



**A SNAPSHOT:  
AUSTRALIAN  
DRINKING HABITS  
2007 VS 2017**

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## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

**This research undertaken for DrinkWise shows Australians are consuming alcohol differently than any other time in our history. A generational change is taking place.**

Recent trends suggest that for the most part we're drinking less and when we do drink we do so moderately. Combined with decreasing rates of underage drinking, these trends suggest our relationship with alcohol is fundamentally changing – to one that is more mature and responsible.

Clearly, however, these trends do not hold true for everyone. Misuse of alcohol continues to cause harm at the individual, family and community level – and provides governments, health professionals, industry and the community with a continued challenge to reduce those harms attributed to excessive consumption.

Understanding our unique drinking culture requires a need to better assess the social context in which Australians drink and the role alcohol plays in our lives.

Statistics tell part of the story, yet never the complete one. Such as:

- Why do Australians dismiss their own drinking as OK but suggest our society has a drinking problem?
- Is having a few drinks with friends a great Australian tradition?
- Why are the social risks of excessive consumption considered more important than physical or health risks?
- Is it acceptable for 16–17 year olds to drink at home?

Unpacking these attitudinal dimensions give rise to a better understanding of the role of alcohol in our current lives.

This study completed by independent market research firm GALKAL goes some way to explaining the mind and mood of Australians when it comes to alcohol in 2017 and presents a more informed lens through which to tackle alcohol-related harm.

### ABOUT THIS STUDY

In 2007, DrinkWise Australia commissioned Quantum Market Research to undertake a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative study to understand the Australian drinking context. The study was fundamental in guiding the development of DrinkWise's first social marketing campaign – *Kids Absorb your Drinking*.

Ten years later DrinkWise sought to look at how our drinking culture has changed – to understand what's influencing these changes and what they mean for health prevention efforts aimed at reducing harm from excessive consumption.

This report summarises a substantial qualitative and quantitative research process undertaken by GALKAL Research – an independent Australian market research firm. The research is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods including an online survey of (n=2000) Australians weighted to ensure a representative sample of the Australian population aged 16 years and over (separate document for sample breakdown).

The trends observed through an analysis of the 2007 and 2017 surveys are consistent with those seen in Government statistics, providing confidence these results reflect the broader changing drinking behaviours and attitudes of Australians.

The qualitative dimension sought to understand the perspectives of some key age/life-stage cohorts – and to understand why Australians drink the way they do – the tensions, pressures and influences on current drinking behaviours.

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# A SNAPSHOT

## The drinking landscape in Australia is evolving.

The last decade has seen significant shifts in how Australians consume alcohol. The majority of Australians are changing the frequency and intensity of how they drink.

Just under two thirds of drinkers report having no more than two standard drinks on a day they typically have a drink. There are also less Australians drinking both on a daily and weekly basis compared to 2007.

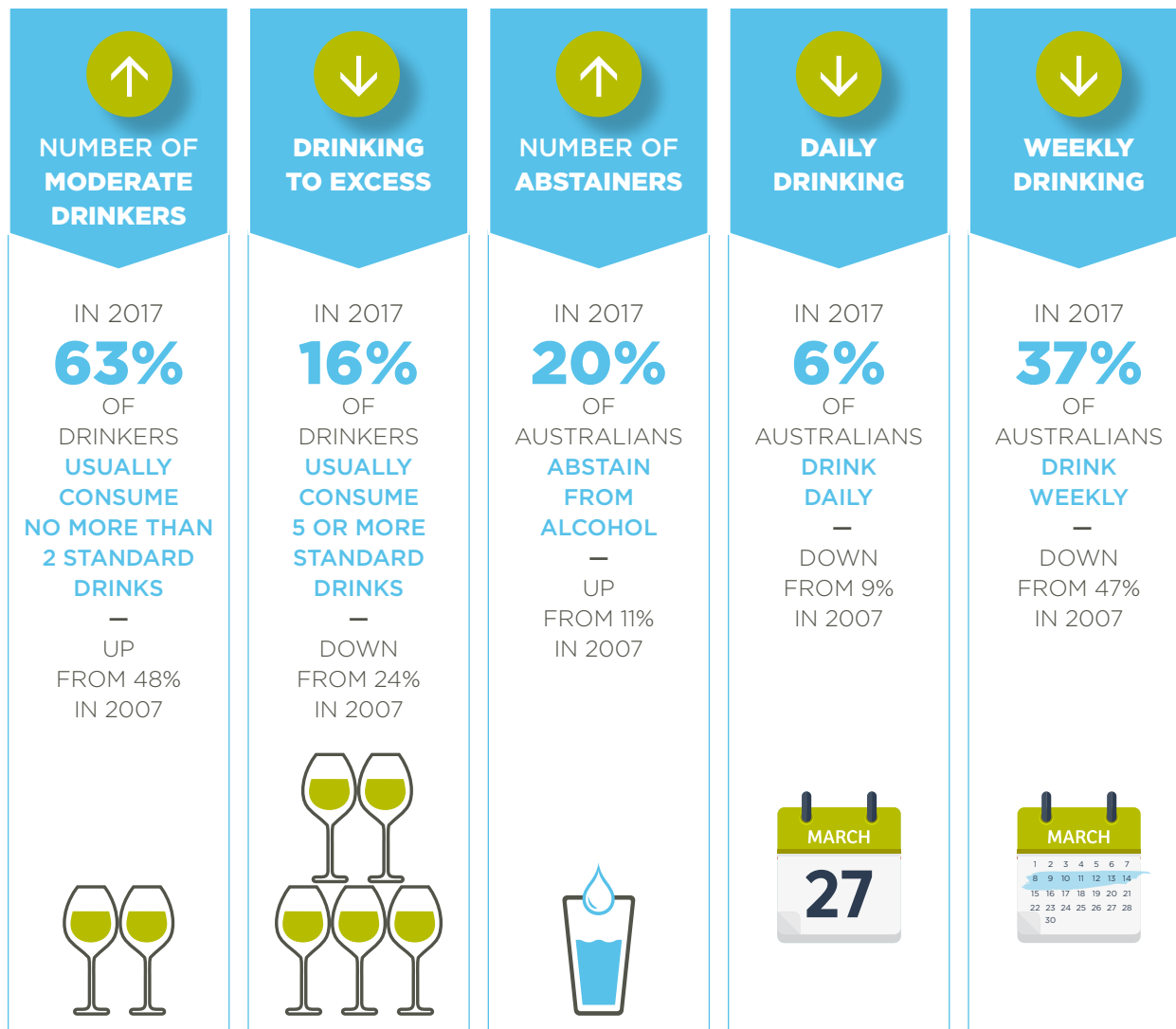
We are now a society more defined by moderation than excess.

