

# I. WHAT ARE THE GUIDELINES AROUND TEENAGE DRINKING?

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is an independent statutory authority that develops guidelines for Australians on health choices. It is important to note that these guidelines are not based on moral grounds, legal principles, or other factors – they are based on the evidence from medical research conducted around the world.

## CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS What are the guidelines?



### GUIDELINE 3A

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.



### GUIDELINE 3B

For young people aged 15–17 years the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.

## ADULTS? What are the guidelines?

For adults, the 2009 NHMRC Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol recommend:



### GUIDELINE 1

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 2

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.

**“ It’s dangerous, obviously kids have smaller bodies than adults so they can’t really take it. ”**

**(Kiama teenager)**

## Why do the guidelines advise that NOT drinking alcohol is the safest option for children and young people under the age of 18?

The NHMRC Guidelines are based on medical evidence. The FAQ document outlines the following reasons for recommending that people under the age of 18 not drink alcohol:



The risks of accidents, injuries, violence and self-harm are high among drinkers aged under 18 years.



Young people who drink are more prone to risky and antisocial behaviour than older drinkers.



Earlier initiation of drinking is related to increased alcohol consumption in adolescence and young adulthood, and these patterns in turn are related to the possibility of damage to the developing brain and development of alcohol-related harms in adulthood.

**“ I’d say there would be a large percentage of young people that still want someone to impose those boundaries for them. ”**

**(Kiama community member)**

**“ I probably see a slightly skewed population...but none of them are drinking to NH&MRC guidelines. They’re all drinking far beyond that. ”**

**(Kiama GP)**

## KEY POINTS

- The recommendation that people under 18 don’t drink alcohol is based on medical evidence: While there are legal restrictions around alcohol consumption under the age of 18 (*See Fact Sheet 7: What are the laws around teen drinking?*), the NHMRC Guidelines are based on international medical evidence on the risks of harm associated with underage drinking.
- Teenagers should be encouraged and supported to delay drinking initiation: Parents, schools and communities have an important role to play in supporting young people to delay drinking initiation as long as possible.
- Our community is committed to providing this supportive environment for our teens.

**“ Your teenage years are kind of like getting ready for your future and drinking messes it up. ”**

**(Kiama teen)**

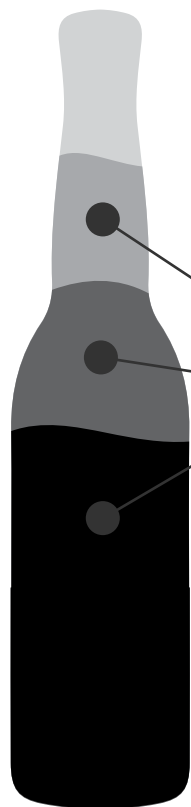
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# 2. ARE AUSTRALIAN TEENAGERS DRINKING?

We hear a lot in the media about underage drinking, and there is a perception that the majority of teenagers drink alcohol. In reality, the majority of Australian teenagers don't drink.

The most accurate and up to date information on teenagers' drinking comes from the Australian Secondary Schools Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) Survey. This survey is conducted every three years and collects anonymous data from students in year 7 to 12 about their use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs. The most recent survey was conducted in 2011.



## How many teenagers have ever drunk alcohol?

The statistic we most commonly see quoted in the media is the number of teenagers who have ever used alcohol, and these numbers are very high. For instance:

- 88.0% of 16 year olds have ever drunk alcohol
- 74.0% of 14 year olds have ever drunk alcohol
- 54.1% of 12 year olds have ever drunk alcohol

However, these numbers are responses to the question "Have you ever had even part of an alcoholic drink" and include those who have ever had even a sip or taste of alcohol.

A better measure of underage drinking is the number of teenagers who have consumed alcohol recently – that is, in the last month or last week.

