

Alcohol Awareness Study 2009

- Prepared for -

Salvation Army

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1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2009, Roy Morgan Research was commissioned by the Salvation Army to conduct its annual research into alcohol awareness amongst the Australian community.

This research has been conducted yearly by Roy Morgan Research (except in 2007 when alcohol research was not undertaken by the Salvation Army). Each year the focus of the research is on different aspects of Australians' awareness of issues associated with the consumption of alcohol.

In February 2009, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) released new guidelines on the consumption of alcohol, the Australian Guidelines to Reduce the Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol. Guideline 3 focuses on the consumption of alcohol by children and young people aged under 18 years.

The Salvation Army commissioned Roy Morgan Research to conduct research to help understand the public's awareness of these guidelines and, given the guidelines' strong advice that young people aged under 18 years abstain from drinking, the community's practice of and attitude to underage drinking.

2. METHODOLOGY

Between 5th – 6th August 2009, Roy Morgan Research interviewed by telephone a nationally representative sample of 687 Australians aged 14 and over. The survey was a part of Roy Morgan Research's telephone omnibus survey, CATIBus.

The survey asked questions about alcohol, including:

- Respondents' alcohol consumption – the average number of standard drinks each week and the greatest number of standard drinks in one session in the last month (these questions are asked each year);
- The circumstances of their first drink or sip of alcohol (including age, location, person with and who suggested it);
- Respondents' awareness of Australia's new alcohol guidelines released by the NHMRC;
- What respondents thought the guidelines are for children and young people aged under 15 and between 15 and 17;
- Their awareness of the media's attention on excessive drinking; and
- The effectiveness of this attention.

The data were weighted to the Australian population aged 14 and over by age, sex and area.

This report outlines the key findings from these questions. It also considers the trend data collected over previous years regarding Australians' alcohol consumption.

3. OUTLINE OF KEY FINDINGS

3.1 Australians' alcohol consumption

Almost every year since 2002, Roy Morgan Research has asked a nationally representative sample of Australians their alcohol consumption habits, including the average number of standard drinks they drink each week and the greatest number of standard drinks they have drunk in one session in the last month (asked since 2004).

This enables us to consider Australians' drinking behaviour in 2009 and the gradual trends unfolding.

3.1.1 Average number of standard drinks each week

In 2009, 37% of Australians aged 14 and over had between one and five standard drinks on average each week, 24% had six or more standard drinks each week, and some 31% reported not drinking in an average week.

There has been a gradual downward trend in the proportion of Australians who drink six or more standard drinks on average each week (31% in 2002 compared with 24% in 2009). This trend can be seen with males more so than females - in 2002, 43% of male Australians drank on average six or more standard drink per week while in 2009, 32% of male Australians drank six or more standard drinks per week.

The proportion of Australians who do not drink any alcoholic drinks on average each week has remained relatively stable in recent years (30% in 2002 compared with 31% in 2009).

See the tables below for a more detailed break-down by total Australians, males and females.

Q1 On average, how many standard drinks do you drink each week?

Number of standard drinks	Total						
	2002 n=614	2003 n=609	2004 n=1331	2005 n=1296	2006 n=1332	2008 n=653	2009 n=687
Have Never Drunk Alcohol At All	2%	1%	6%	5%	5%	5%	6%
None	30%	30%	29%	32%	30%	37%	31%
1-5	38%	37%	35%	32%	36%	33%	37%
6-10	15%	17%	15%	17%	15%	16%	14%
11-15	9%	7%	7%	6%	6%	4%	6%
16-20	3%	4%	4%	3%	3%	1%	1%
21-25	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%
26-30	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%
More than 30	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
TOTAL 6+ DRINKS	31%	31%	29%	30%	28%	24%	24%
Can't Say	-	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Q1 On average, how many standard drinks do you drink each week?

Number of standard drinks	Male						
	2002 n=299	2003 n=302	2004 n=665	2005 n=644	2006 n=654	2008 n=328	2009 n=349
Have Never Drunk Alcohol At All	-	0%	4%	5%	3%	5%	7%
None	23%	24%	21%	25%	24%	31%	23%
1-5	33%	32%	33%	31%	32%	28%	37%
6-10	18%	20%	17%	20%	19%	20%	18%
11-15	13%	10%	10%	7%	9%	7%	7%
16-20	4%	6%	7%	5%	4%	2%	1%
21-25	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%
26-30	2%	3%	2%	2%	4%	2%	1%
More than 30	4%	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%
TOTAL 6+ DRINKS	43%	43%	40%	38%	41%	34%	32%
Can't Say	1%	-	1%	1%	0%	2%	2%

Q1 On average, how many standard drinks do you drink each week?