For the most part Australians have a positive relationship with alcohol. Having a drink to unwind, enjoy a meal or to socialise with family and friends remains part of how we see ourselves.

Clearly these positive trends do not hold true for all and the potential for harm when consuming alcohol excessively remains a concern for individuals, families and communities.

Better understanding the role alcohol plays in the context of what's going on in our lives provides unique opportunities to communicate messages of moderation, education, advice and support.

This commissioned research provides some additional clues to understanding why these changes are taking place and how DrinkWise can continue to have a meaningful conversation about alcohol, moderation and responsibility.



# HOW WE DRINK IS CHANGING

**Australians are changing both the frequency of consumption and the amount we're consuming when we do have a drink.**

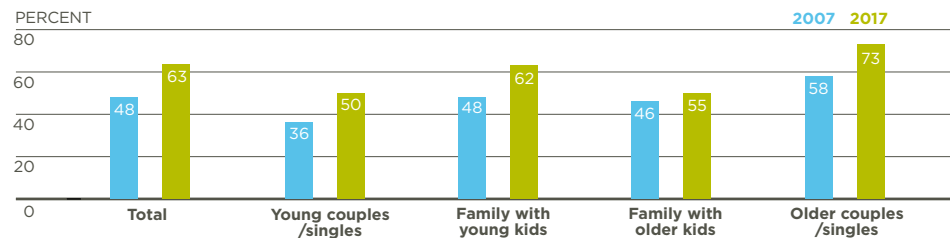
Since 2007, it's evident that most Australians are drinking less frequently on a daily and weekly basis and more people are deciding not to drink at all.

For those drinking less - personal health/lifestyle factors and a focus on moderation are influencing this decision. For those drinking more, almost a fifth attribute added life stressors for increased consumption.

## WE'RE DRINKING LESS...

### NO MORE THAN TWO STANDARD DRINKS

Over six in 10 consumers report that on a day they have an alcoholic drink, they usually have no more than two standard drinks.



### OR NOT DRINKING AT ALL...

IN 2017  
**20%**  
OF AUSTRALIANS  
ABSTAIN FROM  
ALCOHOL UP FROM  
11% IN 2007

IN 2017  
**59%**  
OF 16-17 YEAR OLDS  
REPORTED NEVER  
HAVING CONSUMED  
ALCOHOL

## SEGMENTS OF INTEREST TO DRINKWISE

### What this means for DrinkWise:

These findings reinforce DrinkWise's belief that our targeted social marketing campaigns and education activities are resonating with the broader community and particularly with those audiences at risk from excessive consumption.

From young adults to parents, DrinkWise's broader messages of moderation are playing an important role in changing the Australian drinking culture.

### Adolescents

#### 16-17 YEAR OLDS

... are in a period of self-discovery. For the minority who are drinking, alcohol is one of the ways available to explore their identity and amplify the experience of social occasions.



### Young Adults

#### 18-24 YEAR OLDS

... are drinking less overall, employing a tactical approach to alcohol.

They use alcohol in a similar way to other recreational drugs - as a tool in their arsenal of ways to blow off steam and relax during social occasions.

### Younger families

#### OF CHILDREN AGED 13 OR UNDER

... are drinking smaller amounts, and almost always in their own or a friend's home. Alcohol allows them to relax, unwind and cope with the high pressure, hectic lifestyle that comes with young children.

### Older families

#### OF CHILDREN AGED 14 OR OLDER

... are rediscovering their identity and freedom as the responsibilities of parenthood begin to taper.

For those who are drinking at risky levels, they are returning to pre-parenthood drinking habits, although today this is primarily in the home.

### Middle aged adults

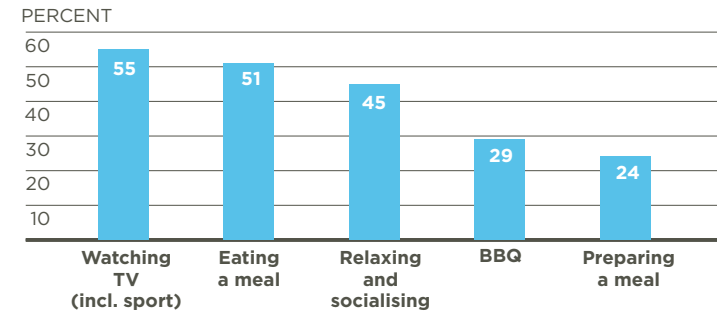
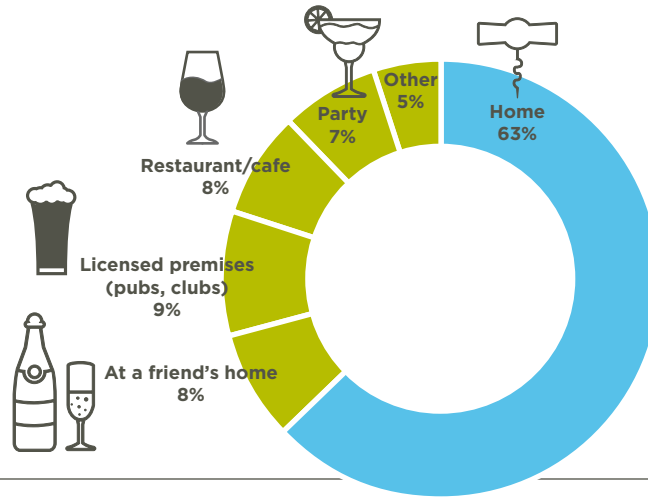
#### 40-60 YEAR OLD MALES

...drinking is a well-established and engrained part of their day-to-day lives (akin to a best mate). For most, heavy drinking is not the norm and when it does occur most consider the immediate impact on family and work commitments. For the most part the long term health risks of excessive consumption are dismissed.

