

YOUNG AUSTRALIANS ALCOHOL REPORTING SYSTEM (YAARS)

(BULLETIN 3: POLICY)



DESIGNED TO PROTECT: IMPACT OF ALCOHOL POLICY MEASURES ON YOUNG RISKY DRINKERS

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Alcohol is one of the leading causes of death and hospitalisations amongst young people in Australia (1, 2). There are two diverging trends in use: firstly, there are more young people choosing to abstain from alcohol (3, 4), but those who are drinking, appear to be doing so at riskier levels (5). This bulletin presents data from a sample of the heaviest drinking 20-25% of 16-19 year olds in three Australian cities and one regional centre.

These heavy drinkers tend to disproportionately experience more alcohol related harms while being underrepresented in many health surveys that examine the Australian population as a whole (4, 6).

There is widespread agreement among researchers that managing the physical and economic availability of alcohol is paramount in efforts to minimise alcohol related harm (7-11).

Alcohol policies are regulations and practices designed to reduce alcohol related harms within society (12). For example, Australian licensees and their staff are obliged to not sell alcohol to anyone under the age of 18, and to not serve an intoxicated individual (13).

This bulletin describes some of the impacts of existing alcohol availability policies on young Australian risky drinkers, and gauges their support for proposed measures.

Proposed policies assessed included economic-measures, the drinking age, venue closing times and advertising restrictions (6).

How were the data collected?

This study, the Young Australians Alcohol Reporting System (YAARS) surveyed young risky drinkers in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and the regional city of Bunbury in Western Australia.

Face-to-face interviews (n=351) and online surveys (n=607) were conducted with 958 young people aged 16-19. The participants' consumption patterns were in the heaviest 20-25% of their age-bracket (they drank 7 or more standard drinks twice a month; or 11 or more standard drinks twice a month if the participant was male and aged 18-19).

Participants were recruited through social media advertising, peer-referral, and posters at educational facilities and services frequented by young people. This study is not representative of all 16-19 year old risky drinkers. However, this sample reported similar rates of high risk drinking (11+ standard drinks at least twice monthly) to age-matched risky drinkers recruited using representative sampling techniques (6, 14).

As this was a risky drinking sample, they might be more determined in attempts to access alcohol. That is to say, this sample by definition, is not representative of others in their age bracket, nor in their attempts to gain access to alcohol.

This bulletin describes some of the impacts of existing alcohol availability policies on young Australian risky drinkers, and gauges their support for proposed measures.

958 young people aged 16-19 were surveyed. Their consumption placed them in the heaviest drinking 20-25% of their age bracket.

These heavy drinkers tend to disproportionately experience more alcohol related harms while being under-represented in many health surveys that examine the Australian population as a whole.

RESULT 1. Point of sale alcohol restrictions are commonly circumvented by young drinkers

Young people were asked to rate how easy it was to access alcohol through a bottle store, to enter a licensed venue as someone under the age of 18, and to enter a venue while intoxicated. The items asked how easy these tasks were for people in general, and in terms of their own experiences (see Figure 1).

Half of the participants aged under 18 said it was 'easy' or 'very easy' in general, for under 18s to purchase alcohol from the bottle store (51%). Of the under 18s who had previously tried to purchase from a bottle store, 75% said their most recent attempt was easy (49% of total underage sample when including the 161 that had never tried).

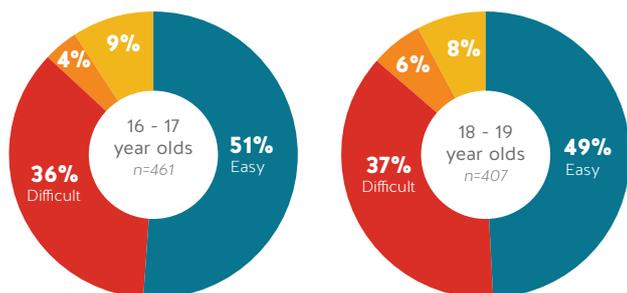
Of the under 18s who had previously tried to enter a licensed venue, 72% said it was easy the last time they attempted access. The last time they attempted to enter a venue while intoxicated, 59% of the under 18s, and 81% of the over 18s reported it was easy to get into the venue (excluding participants who had never tried).

