

# PUBLIC OPINION ON ALCOHOL IN AUSTRALIA

Knowledge, attitudes, and support for change

NOVEMBER 2023



# INTRODUCTION

**Every Australian deserves to live in a community that is safe and free from harm. Sadly, this is not the case for many Australians who experience harm from alcohol.**

This report highlights that Australians are concerned about alcoholic products and the impact they are having on our community. Many are worried about the drinking behaviours of someone in their life. The vast majority are concerned about the wide range of harms caused by alcohol, including violence, road traffic crashes, and the impact alcohol has on hospitals and health services.

Alcohol harms are at a crisis point and Australians support change. Seven in 10 Australians agree that more needs to be done by governments to reduce the harms caused by alcohol. Support is strong for higher standards on marketing and action to address cheap alcohol. There are high levels of support for greater investment in public education and the introduction of health warning labels on alcohol products. Australians want to see measures introduced that would reduce the influence the alcohol industry has on public health policy.

We know what works to reduce harm. All that is needed is action.

## ABOUT ALCOHOL CHANGE AUSTRALIA

Alcohol Change Australia is a group of health and community organisations working together to prevent and reduce alcohol harm among Australian individuals, families, and communities.



### Acknowledgement

This work was supported by a grant from the Australian Rechabite Foundation.

# AT A GLANCE

Public opinion on alcohol in Australia

We asked **2,000 Australian adults** about their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours around alcohol. The nationally representative sample was surveyed online in September 2023.

Here's what they said.

**AUSTRALIANS ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE IMPACT ALCOHOL IS HAVING ON INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES**



**8 in 10 Australians** are concerned about alcohol - related harm in Australian communities.



**30%**

of Australians are **concerned** about the **alcohol use of someone they know**, such as a family member, friend, or colleague



**2 IN 3**

Australians agree that **Australia** has a **problem with alcohol**

**MANY AUSTRALIANS ARE UNAWARE OF THE HEALTH HARMS CAUSED BY ALCOHOL**

Around **half of Australians** are **unsure** of the number of **standard drinks** healthy men and women should **not exceed** in a day or week according to the current government guidelines

**46%**

Less than half of Australians know that **alcohol causes cancer**

**14%**

Only 14% of Australians are aware that **alcohol is a cause of breast cancer**

**AUSTRALIANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY'S ACTIVITIES**

**63%**

are concerned about the amount of **alcohol advertising** they see in the community

**65%**

are concerned about **digital platforms** such as Facebook and YouTube **collecting personal data** that alcohol companies can use for marketing purposes

**65%**

are concerned about the **influence the alcohol industry and its lobbyists** have over **governments** in Australia

## AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE GOVERNMENTS NEED TO DO MORE TO ADDRESS ALCOHOL-FUELLED HARMS



**7 in 10** agree that more needs to be done by governments to reduce the harms caused by alcohol in Australia



Three-quarters agree that governments should provide more support and services for rural and remote Australians who experience harm from alcohol

## AUSTRALIANS SUPPORT ACTION TO ADDRESS ALCOHOL HARMS



**77%**

of Australians **support restricting alcohol advertising on television** during times when children are likely to be watching, including during live sports broadcasts, with only 6% opposed



**3 IN 4**

Australians agree that alcohol companies **should not be allowed to collect their data online** and use it to target them with alcohol marketing



**1 IN 2**

Australians **support taxing all alcoholic drinks**, including wine products, **based on the amount of alcohol they contain**. Less than a quarter are opposed

**72%**



of Australians **support health warning labels** on all alcohol products that raise awareness of the harms caused by alcohol, with only 8% opposed

**2 IN 3**



Australians **support changing political donation laws** to stop alcohol companies from donating money to political parties, with only 6% opposed

# METHODOLOGY

The findings of this report were collected through an online survey commissioned by Alcohol Change Australia and conducted by ISO-accredited web panel provider Pureprofile. Fieldwork was conducted between 13 and 15 September 2023. The sample size was 2,003 Australian adults aged 18 years and over, with quotas for age, gender, and location applied to obtain a nationally representative sample. The results have been weighted by age, sex, and capital city or non-capital city areas within each state and territory using Australian Bureau of Statistics population proportions. Differences in demographics are highlighted when the differences were statistically significant.