# HOW WE DRINK IS CHANGING

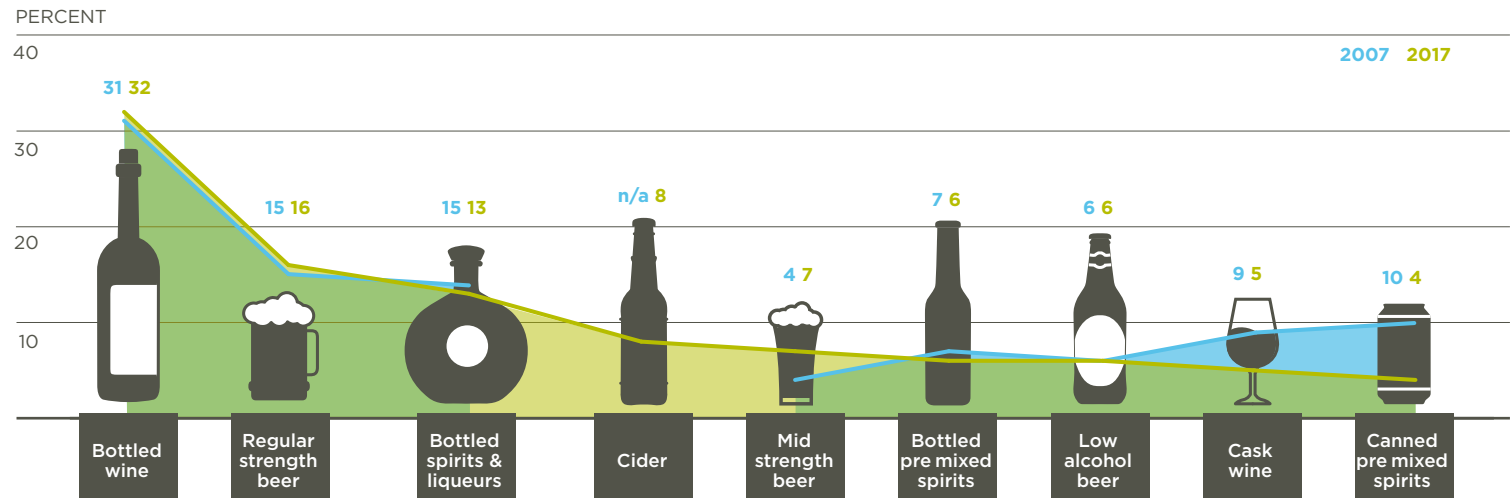
## WHERE WE DRINK

The home is clearly the environment in which the vast majority of Australians drink most often - and when we're drinking at home we're typically enjoying a meal or BBQ, watching TV or relaxing.



## WHAT WE DRINK

It's clear that our tastes are changing. We're drinking more mid-strength beer, trying new products such as cider and decreasing our consumption of canned pre-mixed spirits. Premiumisation and greater consumer choice is also driving change towards new products and lower alcohol alternatives.



# ALCOHOL AND OUR LIFE

Australians have a lot of issues to contend with. Housing affordability, unemployment, domestic violence, public healthcare and violent crime are all key concerns in 2017.

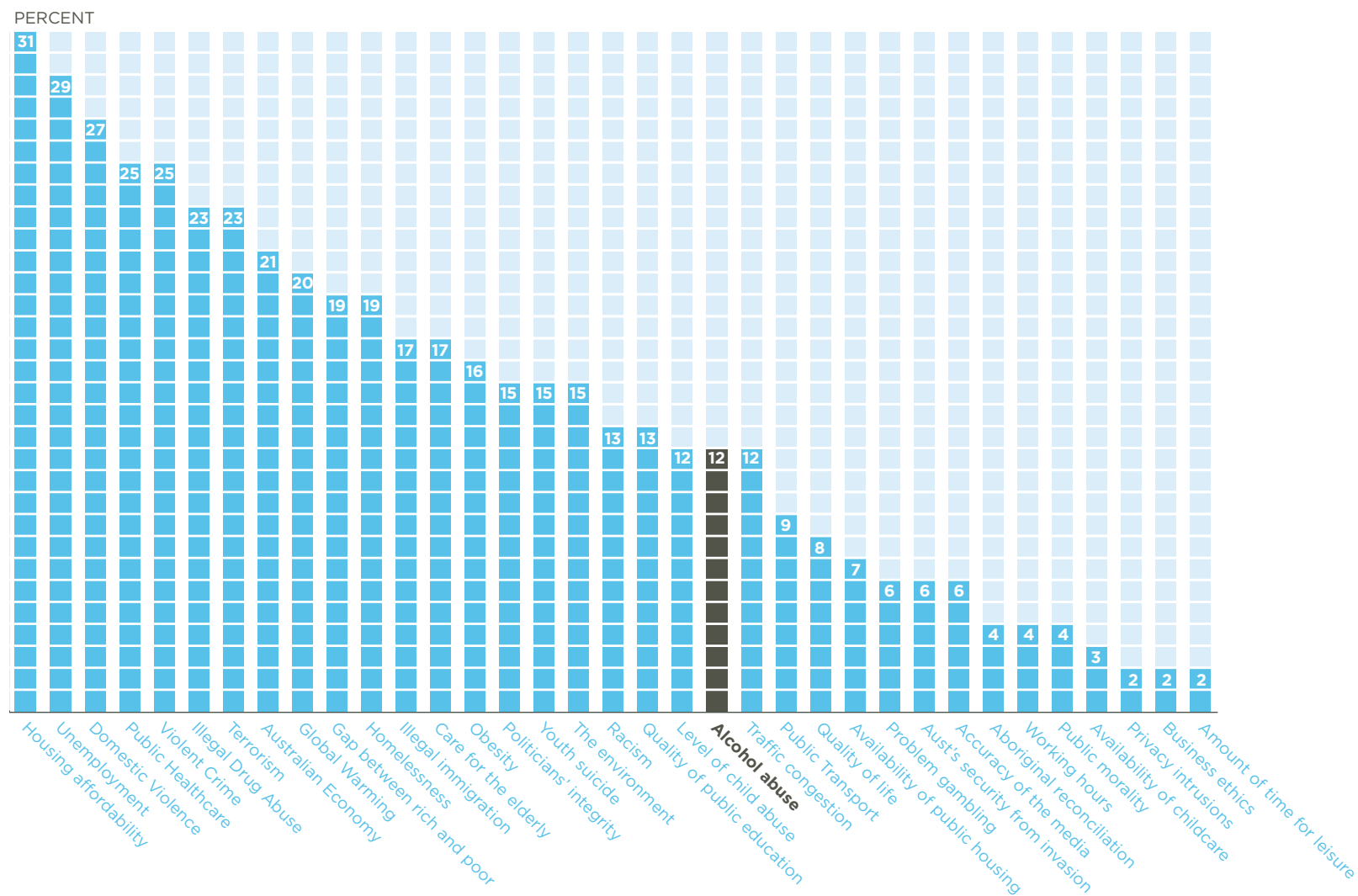
When considering health issues, more Australians perceive illegal drug use, obesity and youth suicide to be of concern.