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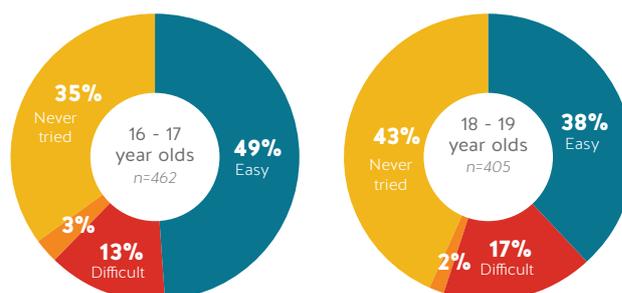
Figure 1. Ease of access to purchase alcohol

Easy Difficult Don't know Never tried

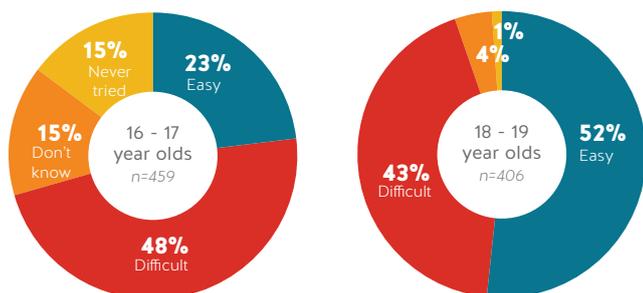
1. How easy is it, in general, for people under the age of 18 to buy alcohol from the bottle store?



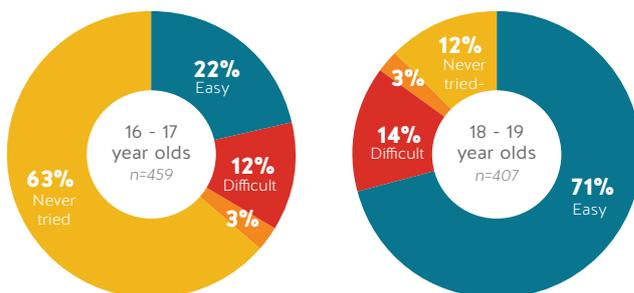
2. The last time you tried, how easy was it for YOU as someone under the age of 18, to buy alcohol from the bottle store?



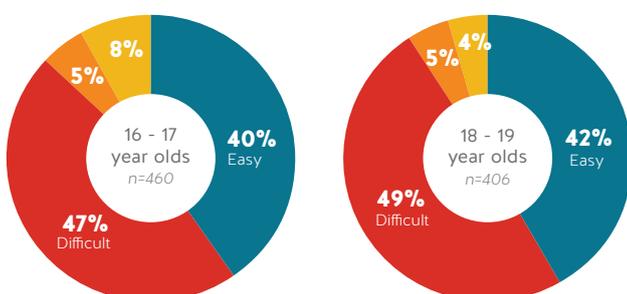
3. How easy is it, in general, for people who are intoxicated to get into a licensed venue?



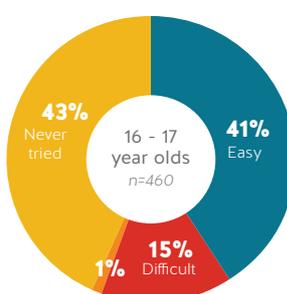
4. The last time you tried, how easy was it for YOU to get into a licensed venue while intoxicated?



5. How easy is it, in general, for people under the age of 18 to get into a licensed venue?



6. The last time you tried, how easy was it for YOU (as someone under the age of 18), to get into a licensed venue?



RESULT 2. Half of the 16-17 year olds had attempted to enter a licensed venue

Over half of the 16-17 year olds had previously attempted to enter a licensed venue (57% males, 56% females). Of these under-18s who had previously attempted to enter a licensed venue, the majority (51%) reported they did not have their ID checked the last time they tried to enter (see Table 1).

Of the 283 face-to-face respondents that had ever been to a licensed venue, almost half (46%) had been refused service, entry or required to leave a licensed venue for being too intoxicated in the past 12 months. This was more commonly reported among 18-19 year olds (55%) compared to 16-17 year olds (30%).