## Who we spoke to

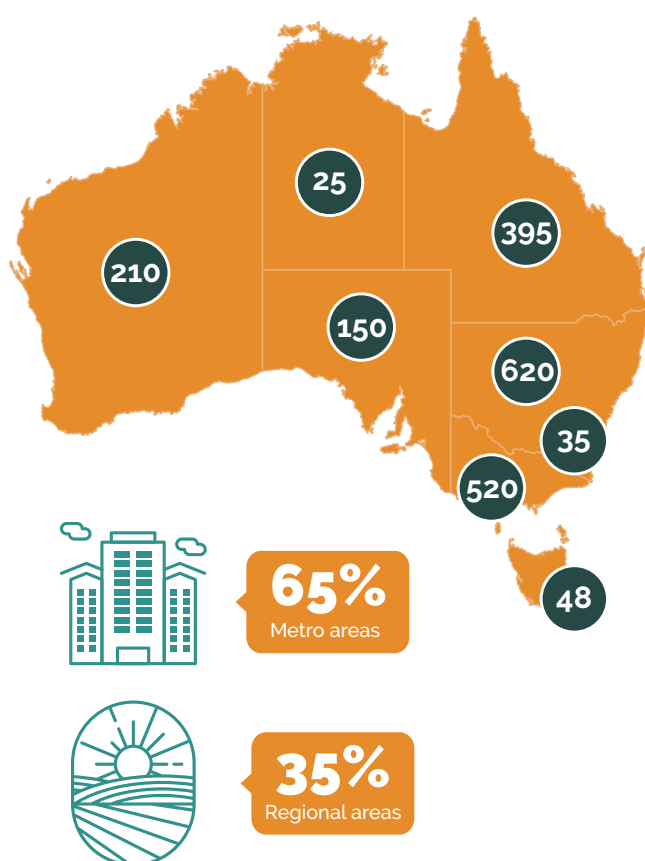


TABLE 1 – DEMOGRAPHICS OF SAMPLE

|   | Total Sample (n=2,003) |
|---|------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                               |                        |
| Male  | 48%                    |
| Female                                      | 51%                    |
| Non-binary                                  | <1%                    |
| <b>Age range</b>                            |                        |
| 18-29 years                                 | 17%                    |
| 30-39 years                                 | 20%                    |
| 40-49 years                                 | 16%                    |
| 50-59 years                                 | 16%                    |
| 60 – 69 years                               | 17%                    |
| 70+ years                                   | 13%                    |
| <b>Parent/carer of child under 18 years</b> |                        |
| Yes   | 34%                    |
| No  | 66%                    |
| <b>Household income</b>                     |                        |
| Lower income (less than \$100k)             | 55%                    |
| Medium income (\$100k – 149k)               | 24%                    |
| High income (\$150k or more)                | 21%                    |

## Measuring risky drinking

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We have measured risky drinking in line with definitions from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.<sup>1</sup> A number of national sources of alcohol data report on whether alcohol use is occurring at a level that may have increased health risks, as defined by the *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*.

Respondents in our poll were asked how often they had an alcoholic drink in the last 12 months, their alcohol use on a typical day and a typical week, and how often they had five or more standard drinks on one occasion in the last 12 months. A person who reported drinking more than 10 standard drinks per week and/or who drank more than 4 standard drinks on a single day at least once a month is classified as drinking at risky levels. A person who, in the past 12 months, reported consuming no more than 10 standard drinks per week and never consumed more than 4 standard drinks on a single day (or did so less often than once per month) is classified as drinking at non-risky levels. Non-drinkers are those who did not have a drink containing alcohol in the last 12 months.

The alcohol use of respondents in our poll, including the proportion of those that reported drinking at risky and non-risky levels, is detailed in Appendix 1.

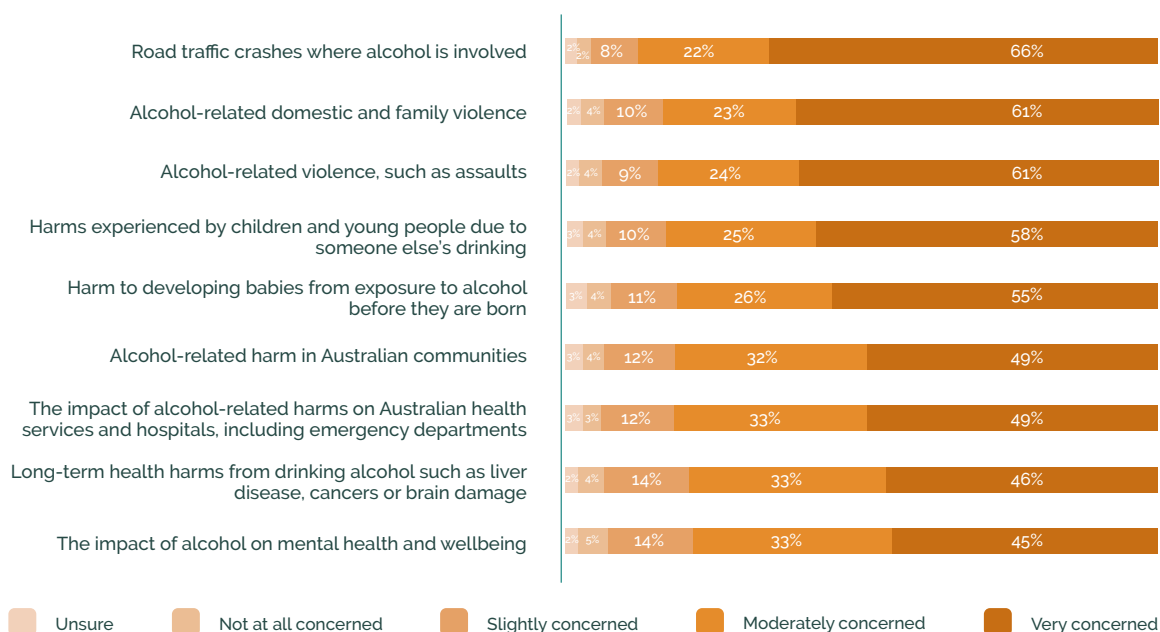


# FINDINGS

## There are high levels of community concern around alcohol-fuelled harms in Australia

**Eight in 10 Australians are either very concerned or moderately concerned about alcohol-related harm in Australian communities.**

**FIGURE 1 – EXTENT OF CONCERN ABOUT ALCOHOL-RELATED HARMS IN AUSTRALIA**



## Australians are concerned about alcohol use

**30% of Australians are concerned about the alcohol use of someone they know, such as a family member, friend, or colleague.**

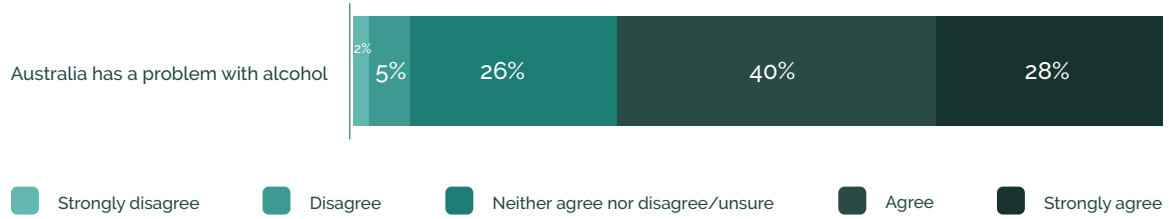
**1 in 8 Australians who drink are concerned about their own alcohol use (12%).**

**1 in 9 Australians report that someone in their life, such as a friend, colleague, family member or healthcare professional, has expressed concern about their alcohol use in the last 12 months (11%).**

- Almost a quarter of people drinking at risky levels are concerned about their own alcohol use (24%). 23% have had someone in their life express concern over their alcohol use.
- One in five parents/carers who drink are concerned about their own alcohol use (21%).
- Australians in their 40s who drink alcohol (20%) are more likely to be concerned about their own alcohol use than other age groups.