Number of standard drinks	Female						
	2002 n=315	2003 n=307	2004 n=666	2005 n=652	2006 n=678	2008 n=325	2009 n=338
Have Never Drunk Alcohol At All	3%	2%	8%	5%	7%	5%	6%
None	36%	36%	36%	39%	36%	43%	39%
1-5	43%	41%	36%	34%	40%	38%	36%
6-10	12%	15%	12%	14%	12%	12%	11%
11-15	4%	4%	4%	5%	2%	1%	4%
16-20	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%
21-25	-	-	1%	1%	0%	-	0%
26-30	-	-	-	1%	0%	-	-
More than 30	-	0%	0%	0%	0%	-	-
TOTAL 6+ DRINKS	17%	20%	19%	23%	16%	14%	17%
Can't Say	-	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%

3.1.2 Greatest number of standard drinks per session in last month

In 2009, about 40% of all Australians aged 14 and over reported that the greatest number of standard drinks that they had consumed in one session in the last month was between one and three drinks (15% reported a maximum of one standard drink, 14% reported a maximum of two standard drinks and 11% reported a maximum of three standard drinks).

There are indications that a downward trend is developing in the number of standard drinks consumed in one session in the last month by men. In 2004, 40% of Australian men consumed six or more standard drinks in one session in the last month while in 2009, this had decreased to 31% of Australian men.

Q2. During the last month, what is the greatest number of standard drinks that you have had in one session?

Number of standard drinks	Total				
	2004 n=1331	2005 n=1296	2006 n=1332	2008 n=653	2009 n=687
1	10%	10%	9%	8%	15%
2	14%	13%	13%	16%	14%
3	11%	11%	9%	10%	11%
4	9%	8%	8%	10%	8%
5	5%	7%	5%	4%	5%
6	7%	6%	6%	5%	5%
7	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%
8	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%
9	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
10	4%	6%	5%	3%	5%
11-12	3%	3%	4%	3%	2%
13-14	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
15-16	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%
17-18	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
19-20	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%
21-25	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
26-30	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%
More than 30	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%
TOTAL 6+ DRINKS	26%	26%	26%	20%	23%
Can't say/ Refused	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%
None	18%	20%	23%	25%	18%
Total Have Never Drunk Alcohol	6%	5%	5%	5%	6%

Q2. During the last month, what is the greatest number of standard drinks that you have had in one session?

Number of standard drinks	Male				
	2004 n=665	2005 n=644	2006 n=654	2008 n=328	2009 n=349
1	7%	7%	8%	4%	13%
2	11%	10%	11%	13%	15%
3	9%	9%	10%	9%	9%
4	10%	9%	8%	9%	8%
5	5%	7%	6%	5%	5%
6	10%	8%	6%	8%	6%
7	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%
8	4%	3%	4%	6%	5%
9	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%
10	5%	7%	7%	4%	5%
11-12	5%	4%	5%	5%	2%
13-14	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%
15-16	4%	3%	3%	2%	4%
17-18	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
19-20	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%
21-25	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%
26-30	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%
More than 30	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%
TOTAL 6+ DRINKS	40%	35%	35%	30%	31%
Can't say/ Refused	1%	1%	2%	3%	2%
None	13%	16%	18%	21%	12%
Total Have Never Drunk Alcohol	4%	5%	3%	5%	7%

Q2. During the last month, what is the greatest number of standard drinks that you have had in one session?

