# Over the limit: A profile of Australians who drink in excess of the recommended guidelines

## Researchers

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## Summary

The 2009 Australian National Health and Medical Research Council’s Guidelines to Reduce the Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol (Alcohol Guidelines) include two guidelines on alcohol consumption for healthy Australians aged 18 years and over.

Guideline one recommends that: “For healthy men and women, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day reduces the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury”.

Guideline two recommends that: “For healthy men and women, drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion”.

This study analyses the 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) to provide a demographic profile of Australian drinkers who consume in excess of the Alcohol Guidelines including their main drink of preference. In doing so, it helps to highlight the groups that may be most in need of receiving promotion of these guidelines. All analyses are conducted only on those who drink. That is abstainers have been excluded from all the results shown in this report.

## Outcomes

In all age groups and overall, men who drink are more likely to exceed both guideline one (34.4%) and two (59.1%) than women (16.9% and 38.2%). Two thirds (62.3%) of male drinkers exceeded either guideline one or guideline two compared to only 40.3% of female drinkers. In all age groups, male drinkers exceed alcohol guideline two more often than women. Up until the age of 60 years, the majority of male drinkers exceeded guideline two at least monthly. Over one quarter of this group exceeded guideline two, weekly or more. This suggests that it is not only young men but also middle aged men who are drinking at risky levels. By contrast, the majority of women aged 30 years and over did not exceed guideline two.

People aged 20 to 29 years are more likely than any other age group to exceed both guidelines. The prevalence of exceeding both guidelines and the frequency of exceeding guideline two in men of this age is worryingly high: 36.2% exceed guideline two at least weekly and 40.1% exceed guideline one. After peaking at 20 to 29 years, the proportion of people exceeding each guideline tends to decrease with age.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drinkers are more likely to exceed guidelines one (38.5%) and two (67%) than non-Indigenous Australians (25.1% and 48.7% respectively). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who drink alcohol also exceeded guideline two more frequently than non-Indigenous Australians who drink alcohol with as many as 34.4% doing this weekly or more compared to 17.4% of non-Indigenous Australian drinkers. It is important to note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents are more likely to abstain from alcohol and that these responses were not included in this analysis.

The proportion of people exceeding both alcohol guidelines increases as household income increases. This trend was stronger for guideline two than guideline one.

People whose preferred drink is regular beer or home brew are over-represented among those who exceed both alcohol guidelines. This group also exceeded guideline two the most often. Between 40% and 50% of people whose favourite drink was either regular beer or home brew exceeded guideline one and the majority who favoured these drinks exceeded guideline two at least monthly. Exceeding both guidelines was least common among people who preferred bottled and fortified wine and light beer.

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