Two-thirds of Australians think that Australia has a problem with alcohol.

FIGURE 2 – AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT 'AUSTRALIA HAS A PROBLEM WITH ALCOHOL'

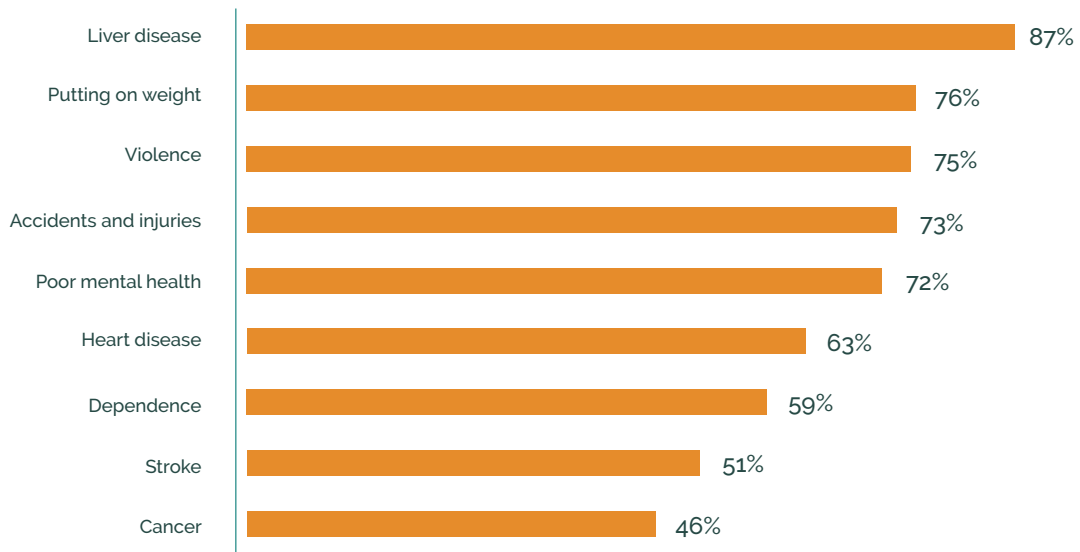


## Awareness of health harms caused by alcohol remains low

Less than half of Australians know that alcohol can cause cancer.

Respondents were asked about what health conditions can be caused by alcohol. Knowledge of some harms are high, such as liver disease (87%). However, only 46% of Australians know that alcohol causes cancer.

FIGURE 3 – AUSTRALIANS' KNOWLEDGE OF HEALTH HARMS CAUSED BY ALCOHOL

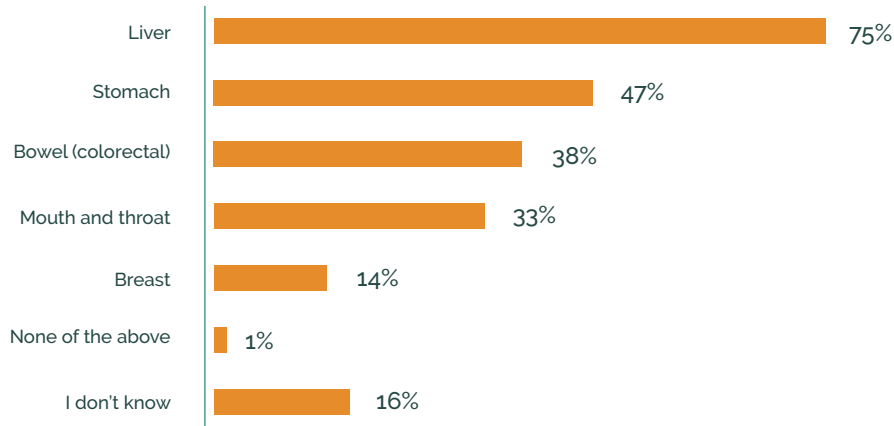


- People drinking at risky levels were less likely to identify health harms caused by alcohol, including violence (65%), accidents and injuries (64%), and poor mental health (65%).



When presented with types of cancer, 75% of Australians indicate they know that alcohol causes liver cancer, but only 14% know alcohol causes breast cancer.

**FIGURE 4 – AUSTRALIANS' KNOWLEDGE OF TYPES OF CANCER CAUSED BY ALCOHOL**

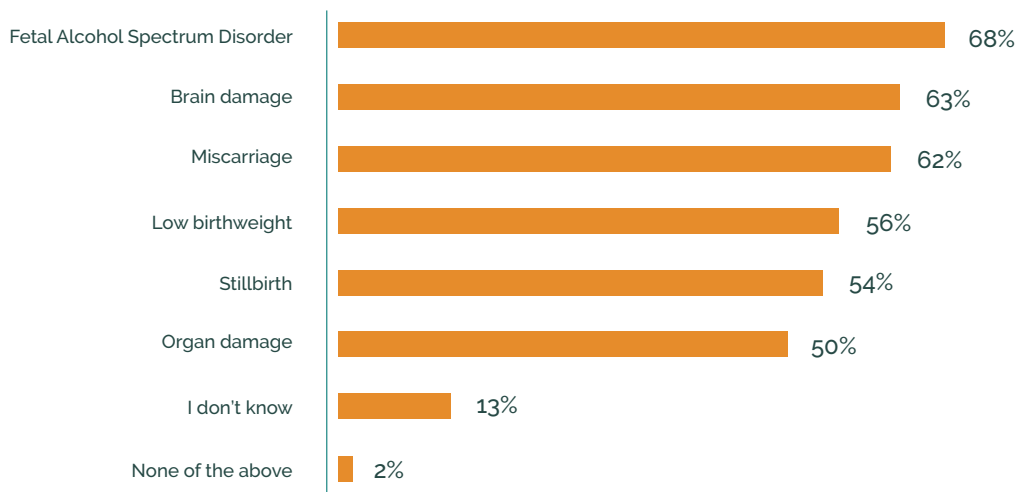


- Females (17%) were more likely than males (11%) to know alcohol causes breast cancer.