Number of standard drinks	Female				
	2004 n=666	2005 n=652	2006 n=678	2008 n=325	2009 n=338
1	13%	12%	10%	12%	16%
2	17%	17%	16%	19%	14%
3	12%	12%	9%	10%	13%
4	8%	6%	8%	10%	8%
5	6%	6%	5%	3%	6%
6	4%	5%	6%	3%	4%
7	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%
8	2%	3%	3%	2%	2%
9	1%	1%	1%	-	1%
10	2%	4%	3%	2%	4%
11-12	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%
13-14	0%	1%	-	-	-
15-16	1%	2%	1%	-	1%
17-18	-	-	0%	-	-
19-20	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
21-25	0%	1%	0%	-	-
26-30	-	0%	0%	-	-
More than 30	-	0%	0%	1%	-
TOTAL 6+ DRINKS	13%	18%	17%	10%	14%
Can't say/ Refused	1%	1%	2%	2%	-
None	22%	24%	27%	30%	23%
Total Have Never Drunk Alcohol	8%	5%	7%	5%	6%

3.2 Circumstances of first sip or drink of alcohol

To complement this year's research into the awareness of the NHMRC's new alcohol guidelines for people aged under 18, the survey also asked questions relating to Australians' first sip or drink of alcohol.

3.2.1 Age of first sip or drink of alcohol

Two thirds of Australians aged 14 and over had their first sip or drink of alcohol when they were under 18 years (67% or 11,898,000 Australians). A third had their first sip or drink of alcohol when they were aged under 15 years (34% or 5,954,000 Australians; 36% of males or 3,151,000 males and 31% of females or 2,804,000 females).

The mean age for Australians to have their first sip or drink of alcohol is 15.4 years. The average age for females is slightly higher than for males (15.8 years compared with 15.0 years).

Q3. At what age did you have your first sip or drink of alcohol?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338
10 And Under	13%	15%	12%
11-14	20%	21%	20%
15-17	34%	35%	32%
18-19	11%	11%	11%
20-24	9%	5%	12%
25+	2%	2%	3%
Can't Say	2%	1%	2%
Total Never Drunk Alcohol Before	9%	9%	9%
Mean	15.4	15.0	15.8

3.2.2 People present for first sip or drink of alcohol

Approximately half of all Australians aged 14 and over were with their family when they had their first sip or drink of alcohol (50% or 8,811,000 Australians). Many were also with friends or acquaintances when they had their first sip or drink of alcohol (39% or 6,847,000 Australians).

Q4. Who were you with when you had your first sip or drink of alcohol?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338
Family	50%	45%	54%
Friends Or Acquaintances	39%	42%	35%
Strangers	0%	1%	0%
Alone	1%	2%	0%
Can't Say	3%	3%	3%
Total Never Drunk Alcohol Before	9%	9%	9%

3.2.3 Place where first sip or drink of alcohol occurred

Over one third of Australians aged 14 and over had their first sip or drink at home (40% or 7,050,000 Australians). The next most popular locations for Australians' first sip or drink of alcohol was at a friend's house (15% or 2,642,000 Australians) or a restaurant, pub, club or sporting club (14% or 2,447,000).

Q5. Where did you have your first sip or drink of alcohol?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338
Home	40%	39%	40%
A Friend's House	15%	13%	17%
Restaurant, Pub, Club Or Sporting Club	14%	14%	14%
Other	8%	8%	8%
Park Or Other Public Area	7%	9%	5%
A Relative's House	5%	3%	6%
Can't Say	4%	5%	2%
Total Never Drunk Alcohol Before	9%	9%	9%

3.2.4 Person who suggested first sip or drink of alcohol

Nearly half of all Australians aged 14 and over asked for their first sip or drink of alcohol themselves (45% or 7,880,000 Australians). Seventeen percent reported that parents and 15% reported that friends suggested their first sip or drink of alcohol.

Q6. Who suggested you take your first sip or drink of alcohol?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338
Me/ I Asked For It Myself	45%	42%	47%
Parent/s	17%	18%	16%
Friend/s	15%	15%	14%
Can't Say	9%	9%	9%
Family Friend/s	3%	3%	3%
Sibling/s	3%	4%	2%
Acquaintance	1%	1%	1%
Total Never Drunk Alcohol Before	9%	9%	9%

3.2.5 Youngest age for someone to be given occasional sips of alcohol

Over half of all Australians aged 14 and over think that it is safe for people under the age of 18 to be given occasional sips of alcohol (56% or 9,971,000 Australians). Nearly a fifth of all Australians think it is safe for someone under the age of 15 to be given occasional sips of alcohol (18% or 3,161,000 Australians).