Given that the majority of Australians drink alcohol in moderation, it is not surprising that the abuse of alcohol in society sits well down the list.

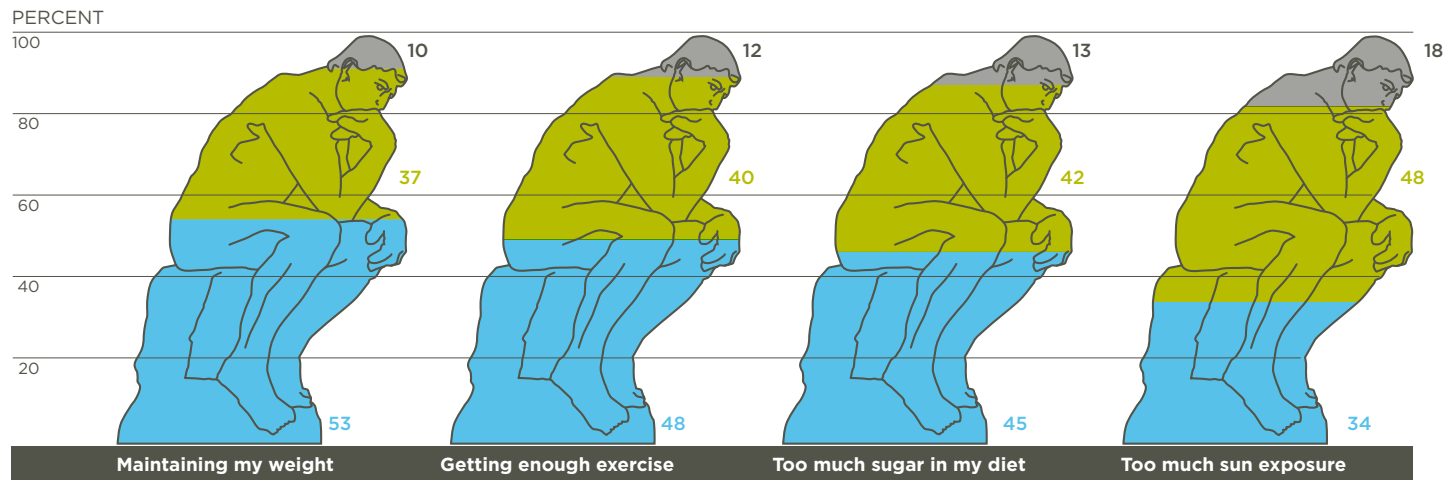
## What this means for DrinkWise:

Alcohol abuse is not a significant personal concern for most Australians. For the most part having a drink remains an enjoyable part of a sociable lifestyle - that complements a meal and allows people to socialise and relax. Some Australians, however, are clearly bothered by their consumption of alcohol - and for DrinkWise, understanding these audiences remains the key to targeted approaches that reduce the potential for harm and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

## ISSUES THAT CONCERN US



# MY HEALTH – WHAT BOTHERS ME?



**When pressed about personal health concerns that bother them, Australians are concerned about weight control, getting enough exercise and too much sugar in their diet.**

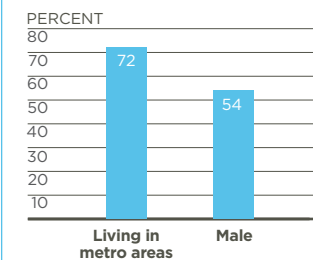
The issue of drinking too much alcohol doesn't 'bother' over three quarters of Australians - most are either 'taking care of how they drink' or don't feel they need to do anything about their drinking.

Those who are bothered about drinking too much alcohol tend to be living in metro areas and are more likely to be male.

Really does not bother me  
Does not really bother me... I'm taking care of it  
Bothers me



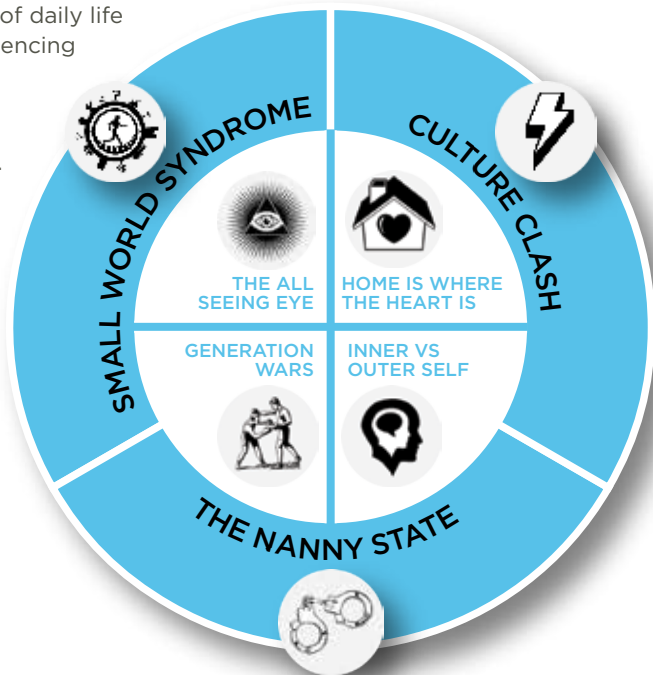
**FOR THOSE WHO ARE BOTHERED BY DRINKING TOO MUCH:**



# THE BIG PICTURE

When talking with Australians across various ages and life stages, seven cultural narratives are at play in their lives.

These narratives act to shape and influence our day-to-day living as well as influencing our world view - adding to the stresses of daily life and influencing the role alcohol plays in our lives.



## SMALL WORLD SYNDROME

### Small world syndrome:

Whilst the phrase 'the world is your oyster' rings true for many Australians - the impact of globalisation, the internet and a 24/7 news cycle means the world's problems are our problems.

**"I don't engage with the news anymore. All I see are the world's problems, all the time and it's too much."**

18-24 male, Wagga



## CULTURE CLASH

### Culture clash:

The traditional Aussie way of life is seen to be under threat. Immigration is a hot button topic for many, who believe current immigration is impacting on house prices in the big cities and diminishing job opportunities for young adults.



## THE NANNY STATE

### The nanny state:

Australians rail against being told what to do - especially by government. Our tenuous relationship with rules provides a cultural tension between our protectionist sensibilities and our inclinations for freedom. Sydney's lock out laws represent a microcosm of this phenomenon.

**"You need a bloody permit to do just about anything these days."**

40-60 male, Wagga



# THE LITTLE PICTURE



THE ALL SEEING EYE

## The all seeing eye:

Social media has changed the game.