One-third of Australians are unaware that drinking alcohol during pregnancy is associated with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Respondents were also asked about what health conditions they think are associated with alcohol use during pregnancy.

**FIGURE 5 – AUSTRALIANS' KNOWLEDGE OF HEALTH CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL USE DURING PREGNANCY**



- Females (78%) were more likely than males (57%) to identify that alcohol use during pregnancy is associated with FASD.

**Knowledge of the Australian alcohol guidelines is low. Over half of Australians are either unsure of Guideline 1 or overestimate the number of standard drinks to remain at low risk of harm.**

The NHMRC *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol* Guideline 1 states that healthy men and women should drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week or more than four standard drinks on any one day to reduce their risk of alcohol-related disease or injury.

**TABLE 2 – RECALL OF THE NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS A PERSON SHOULD NOT EXCEED IN ONE SITTING TO REDUCE THE RISK OF HARM ACCORDING TO THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES**

| Response            | % of respondents |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Less than 4 drinks  | 40               |
| 4 drinks            | 8                |
| Five or more drinks | 7                |
| Unsure              | 45               |

**TABLE 3 – RECALL OF THE NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS A PERSON SHOULD NOT EXCEED IN ANY ONE WEEK TO REDUCE THE RISK OF HARM ACCORDING TO THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES**

| Response              | % of respondents |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Less than 10 drinks   | 30               |
| 10 drinks             | 9                |
| Eleven or more drinks | 8                |
| Unsure                | 53               |

**Around one-third (34%) of Australians don't know that zero is the safest number of standard drinks a pregnant woman can consume on any one occasion to avoid harm to their developing baby.**

**TABLE 4 – RECALL OF THE SAFEST NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS A PREGNANT WOMAN CAN CONSUME ON ONE OCCASION TO AVOID HARM TO THEIR DEVELOPING BABY**

| Response         | % of respondents |
|------------------|------------------|
| Zero drinks      | 66               |
| 1 or more drinks | 7                |
| Unsure           | 27               |

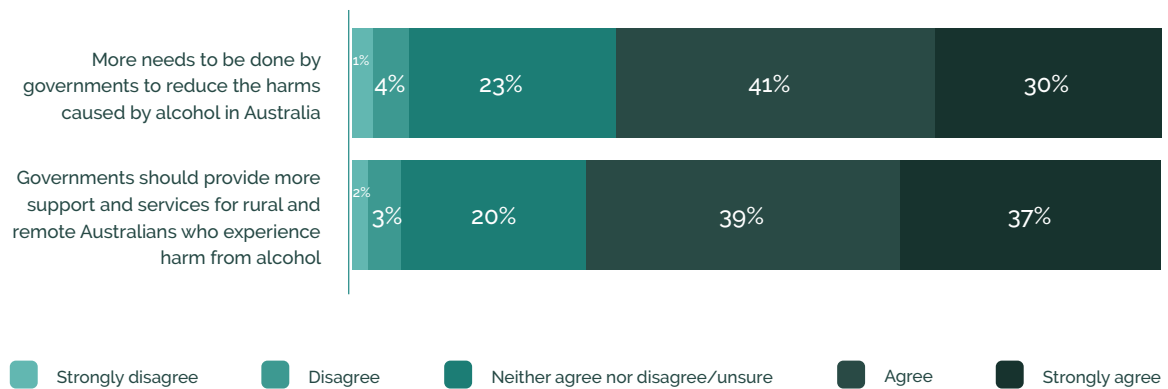
- Women (71%) are more likely than men (60%) to know that zero is the safest number of standard drinks a pregnant woman can consume on one occasion to avoid harm to their developing baby.
- 18 – 29 year olds (54%) were less likely than older Australians to know zero is the safest number.

## Australians want governments to take action on alcohol

71% of Australians agree that more needs to be done by governments to reduce the harms caused by alcohol; only 5% disagree.

76% agree that governments should provide more support and services for rural and remote Australians who experience harm from alcohol; only 5% disagree.

FIGURE 6 – AGREEMENT ON STATEMENTS ABOUT GOVERNMENT ACTION

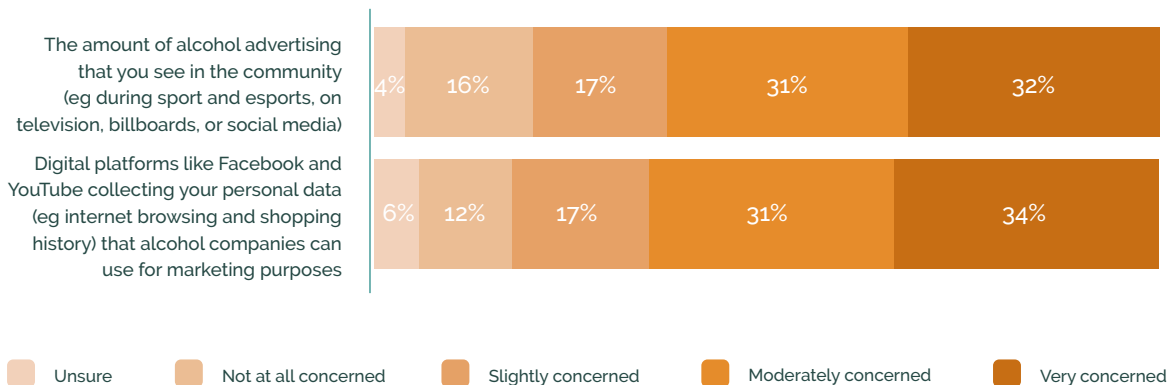


## Australians are concerned about the marketing practices of the alcohol industry

63% of Australians are concerned about the amount of alcohol advertising they see in the community (e.g. during sport and esports, on television, billboards, or social media).

Almost two-thirds of Australians are concerned about digital platforms such as Facebook and YouTube collecting their personal data for alcohol companies to use for marketing purposes.