This is in contrast to the new guidelines released by the NHMRC. Almost the same proportion of those who say they are aware of the new guidelines (discussed in more detail below) think that it is safe for someone under the age of 15 to be given occasional sips of alcohol (17% of those who are aware compared with 18% of those who are not aware) and a slightly lower proportion think it is safe for someone under the age of 18 to be given

occasional sips of alcohol (52% of those who are aware compared with 58% of those who are not aware).

Q7. What is the youngest age that you think it is safe for someone to be given occasional sips of alcoholic drinks?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338
10 And Under	5%	7%	3%
11-12	5%	5%	5%
13-14	8%	8%	8%
15	11%	10%	11%
16	20%	21%	19%
17	8%	6%	9%
18	24%	22%	27%
19-20	2%	2%	2%
21+	8%	10%	7%
Never	2%	2%	2%
Can't Say	8%	8%	7%
Total Who Think Under 15 is safe	18%	20%	16%
Total Who Think Under 18 is safe	56%	57%	55%
Mean	16.2	16	16.3

Q7. What is the youngest age that you think it is safe for someone to be given occasional sips of alcoholic drinks?

	Total n=687	Aware of Guidelines n=205	Not Aware of Guidelines n=466
Total Who Think Under 15 is safe	18%	17%	18%
Total Who Think Under 18 is safe	56%	52%	58%

3.3 NHMRC Australian guidelines on the consumption of alcohol

Guideline 3 of the guidelines is about alcohol consumption for children and young people under 18 years of age. It specifies that:

- Parents and carers should be advised that children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking and that for this age group, not drinking alcohol is especially important; and
- For young people aged 15 – 17 years, the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.¹

The NHMRC based this guideline on evidence showing that the risks of accidents, injuries, violence and self-harm are high among drinkers aged under 18 years. Risky or antisocial behaviour is more likely amongst drinkers under 15 years of age, with the rates also

¹ National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, page 57

elevated among drinkers aged 15 – 17 years. Evidence also suggests that earlier initiation of drinking is related to more frequent and higher quantity alcohol consumption in adolescence, which relates to the development of alcohol-related harms in adolescence and adulthood.²

3.3.1 Awareness of the guidelines

Less than a third of all Australians aged 14 and over are aware of NHMRC’s new guidelines on the consumption of alcohol (29% or 5,166,000 Australians). Awareness is higher amongst those aged 35 to 49 and 50+ (33% of both these age groups are aware of the guidelines) than those aged under 35 (23% of 14 to 17 year olds, 25% of 18 to 24 year olds and 21% of 25 to 34 year olds are aware of the guidelines).

Q8. Are you aware of Australia’s new guidelines for the consumption of alcohol?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338	14-17 Years n=47	18-24 Years n=73	25-34 Years n=115	35-49 Years n=180	50+ Years n=272
Yes	29%	28%	30%	23%	25%	21%	33%	33%
No	69%	70%	67%	70%	74%	76%	66%	65%
Can't Say	2%	2%	3%	7%	1%	3%	1%	3%

3.3.2 Guidelines for children and young people aged under 15 years

Nearly two thirds of Australians aged 14 and over think that the guidelines include the recommendation that the safest option for people aged under 15 years is not to drink at all (64% or 11,374,000), which is the new guideline.

However, just over one third of Australians think that the guidelines include a recommendation that some level of drinking is allowed – 16% or 2,905,000 Australians think the guidelines recommend that if people aged under 15 consume alcohol, it should be at a low-risk level and in a safe environment, supervised by adults; 10% or 1,835,000 Australians think it recommends that it is safe for people aged under 15 to consume alcohol in their family home only; and 6% or 1,105,000 Australians think it recommends that it is safe for people aged under 15 to consume up to one standard drink per week under adult supervision.

Fewer younger people than older people think that the guidelines recommend that the safest option for people aged under 15 years is not to drink at all (only 27% of young people aged 14 to 17 years and 56% of 18 to 24 year olds think this is the guideline

² National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, page 58

compared with 63% of 25 to 34 year olds, 75% of 35 to 49 year olds and 66% of people aged 50+).

The results are largely similar for people who are aware of the new guidelines and people who are not aware of the guidelines.

