national data showing that, 17.1% of Australians over the age of 14 drinking at risky levels [13].

However, the risky drinking rate varies dramatically across the country. Local government areas in Western Australia's (WA) beachside are consuming the most alcohol, with rates almost double the national average. Byron Shire Council in New South Wales (NSW) had the nation's highest rate of risky drinking, but some areas of NSW also had some of the lowest rates in the country.

Top five local government areas drinking at risky levels

1. Byron (the Shire), NSW 31.6%
2. Cottesloe (the Town), WA 31.5%
3. Mosman Park (the Town), WA 31.5%
4. Peppermint Grove (the Shire), WA 31.5%
5. East Fremantle (the Town), WA 29.8%

Lowest five local government areas drinking at risky levels

1. Greater Dandenong (the City), VIC 6.5%
2. Fairfield (the City), VIC 6.5%
3. Auburn (the City), NSW 7.9%

4. Strathfield (the Council), NSW 8.4%
5. Brimbank (the City), VIC 8.6%

More data by jurisdictions provided in Table 1 and 2. Source: National Health Survey 2014-15.

Unlike most health risk factors, drinking at 'risky' levels is prevalent in many higher socio-economic communities. Many regional/remote areas have higher rates of 'risky' drinking.

Table 1 Highest rates of risky alcohol consumption in each State/Territory, by local government area 2014-15

State	Local government area	Alcohol data
ACT	ACT	14.9%
TAS	Tasman Council	22.2%
QLD	Isaac Region	22.7%
NT	Alice Springs Town Council	23.8%
SA	Kangaroo Island Council	27%
VIC	Towong Shire	27.6%
WA	Town of Cottesloe, Town of Mosman Park and Shire of Peppermint Grove	31.5%
NSW	Byron Shire Council	31.6%

Table 2 Lowest rates of risky alcohol consumption in each State/Territory, by local government area, 2014-15

	Local government area	Alcohol data
VIC	City of Greater Dandenong	6.5%
NSW	City of Fairfield	6.6%
SA	City of Salisbury	12.2%
QLD	Ipswich City Council	13.6%
TAS	Kentish Council	14.4%
ACT	ACT	14.9%
WA	City of Canning	15.7%
NT	Litchfield Council	16.6%

Australian target 2025

A national target of 16.1% (20% reduction by 2025) has been set by leading Australian experts (the Australian Health Policy Collaboration) based on the trajectory of alcohol rates

over the last decade [14]. Australia is on track to reach this target based on the current downward trajectory since 2010 (Table 5. Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey).



The Ministerial Drug and Alcohol Forum recently endorsed the National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028. This strategy has adopted the a 10% target in the reduction in harmful alcohol consumption by 2025 as per the *World Health Organization (WHO) Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2013-2020* [15].

Table 3 'Risky' drinking prevalence from the National Drug Strategy and Household Surveys since 2010

Year	Rates of 'risky' drinking in the Australian population (14 years+)	Change (percentage points)
2010	20.1%	-
2013	18.2%	1.9
2016	17.1%	1

Policy recommendations

- Increase the current excise for all alcohol by 10%
- Apply consistent volumetric tax pricing – including on wine, cider and other fruit-based alcohol products – at a rate for wine halfway between the full-strength draught beer rate and the spirits rate, and for cider below 6% alcohol at the rate for draught beer, and for cider with 6% alcohol or above, at the rate for wine.

This policy recommendation is one of 10 policy priority actions presented in *Getting Australia's Health on Track 2016* that, together, will help get Australia on track to reach the 2025 targets and significantly reduce preventable illness and disability in the population. These priority policies have been developed by the Australian Health Policy Collaboration, a network of Australia's leading chronic disease experts.

The evidence is very clear that taxing alcohol is the most value for money policy of reducing consumption of alcohol.

Deakin University modelling [16] shows that the policy would reduce alcohol consumption by an average of 16% and, due to the high calories in alcohol, would also lead to a reduction in mean population body weight by around 0.7kg.

Their research shows that it would lead to 190,000 fewer cases of diabetes, 16,000 fewer cases of cancers and would deliver an extra 470,000 healthy life years. The healthcare savings to the economy would far outweigh any cost of the change.

This report is a summation of Mitchell Institute's key policy documents. For more information relating to alcohol policy and evidence, refer to [Australia's Health Tracker 2019](#), [Australia's Health Tracker by Area](#) and [Getting Australia's Health on Track 2016](#).

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