**FIGURE 7 – EXTENT OF CONCERN AROUND ALCOHOL MARKETING IN AUSTRALIA**



## Australians support greater restrictions on alcohol marketing

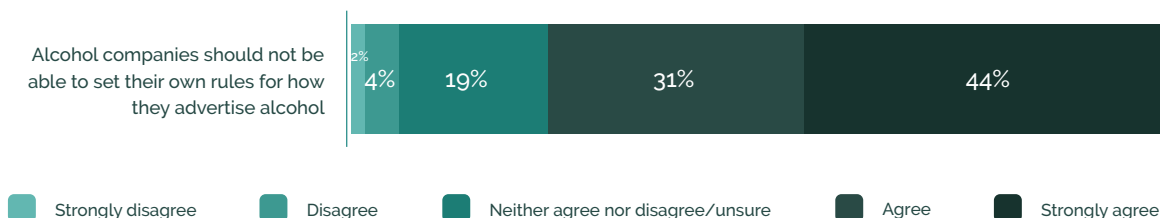
Alcohol marketing comes at a cost to the community. The more children and young people are exposed to alcohol advertising, the more likely they are to start using alcohol products at a younger age, and to drink more if they are already using alcohol.<sup>2</sup> The constant flow of pro-alcohol messages can be confronting for people with lived experience of alcohol harm and people with alcohol dependence or managing an Alcohol Use Disorder.

Respondents were asked if alcohol companies should be able to set their own rules for advertising. They were also asked about the extent they would support stronger restrictions on alcohol marketing across a range of media.

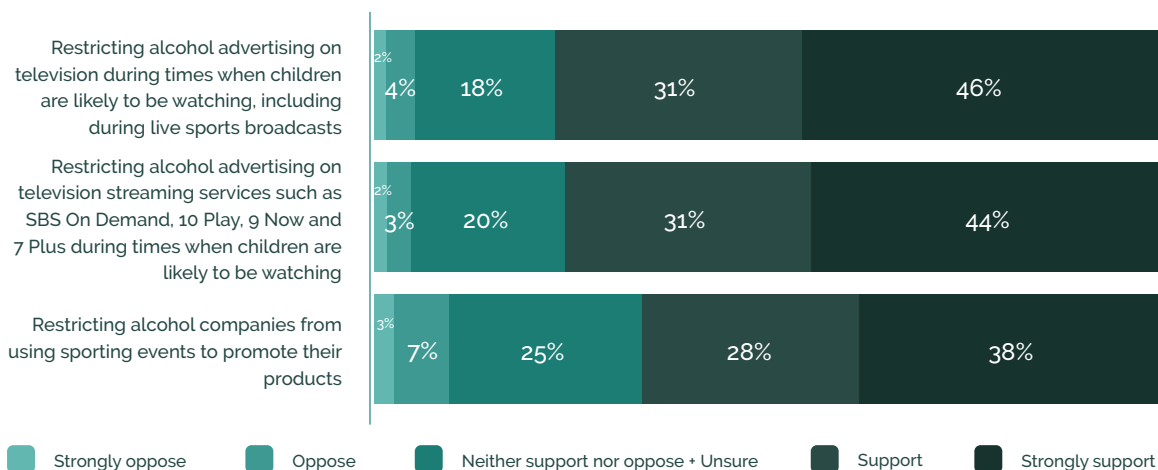
**75% of Australians agree that alcohol companies should not be able to set their own rules for how they advertise alcohol; only 6% disagree.**

**77% of Australians support restricting alcohol advertising on television during times when children are likely to be watching, including during live sports broadcasts; only 6% oppose.**

**FIGURE 8 – AGREEMENT WITH ALCOHOL INDUSTRY SELF-REGULATION OF MARKETING**



**FIGURE 9 – SUPPORT FOR STRONGER MARKETING RESTRICTIONS**



## Australians want better protections online from alcohol marketing

With the increased role of digital technology in our everyday lives, alcohol companies are now able to reach Australians in every location through their smart phones. Extensive data collection means that people are tracked and profiled, allowing alcohol companies to generate highly targeted marketing that is time- and location-specific. Digital platforms also track and profile children for marketing purposes, with over 72 million data points on a child by the time they are 13 years old.<sup>3</sup>

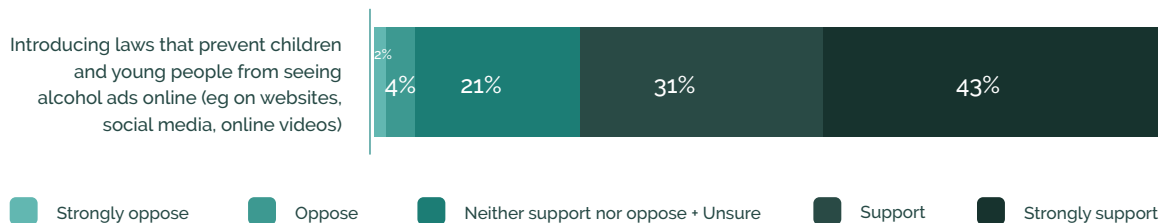
Respondents were asked about the extent they agree with, as well as the extent they would support, stronger restrictions on digital marketing.

**Around three-quarters of Australians support introducing laws that prevent children and young people from seeing alcohol ads online; only 6% oppose.**

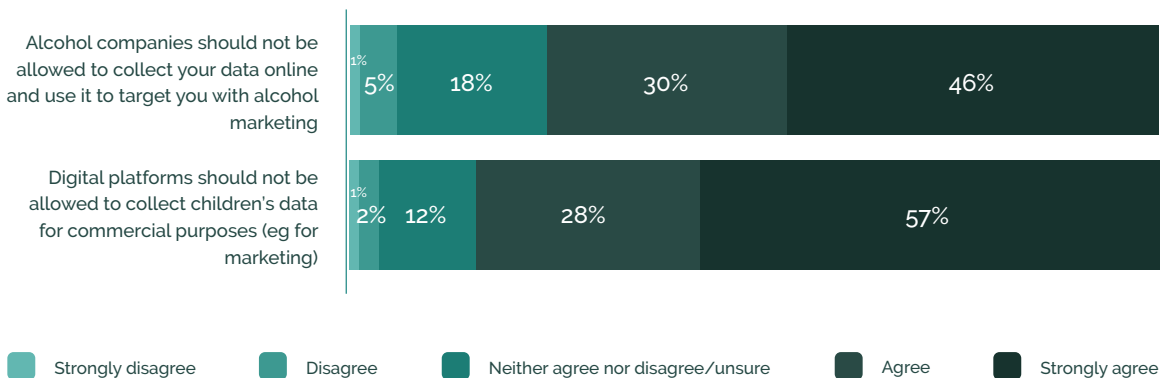
**76% of Australians agree that alcohol companies should not be allowed to collect their data online and use it to target them with alcohol marketing.**