Q9/Q11 The new guidelines include recommendations for young people. Which of these recommendations do you think are made for under 15 year olds?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female N=338	14-17 Years n=47	18-24 Years n=73	25-34 Years n=115	35-49 Years n=180	50+ Years n=272
The Safest Option For People Aged Under 15 Years Is Not To Drink At All	64%	60%	68%	27%	56%	63%	75%	66%
If People Aged Under 15 Consume Alcohol, It Should Be At A Low-Risk Level And In A Safe Environment, Supervised By Adults	16%	17%	16%	52%	25%	16%	10%	12%
It Is Safe For People Aged Under 15 To Consume Alcohol In Their Family Home Only	10%	11%	10%	14%	12%	11%	6%	11%
It Is Safe For People Aged Under 15 To Consume Up To One Standard Drink Per Week Under Adult Supervision	6%	9%	4%	7%	7%	7%	6%	6%
Can't Say	3%	4%	2%	-	-	4%	3%	4%

Q9/Q11 The new guidelines include recommendations for young people. Which of these recommendations do you think are made for under 15 year olds?

	Total n=687	Aware of Guidelines n=205	Not Aware of Guidelines n=482
The Safest Option For People Aged Under 15 Years Is Not To Drink At All	64%	65%	64%
If People Aged Under 15 Consume Alcohol, It Should Be At A Low-Risk Level And In A Safe Environment, Supervised By Adults	16%	14%	17%
It Is Safe For People Aged Under 15 To Consume Alcohol In Their Family Home Only	10%	12%	10%
It Is Safe For People Aged Under 15 To Consume Up To One Standard Drink Per Week Under Adult Supervision	6%	5%	7%
Can't Say	3%	4%	2%

3.3.3 Guidelines for young people aged between 15 and 17 years

Australians are less clear about the correct guideline for young people aged between 15 and 17 years than the guideline for children or young people aged under 15 years.

The most common perception as to what the guideline is for 15 to 17 year olds is the correct guideline: that the safest option for 15 to 17 year olds is to delay as long as possible the age of first consuming alcohol (38% or 6,785,000 Australians). However, there is not a clear majority of Australians who think this. Again, this is a less common choice with younger Australians with only 8% of Australians aged 14 to 17 years thinking that this is the guideline (compared with 32% of 18 to 24 year olds, 36% of 25 to 34 year olds, 49% of 35 to 49 year olds and 40% of people aged 50+).

Nearly a third of Australians think that the guidelines recommend that if people aged 15 to 17 consume alcohol, it should be at a low-risk level and in a safe environment (27% or 4,748,000 Australians). This is not the recommendation in the new guidelines, however it is the preferred option of the NHMRC if a young person does consume alcohol.

Nearly half of all Australians aged 14 to 17 years think that the guidelines recommend that 15 to 17 year old should be taught responsible drinking habits and should not consume more than two standard drinks per week (48% or 555,000 Australians aged 14 to 17 years).

Slightly more Australians who are aware of the new guidelines chose the correct guideline than those that are not aware (43% of those who are aware said the safest option for 15 to 17 year olds is to delay as long as possible the age of first consuming alcohol compared with 36% of those who are not aware of the guidelines).

Q10/12. In Australia's new guidelines, which of these recommendations do you think are made for 15 -17 year olds?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338	14-17 Years n=47	18-24 Years n=73	25-34 Years n=115	35-49 Years n=180	50+ Years n=272
The Safest Option For 15 To 17 Year Olds Is To Delay For As Long As Possible The Age Of First Consuming Alcohol	38%	37%	39%	8%	32%	36%	49%	40%
If People Aged 15-17 Consume Alcohol, It Should Be At A Low-Risk Level And In A Safe Environment Supervised By Adults	27%	25%	28%	39%	31%	31%	27%	22%
15 To 17 Year Olds Should Be Taught Responsible Drinking Habits And Should Not Consume More Than Two Standard Drinks Per Week	18%	18%	19%	48%	19%	18%	13%	17%
It Is Safe For 15-17 Year Olds To Consume Alcohol In Their Family Home Only	14%	14%	13%	5%	16%	15%	11%	16%
Can't Say	3%	5%	1%	-	1%	1%	1%	6%

Q10/12. In Australia's new guidelines, which of these recommendations do you think are made for 15 -17 year olds?