Of these under-18s who had previously attempted to enter a licensed venue, the majority (51%) reported they did not have their ID checked the last time they tried to enter

Table 1. Identification requirements for last visit to a licensed venue

	16-17 years old	18-19 years old
They didn't check for ID	51.2%	13.6%
Used own ID to get in	1.9%	84.1%
Used someone else's / a false ID to get in	30.0%	1.2%
I didn't have ID so I couldn't get in	10.4%	.5%
Other	6.5%	.5%
Total	260	403

Note: the percentages in this table are calculated excluding the 202 16-17 year olds and the 4 18-19 year old respondents that had never attempted to access a venue.

RESULT 3. Majority support for four proposed alcohol policies

The face-to-face interviewees were asked to rank their degree of support for eight measures intended to reduce the problems associated with alcohol use (see figure 2).

Even amongst this heavy drinking group of young people, the following proposed policies held majority support (four other proposals did not receive majority support):

65% supported increasing the price of a standard drink by 20¢ if the extra 20¢ was used to support prevention and treatment of alcohol problems (there was significantly less support for a 20¢ increase when prevention/ treatment was not included in the question).

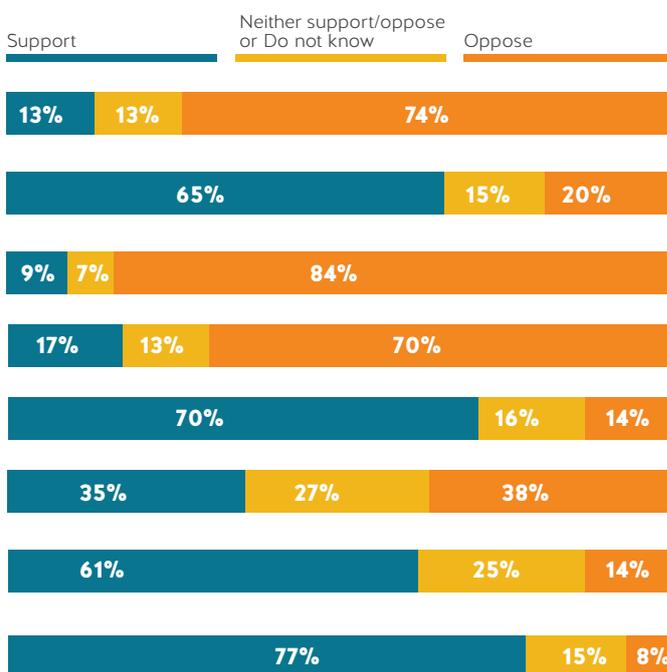
70% supported limiting advertising for alcohol on TV until after 9.30pm.

61% supported requiring information on national drinking guidelines on all alcohol containers.

77% supported limiting advertising for alcohol where the majority of the audience is likely to be under 18.

65% supported increasing the price of a standard drink (by 20¢) if the extra 20¢ was used to support prevention and treatment of alcohol problems

Figure 2. Support for policies intended to reduce alcohol related problems



CONCLUSION

Current restrictions commonly circumvented, proposed evidence-based policy popular

This study found that age based restrictions on alcohol are commonly circumvented by the young risky drinkers. Of the 16-17 year olds who had previously attempted to enter a licensed venue, the majority (51%) reported they did not have their ID checked the last time they attempted entry. The last time they tried, almost half (49%) of participants aged under 18 rated it as easy or very easy for them to purchase alcohol from the bottle shop. This underage purchase is consistent with the literature (15).

Evidence indicates that price consistently has an impact on consumption (9-11, 16-17). This survey found support for an increase in price even among one of the populations at greatest risk of alcohol related harm.

Two-thirds (65%) of the risky drinking young people supported increasing the price of a standard drink by 20¢ if the extra 20¢ was used to support prevention and treatment of alcohol problems. Similarly modest taxes have previously been found to reduce alcohol related mortality.

Young Australians appear to support price-based alcohol taxation measures so long as the extra funds were earmarked for prevention and treatment of alcohol related problems.

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Also see ndri.curtin.edu.au/research/yaars/bulletins for this bulletin's reference list.

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The Young Australians Alcohol Reporting System is a project led by the National Drug Research Institute (NDRI; Curtin University), in collaboration with their partners the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC; University of New South Wales), Eastern Health Clinical School (Monash University and Turning Point) and St John of God Hospital (Bunbury). The project is funded by the Australian National Preventative Health Agency. NDRI and NDARC are supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvement Grants Fund.