**85% of Australians agree that digital platforms should not be allowed to collect children's data for commercial purposes, including marketing.**

**FIGURE 10 – SUPPORT FOR STRONGER RESTRICTIONS ON DIGITAL MARKETING**



**FIGURE 11 – AGREEMENT WITH RESTRICTIONS ON DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES**



## Half of Australians support action on price to reduce harm from alcohol

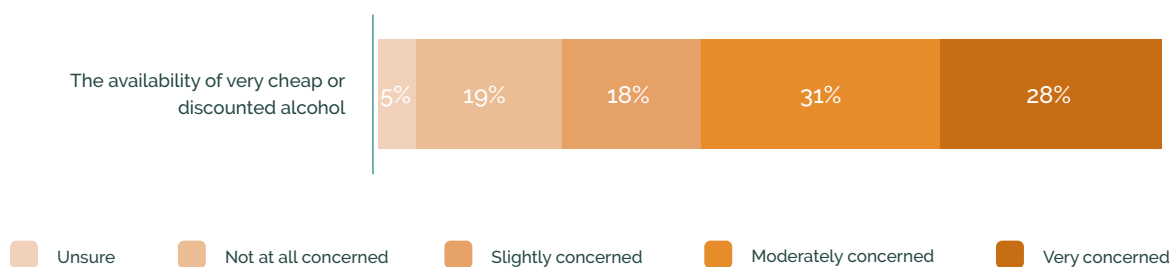
In Australia, the amount of tax paid on an alcohol product is generally based on the amount of alcohol contained within the product. This means the higher the alcohol content, the more the product is taxed. The exception is wine products, which are taxed based on the cost of the final product. This means the cheaper the wine, the less it is taxed. High-volume, high-alcohol wine (such as cask wine) is being sold at very low prices in Australia.

The cheaper alcohol products are, the more people drink, and the more they experience harm.<sup>4</sup> Research has consistently shown that increases in the price of alcohol lead to reductions in alcohol use.<sup>5,6</sup> Respondents were asked about the extent they would support alcohol tax reform to reduce harms from alcohol.

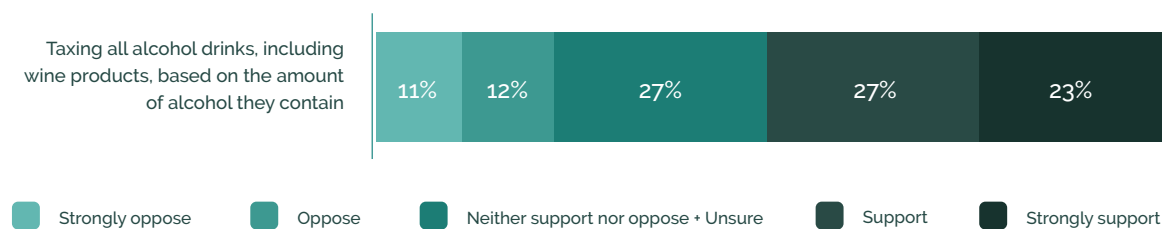
**Almost 6 in 10 Australians are concerned about the availability of very cheap or discounted alcohol in the community.**

**Half of Australians support taxing all alcoholic drinks, including wine products, based on the amount of alcohol they contain. Less than a quarter are opposed.**

**FIGURE 12 – EXTENT OF CONCERN ABOUT AVAILABILITY OF CHEAP ALCOHOL**



**FIGURE 13 – SUPPORT FOR ALCOHOL TAX REFORM**



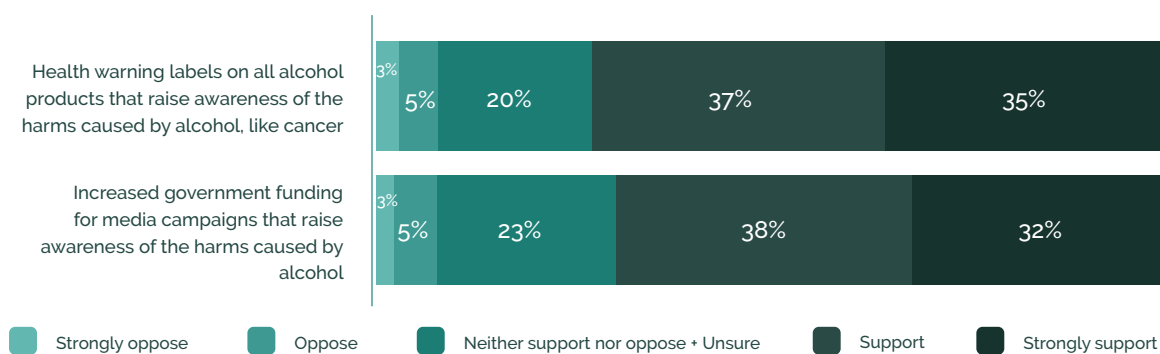
## Australians want to be empowered with knowledge of health harms from alcohol

Australians have a right to know if the products they are using can cause them harm. Yet many people in the community are not aware of the range and magnitude of the harms caused by alcohol products. Empowering Australians with knowledge is an important part of a comprehensive approach to reducing harm from alcohol. Respondents were asked about the extent they would support public education measures to reduce harm from alcohol.