	Total n=687	Aware of Guidelines n=205	Not Aware of Guidelines n=482
The Safest Option For 15 To 17 Year Olds Is To Delay For As Long As Possible The Age Of First Consuming Alcohol	38%	43%	36%
If People Aged 15-17 Consume Alcohol, It Should Be At A Low-Risk Level And In A Safe Environment, Supervised By Adults	27%	27%	27%
15 To 17 Year Olds Should Be Taught Responsible Drinking Habits And Should Not Consume More Than Two Standard Drinks Per Week	18%	12%	21%
It Is Safe For 15-17 Year Olds To Consume Alcohol In Their Family Home Only	14%	15%	13%
Can't Say	3%	3%	3%

3.4 Media attention about excessive drinking

In the past 12 months there has been extensive media coverage about excessive drinking, including Government sponsored advertisements.

3.4.1 Awareness of media attention

Nearly all Australians aged 14 and over are aware of the media attention about excessive drinking in the past 12 months (89% or 15,776,000 Australians).

Slightly more young people are not aware of the media attention than older people (17% of 14 to 17 year olds and 22% of 18 to 24 year olds are not aware compared with 8% of 25 to 34 year olds, 6% of 35 to 39 year olds and 10% of people aged 50+).

Q13. Have you been aware of any media attention in the past twelve months about excessive drinking?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338	14-17 Years n=47	18-24 Years n=73	25-34 Years n=115	35-49 Years n=180	50+ Years n=272
Yes	89%	89%	89%	83%	78%	92%	93%	90%
No	11%	11%	11%	17%	22%	8%	6%	10%
Can't Say	0%	1%	-	-	-	-	1%	0%

3.4.2 Effectiveness of media attention

Half of all Australians aged 14 and over do not think that the media attention has been effective at changing people's behaviour (31% or 5,445,000 Australians think that the media attention has been ineffective and 19% or 3,383,000 think it has been totally ineffective).

Just less than 20% of Australians aged 14 and over think that the media attention has been effective at changing people's drinking behaviour, with 18% or 3,108,000 Australians thinking it has been effective and 2% or 336,000 thinking it has been very effective.

Q14. How effective do you think the media's message about excessive drinking is in changing people's drinking behaviour?

	Total n=687	Male n=349	Female n=338	14-17 Years n=47	18-24 Years n=73	25-34 Years n=115	35-49 Years n=180	50+ Years n=272
Very Effective	2%	1%	3%	1%	2%	2%	3%	1%
Effective	18%	15%	20%	21%	23%	23%	20%	11%
TOTAL EFFECTIVE	19%	16%	23%	22%	25%	25%	23%	12%
Neither Effective Nor Ineffective	17%	15%	19%	30%	18%	19%	17%	13%
Ineffective	31%	32%	29%	25%	26%	25%	28%	37%
Totally Ineffective	19%	23%	15%	7%	9%	20%	22%	22%
TOTAL INEFFECTIVE	50%	56%	44%	31%	35%	46%	51%	59%
Can't Say	3%	3%	3%	-	-	2%	3%	5%
Not Aware of Media Attention	11%	11%	11%	17%	22%	8%	6%	10%

4. CONCLUSION

The results from this study suggest that the awareness of the consequences of underage drinking, as set out in the NHMRC guidelines, is low amongst Australians and in particular, young people.

The mean age for Australians to have their first sip or drink of alcohol is 15.4 years, which indicates that common practice is contrary to the NHMRC guidelines.

Furthermore, public opinion on the age that it is safe for people under the age of 18 to be given occasional sips of alcohol also differs from the guidelines – 56% of all Australians aged 14 and over think that it is safe for people under the age of 18 to be given occasional sips of alcohol and 18% think that this is safe for people under the age of 15.

Awareness of the NHMRC guidelines on the consumption of alcohol is low - only 29% of Australians aged 14 and over are aware of the guidelines.

Fewer young people than older people think that the guideline for people under 15 years is that the safest option is to not drink at all (27% of 14 to 17 year olds and 56% of 18 to 24 year olds compared with 63% of 25 to 34 year olds, 75% of 35 to 49 year olds and 66% of people aged 50+).

The most common perception as to what the guideline is for 15 to 17 year olds is the correct guideline: that the safest option for 15 to 17 year olds is to delay as long as possible the age of first consuming alcohol. However, only 38% of Australians aged 14 and over (and only 8% of 14 to 17 year olds) think this guideline is the correct guideline.

Considering these findings, there is opportunity to raise awareness with Australians of the NHMRC guidelines on the consumption of alcohol and the consequences of underage drinking.