For millennials the rise of social media platforms has led to a world of constant connectivity, scrutiny and a need to maintain and curate our personal brand.

For parents this change provides constant stress and worry about the physical, emotional and psychological impact on their child's development.

**“I think they’ve got more freedom than we had, but at the same time less independence.”**

Older family, Sydney



HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

## Home is where the heart is:

**is:** Burgeoning property prices have pushed homeownership beyond the reach of many – particularly in our larger cities – creating stress and worry for those pressured to join the market.

Many of those with mortgages are often one missed payment away from default.

**“I worry my kids will be renting when they’re older.”**

Young family, Sydney



GENERATION WARS

**Generation wars:** As millennials enter the workforce, a key tension has come to the fore. Whilst baby boomers point to a culture of entitlement and consumption, millennials are of the belief that they may be the first generation to be worse off than their parents.

The blame game begins.



INNER VS OUTER SELF

**Inner vs. outer self:** Whilst we've never been more educated on the benefit of a healthy diet, the role of exercise and the importance of good mental health – we're still obsessed with how we look.

Whilst younger audiences are increasingly conscious of mental health issues, it is how we are seen (and judged) socially that impacts how we behave – particularly when it comes to alcohol.

**“So many of my friends just drink to be cool and fit in, but they really just embarrass themselves as trying too hard or ending up with vomit in their hair.”**

18-24 female, Brisbane

## What this means for DrinkWise:

Understanding audiences at risk is key to developing innovative approaches to reducing harm.

Whilst knowledge of the demographic and psychographic profiles of these Australians is critical, understanding the social context in which these groups are living their lives provides an essential dimension to understanding the role of alcohol in the lives of Australians.

This approach sets DrinkWise apart, allowing better engagement with Australians.

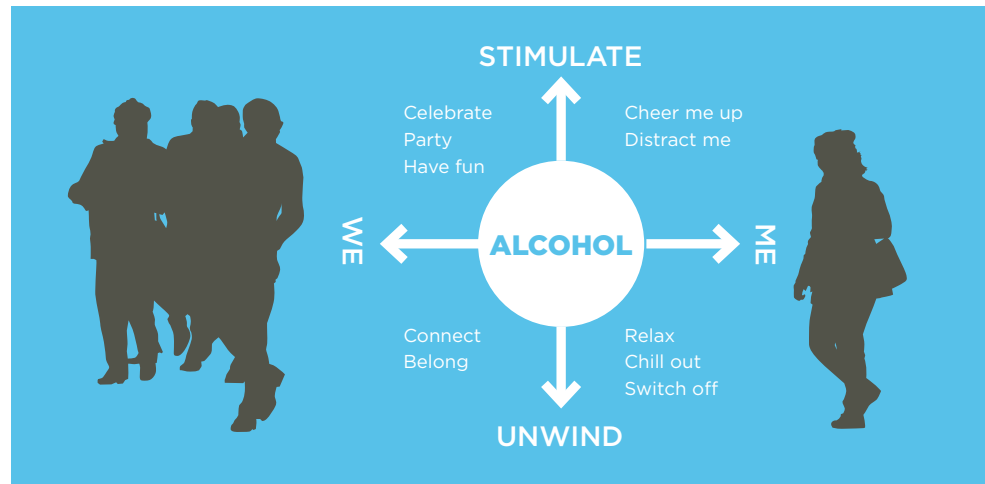
# WHY WE DRINK

When it comes to understanding why Australians drink the way they do, four broad dimensions are evident that influence and motivate our drinking behaviour.

At its heart, alcohol can both stimulate and help people unwind – and for many the decision to drink is tactical – with consuming alcohol playing a role in achieving both conscious and unconscious goals.

## What this means for DrinkWise:

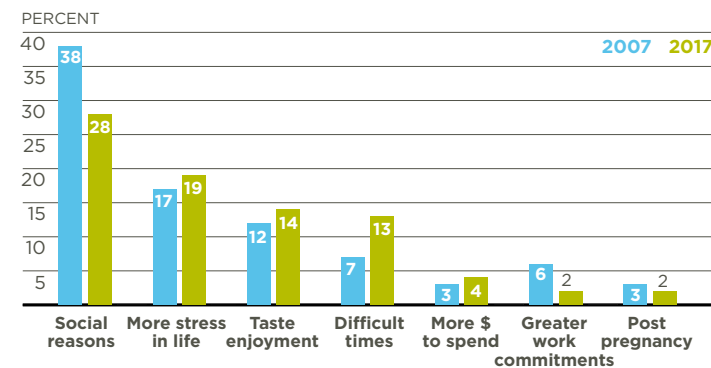
Understanding the demands and pressures impacting Australians at different life stages dovetails with the role that alcohol plays in our day-to-day lives. Whether used to stimulate or unwind, alcohol continues to be consumed to help Australians to celebrate, connect and relax. Understanding those Australians who may be drinking in unsafe ways is critical in ensuring that targeted messages are delivered in the right tone, in the right place and at the right time.



Whilst nearly half of all drinkers indicate that they could 'live without alcohol' it is clear that drinking plays a pivotal role in socialising, enjoying food and relaxing. With many respondents indicating that they've recently increased how much they drink due to increased social occasions and socialising with friends, the key remains encouraging moderation and the role of personal responsibility.

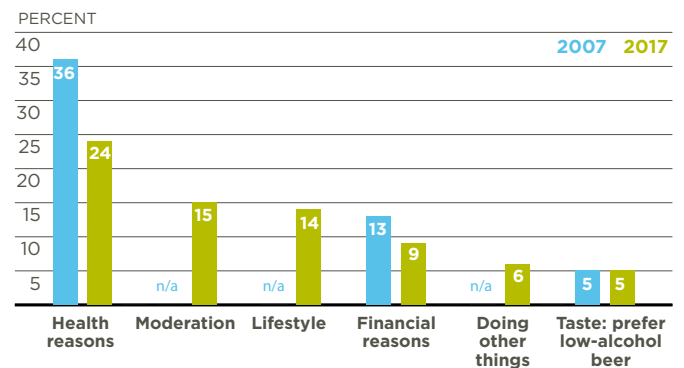
## WHY WE DRINK MORE

Almost a fifth of those drinking more attribute added life stressors for increased consumption.



## WHY WE DRINK LESS

Personal health/lifestyle factors and a focus on moderation are influencing people's decision to drink less (24% of people drink less for health reasons compared with 36% in 2007). An additional 15% want to drink more responsibly/moderately.