**72% of Australians support a health warning label on all alcohol products that raises awareness of the harms caused by alcohol, including cancer; only 8% oppose.**

**Over two-thirds of Australians support increased government funding for media campaigns that raise awareness of the harms caused by alcohol; only 8% oppose.**

**FIGURE 14 – SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION MEASURES**



**Health warning labels have the potential to impact on alcohol use.<sup>a</sup>**

**47% of Australians report that if they saw an ‘alcohol causes liver disease’ label on an alcoholic drink, they would drink less of that product.**

**42% of Australians reported that if they saw an ‘alcohol causes cancer’ label on an alcoholic drink, they would drink less of that product.**

## Australians support governments addressing the influence of the alcohol industry

When developing health policies, the objective should always be to improve the health and wellbeing of the community. Unfortunately, many commercial groups are invested in the development of alcohol policy in Australia. Respondents were asked about the extent they would support measures to reduce the alcohol industry’s influence on policy.

**65% of Australians are concerned about the influence the alcohol industry and its lobbyists have over governments in Australia.**

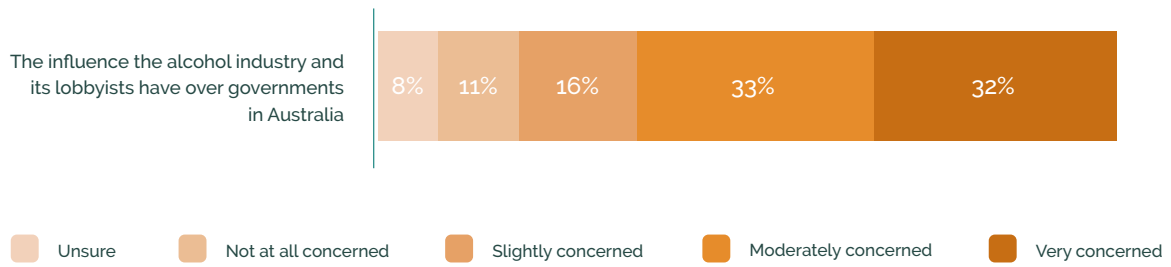
**Two-thirds of Australians support changing political donation laws to stop alcohol companies from donating money to political parties, with only 6% opposed.**

**64% of Australians support excluding alcohol companies from being involved in the development of public health policy in Australia, with only 8% opposed.**

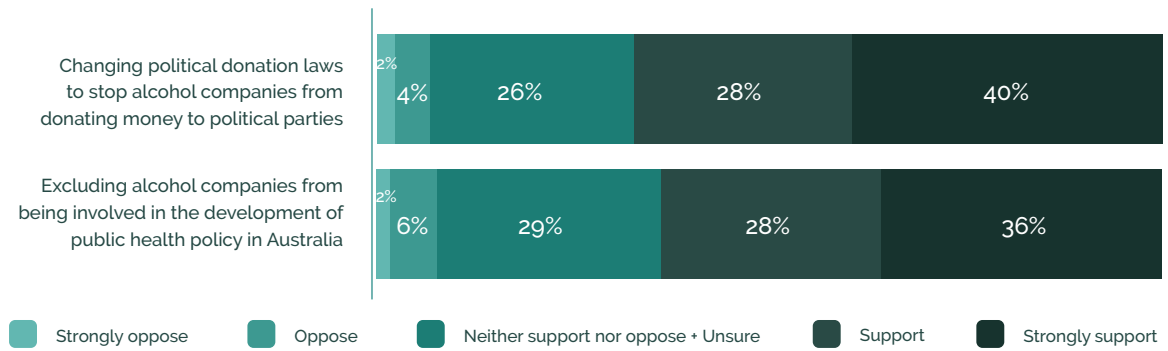
<sup>a</sup> In August 2023, Alcohol Change Australia placed two questions in an online omnibus survey to assess the potential impact of health warning labels on people’s alcohol use. Respondents were shown images of three alcoholic ciders – one standard bottle, one with an ‘alcohol causes cancer’ label, and one with an ‘alcohol causes liver disease’ label. Respondents were asked how seeing a health warning label on an alcoholic drink would impact on the number of drinks they would have. The nationally representative sample of 1,000 Australian adults aged 18 years and over were surveyed via an online omnibus survey, conducted by panel provider Pureprofile, on 27 and 28 August 2023.



**FIGURE 15 – EXTENT OF CONCERN AROUND THE INFLUENCE OF THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY**



**FIGURE 16 – SUPPORT FOR RESTRICTIONS ON ALCOHOL INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY**



# CONCLUSION

We all want Australia to be a healthy, happy country to live in. But alcohol products are having a devastating impact on the Australian community. The alcohol industry is marketing and selling its products in more places than ever before, to the detriment of Australians' health and wellbeing.

Australians are very concerned about the impact alcohol is having on their loved ones and the broader community. It's clear that Australians want and support government action on alcohol. The time is now for the Australian Government to take more responsibility for regulating alcohol products and introduce proven measures that reduce harms from alcohol products. Alcohol Change Australia calls on the Australian Government to:

- Protect the community from alcohol marketing;
- Address cheap alcohol that fuels harm;
- Empower the community by raising awareness of the harms caused by alcohol;
- Support alcohol-free pregnancies; and
- Create healthy public policy free of industry influence.



# APPENDIX 1: ALCOHOL USE OF POLL RESPONDENTS

Below are details on the reported alcohol use of respondents in our poll.