# HOW WE DRINK



## 16-17 YEAR OLDS

Busy with studies and the stress of emerging social events – life is becoming more of a balancing act. With underage drinking rates declining in Australia, most in this age group are not drinking. Those who have tried alcohol and are drinking, reflect that it occurs under less secrecy (from their parents) and in some situations having a drink is OK'd by parents.

Drinking is often undertaken in a very 'tactical way' – and is most often consumed in a social and uplifting way – rather than to unwind or deal with stress.

*I only drink when I am at parties.*



## 18-24 YEAR OLDS

The focus to succeed is balanced against an increasingly difficult future. Living for the moment is key. Social media means entire lives are on display – and a lot of time is invested in ensuring that success is projected. Social rituals are key in peer groups and pre-loading meets both social and financial goals.

*My drinking is about amplifying my social occasions – to alter my mental state. In this regard it's like a recreational 'party drug' used to achieve a certain feeling.*



## YOUNGER PARENTS

Life is busy – and mostly revolves around raising healthy and balanced kids. Work-life balance is a key challenge and the weight of family and financial responsibility on their shoulders is immense. Health is often deprioritised – and exercise and healthy eating sometimes takes a back seat.

*Having a drink is all about relaxing with my partner at the end of the day – often with food. We're interested in new wine and beer options. It's not drinking for drinking's sake – but it helps with the pressure.*



## OLDER PARENTS

As kids become older, there is more time and energy spent on personal pursuits. However, increasingly the kids are more dependent than previous generations. The lines then begin to blur between parent and peer – and this is pronounced as university-aged kids remain in the family home. Sometimes drinking levels increase (when compared to times when the kids were younger) but the feeling of control and self-regulation remains.

*I'm not as conscious about how I drink in front of the kids – they're old enough to make up their own mind.*



## MIDDLE AGED MEN

There is a greater focus on self, with reflection on the past 20 years and the decisions made during that time. Pressure is still on – there is a need to continue working and feed the family – not to mention the growing worry of job security. Away from that, there is a little more time for personal enjoyment. Drinking is enjoyable – a real friend – and something that can become a ritual.

*I may be drinking too much but can pull stumps early if I've got a big work day on the next day.*

# ATTITUDES TO ALCOHOL AND SOCIETY

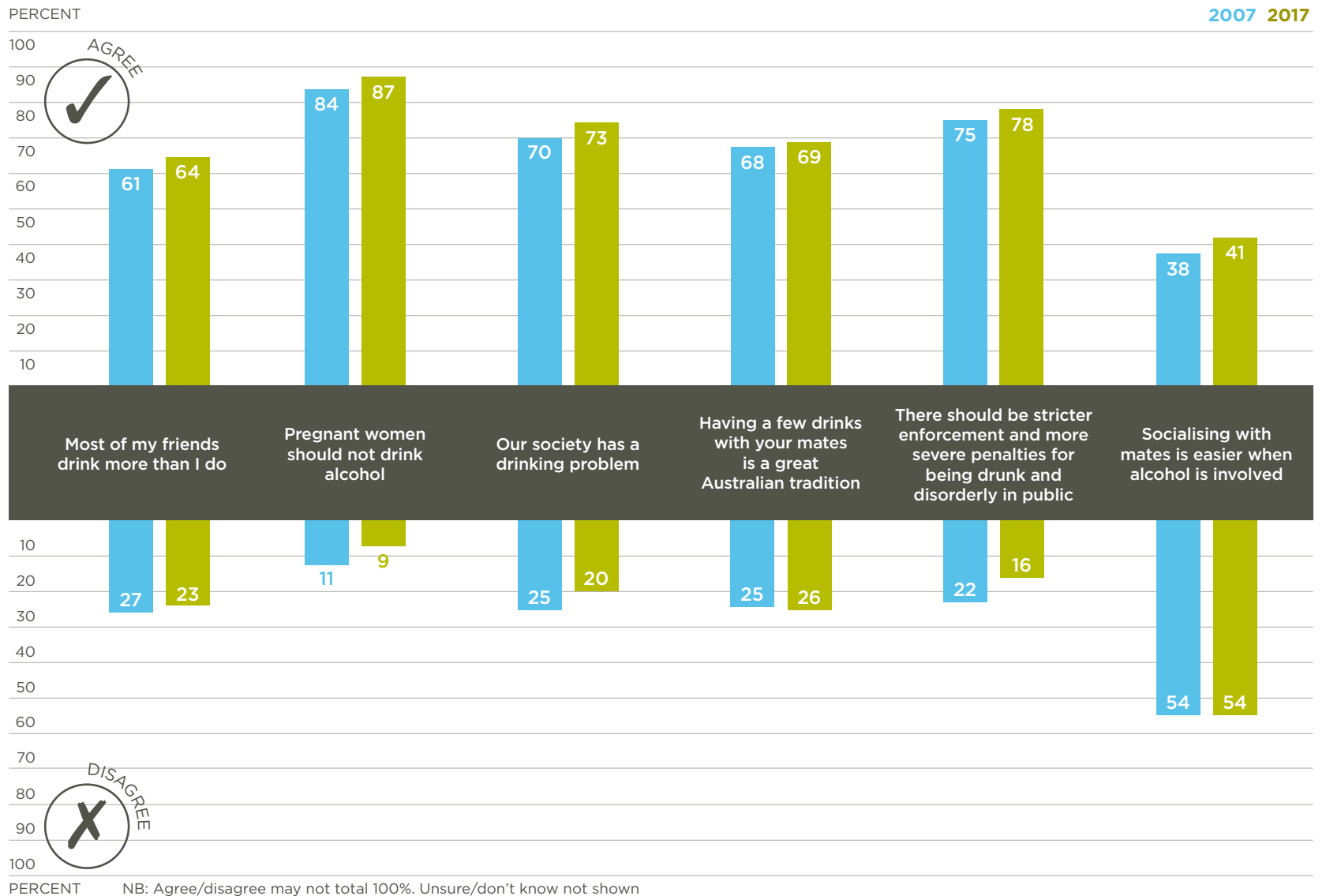
**When it comes to alcohol and society, Australians have mixed and often contradictory views on the role of alcohol in our lives.**

On one hand more than seven in 10 think society has a drinking problem yet six in 10 are more likely to believe their friends drink more than they do. Over two thirds see having a few drinks with your mates as a great Australian tradition and believe the country is facing bigger problems than people having a few drinks.

These contradictions go to the heart of how we see alcohol: it's part of our daily lives with many drinking in moderation and using alcohol to relax after a hard day, while thinking it's the drinking of others that holds concern.

Those aged 18-24 are more likely to reinforce alcohol's positive role when socialising. Importantly, the health message that women who are pregnant should not drink alcohol is resonating with most.

Being drunk and disorderly in public is clearly considered inappropriate behaviour, with almost eight in 10 calling for stricter penalties for those who cross this line.

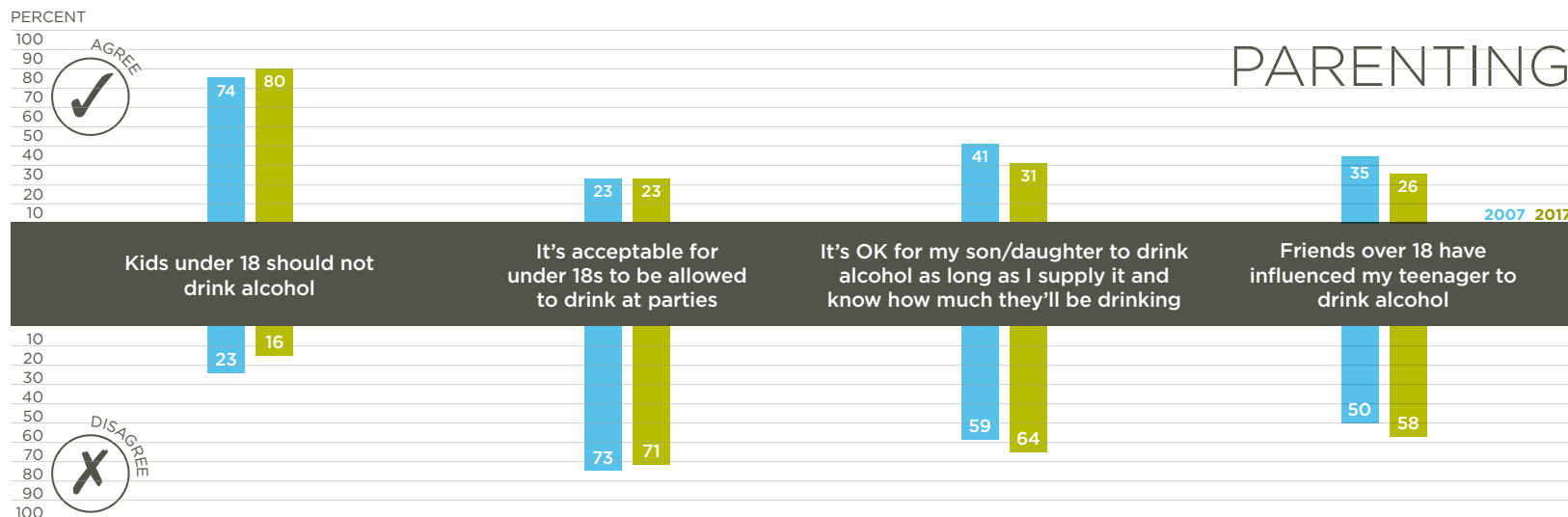


# ATTITUDES TO MY DRINKING/PARENTING



There are encouraging changes in sentiment towards drinking excessively and keeping up with others as a reason for intoxication. This suggests a maturing relationship with alcohol and a reduced culture of drinking to get drunk.

Consistent with society's unwillingness to accept underage drinking, parents are increasingly less accepting of teenage drinking even when under adult supervision.



### What this means for DrinkWise:

Understanding the changing sentiment of the role and place of alcohol in our lives means that DrinkWise can get to the heart of why we are drinking more responsibly and moderately. This is critical as we seek to develop new and innovative approaches that target those audiences who over consume and are at greater risk of harm.

PERCENT NB: Agree/disagree may not total 100%. Unsure/don't know not shown

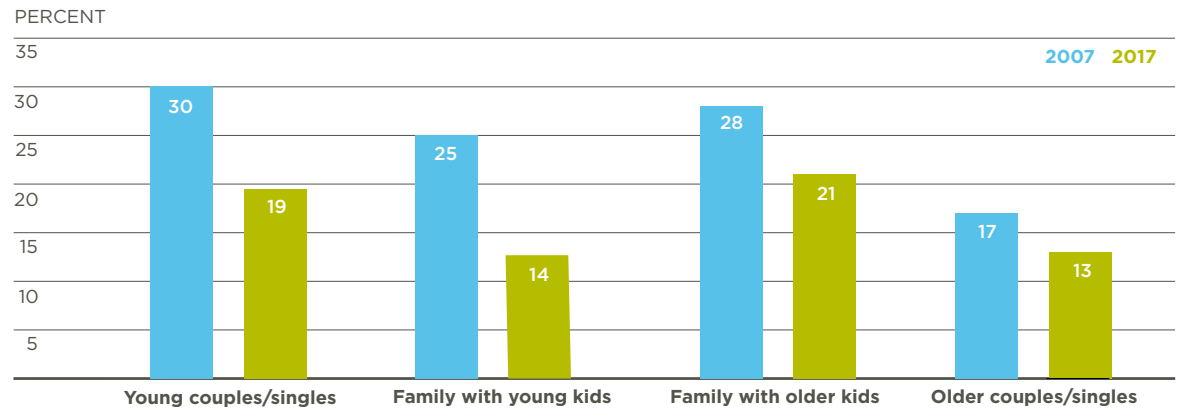
# DRINKING TO EXCESS

The majority of drinkers acknowledge that there are risks to drinking and whilst this includes physical health and long term damage, it's often the immediate short term physical implications of a hangover and functioning effectively the next day that are top of mind.

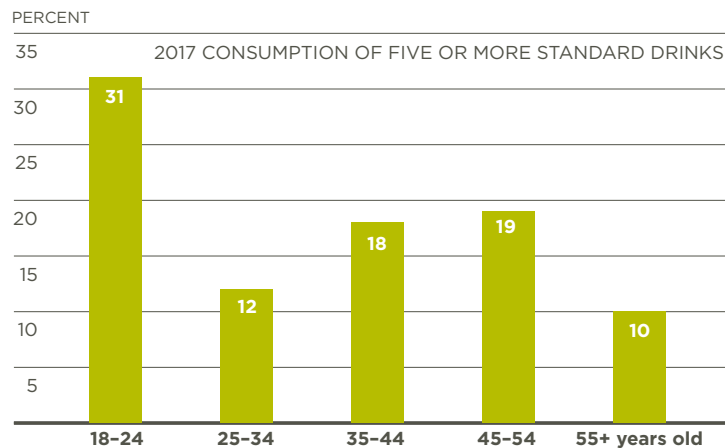
Over the last decade, there have been decreases across all lifestages of those who report drinking five or more standard drinks on a day that they have an alcoholic drink.