**86% of respondents had an alcoholic drink in the last 12 months.**

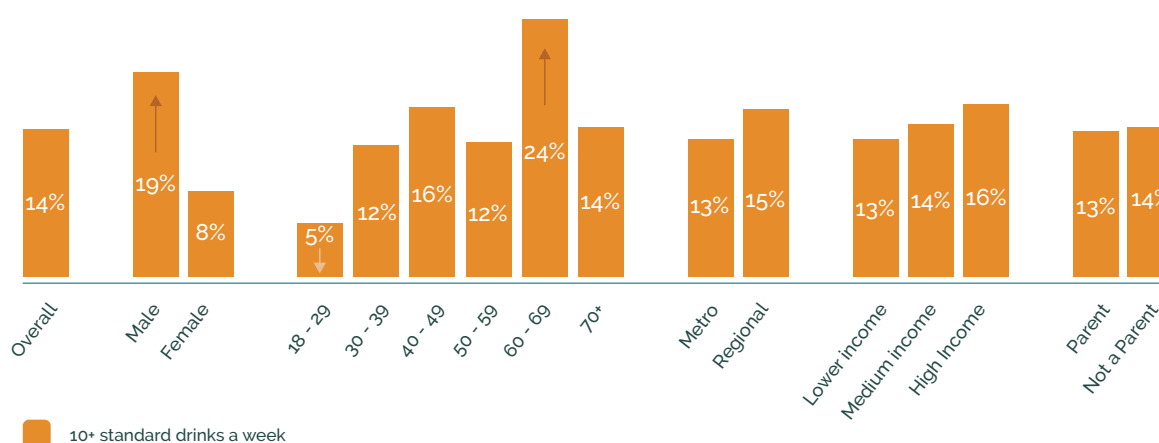
**TABLE 5 – FREQUENCY OF DRINKING IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS**

| Frequency                               | Percentage of respondents |
|---|---------------------------|
| Did not have a drink containing alcohol | 14                        |
| Less than once a month                  | 13                        |
| About 1 day a month                     | 7                         |
| 2 to 3 days a month                     | 18                        |
| 1 to 2 days a week                      | 25                        |
| 3 to 4 days a week                      | 13                        |
| 5 to 6 days a week                      | 7                         |
| Every day                               | 4                         |

**Of those respondents who drink alcohol, 14% reported drinking more than 10 standard drinks a week.**

- Males who use alcohol (19%) were more likely than females who use alcohol (8%) to drink more than 10 standard drinks a week.
- Those aged 18 – 29 years (5%) were less likely than older Australians to drink more than 10 standard drinks a week.

**FIGURE 17 – RESPONDENTS DRINKING MORE THAN 10 STANDARD DRINKS A WEEK BY DEMOGRAPHICS**

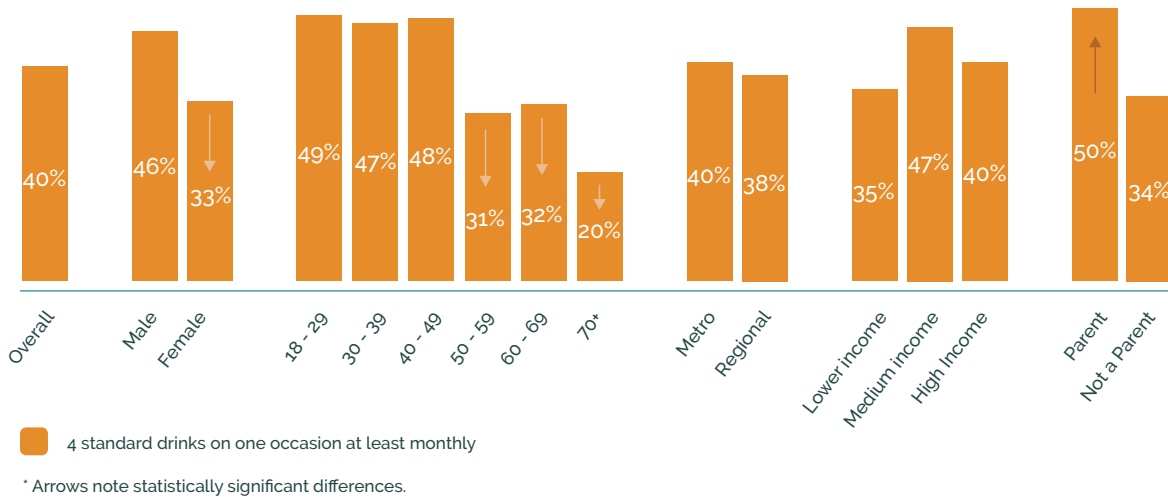


\* Arrows note statistically significant differences.

Two in five respondents who use alcohol (40%) reported drinking more than 4 standard drinks on one occasion at least monthly.

- Men (46%) were more likely than women (33%) to drink more than 4 standard drinks on one occasion at least monthly.
- Those aged 18 – 49 years were more likely than older respondents to drink more than 4 standard drinks on one occasion at least monthly.

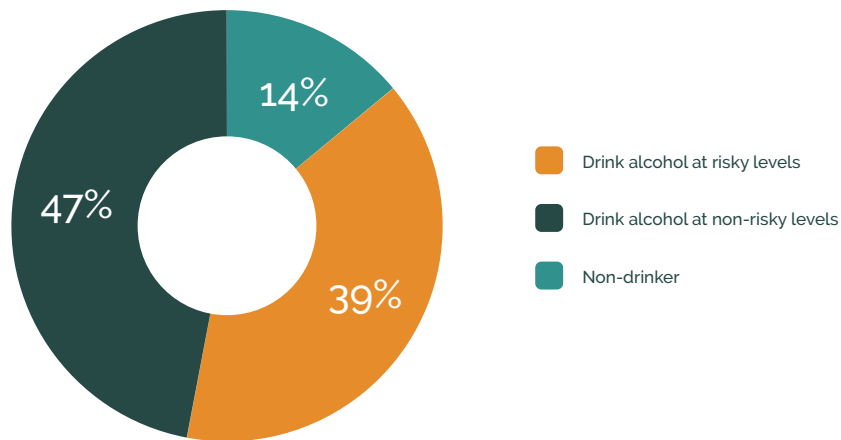
**FIGURE 18 – RESPONDENTS DRINKING MORE THAN 4 STANDARD DRINKS ON ONE OCCASION AT LEAST MONTHLY BY DEMOGRAPHICS**



39% of respondents drink alcohol at risky levels.

- Men, younger Australians aged 18-39 years, and those on higher incomes were more likely to drink at risky levels.

**FIGURE 19 - RESPONDENTS BY DRINKING RISK**



# REFERENCES

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# ALCOHOL CHANGE AUSTRALIA

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