However in 2017 there continues to be a substantial proportion of drinkers in each age group who report drinking at these levels.

## DECREASES IN THOSE REPORTING THEY USUALLY DRINK FIVE OR MORE STANDARD DRINKS

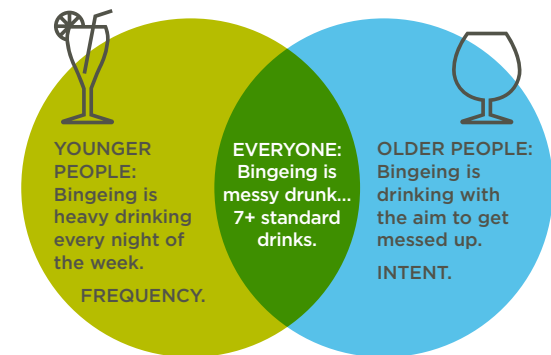


## COHORTS OF CONCERN



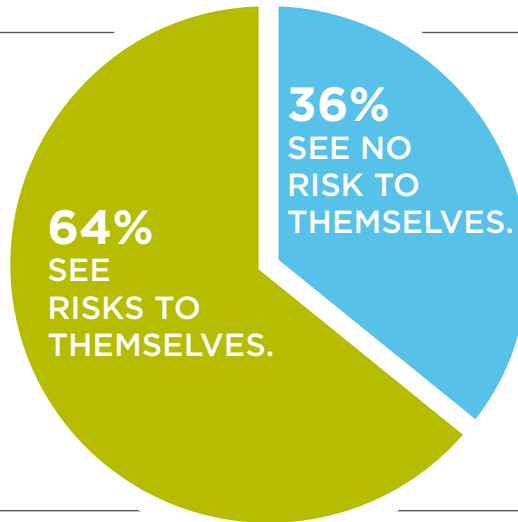
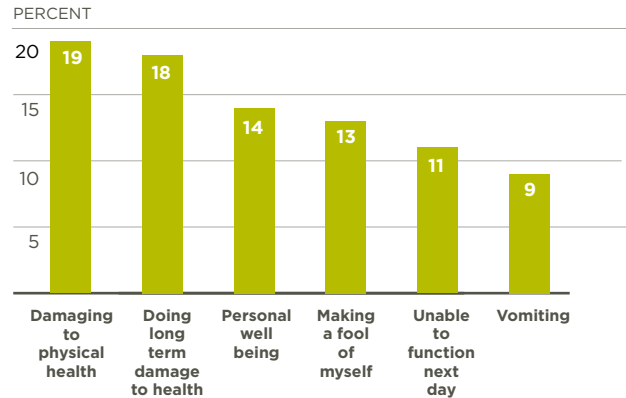
## BINGEING

Whilst most Australians see consuming more than seven drinks in a session as excessive or binge drinking, different age groups comprehend 'bingeing' differently.

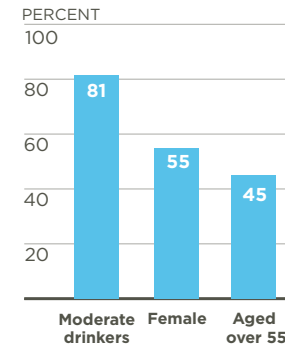


# PERCEPTIONS OF RISK

TOP SIX RISKS IDENTIFIED BY DRINKERS:



THOSE WHO SEE NO RISK TO THEMSELVES ARE:



## What this means for DrinkWise:

Understanding who is at risk ensures that DrinkWise's campaigns are more likely to hit the mark when it comes to effective social marketing and education approaches.

Since 2007 DrinkWise has been at the forefront of campaigns that effectively speak to Australians in a way that evokes a considered and meaningful response.

Our *Kids Absorb Your Drinking* and *Kids and Alcohol Don't Mix* campaigns have set in motion a changed relationship between parents, their teenagers and alcohol. The DrinkWise *How to Drink Properly* campaign has effectively started a conversation amongst young adults about what moderation looks like and the *You won't miss a moment if you DrinkWise* initiative effectively encourages the majority of Australians to continue to drink moderately and responsibly.



## FOR SOME, DRINKING CAN LEAD TO POOR DECISION MAKING

The risks of poor drinking behaviour is often different for men and women.

While women worry about causing social and emotional harm by saying things that may hurt others, they are more keenly aware of the risk of physical harm to themselves caused by others when drinking.

"I look back now to when I was 16 and drinking with older guys - that was just so dangerous."

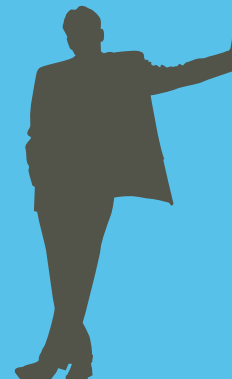
Female, Young family Melbourne



Whether physically, socially or emotionally, men are aware that alcohol can impede their rational brain and are wary of inflicting harm onto themselves or those around them by making poor decisions while drunk... aggression for some (esp. younger) can be a key concern.

"I know my warning signs - and usually it's when I'm getting up in someone's face."

Male, 18 Wagga Wagga



## IT'S NOT ME ... IT'S MY FRIENDS

When it comes to drinking and risk, Australians tend to distance themselves from their own poor drinking behaviour with more than six in 10 more likely to believe that their friends drink more than they do.

## ABOUT DRINKWISE

Established in 2005, DrinkWise is a not-for-profit social change organisation created to harness the power of evidenced-based social marketing to bring about a healthier and safer drinking culture in Australia.

DrinkWise recognises that a whole-of-community approach involving industry, government, health and education professionals and the broader community will be most effective at achieving cultural change and reduce the significant individual and community harms associated with alcohol misuse.

DrinkWise is governed by a Board of seven community representatives (including its Chair) with backgrounds including public health, education, law enforcement, medicine and research, and six alcohol industry representatives drawn from across the various producer groups, retail and licensed venues.

DrinkWise is focused on promoting evidenced based information and practical solutions that encourage moderation and responsible consumption. It does this through targeted campaigns, education initiatives and resources that inform and support the community.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Call 03 9682 8641

Email [info@drinkwise.org.au](mailto:info@drinkwise.org.au)

Web [drinkwise.org.au](http://drinkwise.org.au)