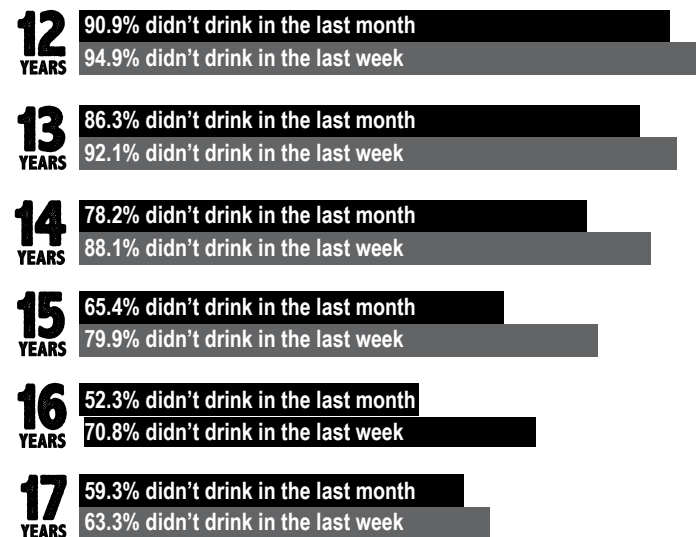
## How many Australian teenagers have drunk alcohol in the last month?

Less than one-third of teenagers aged 12-17 years have drunk any alcohol in the last month. Among younger teens, the proportion who are drinking is very low (for example, less than one in eight 13 year olds); and even at age 16 it is still less than half.

## How many Australian teenagers have drunk alcohol in the last week?

The ASSAD survey classifies teenagers as 'current drinkers' if they have drunk alcohol in the last week. The 2011 data shows that the majority of teens are not current drinkers. Less than one in five 15 year olds and only one-third of 17 year olds are current drinkers.

## What does that mean for my teenager?



But most teenagers think that the majority of their peers drink, and that if they don't drink they won't fit in (see *Fact Sheet 6 – Teenage drinking and social norms*)

**" A lot probably don't drink...maybe one out of 10 drink or one out of 20. "**

**(Kiama teenager)**

“ I think probably a high percentage have tried but a lower percentage would be using on a weekly basis... so they've tried but are not drinking on a regular basis. ”

(Kiama teacher)

### Is the problem getting worse?

Data from the ASSAD surveys – which have been conducted every three years since 1984 – clearly shows that the proportion of teenagers who are regular drinkers (drank alcohol in the last week) has declined over time:

From 30% of 12-15 year olds in 1984 to 11% of 12-15 year olds in 2011



From 50% of 16-17 year olds in 1984 to 33% of 16-17 year olds in 2011

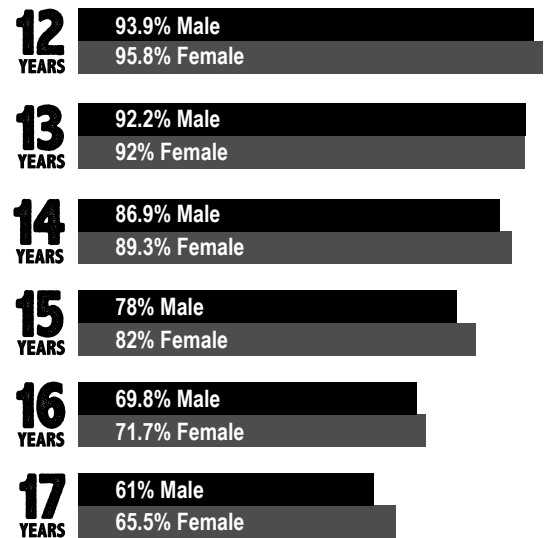


There have also been similar declines in the proportion of teenagers who have had a drink in the last month, last year and ever.

That is, more and more Australian teenagers are choosing not to drink. We can support them in making this choice by talking to them about not drinking and making sure they know that the majority of teenagers don't drink, and that Kiama doesn't support underage drinking.

## KEY POINTS

- Most teenagers don't drink alcohol: less than one in five 15 year olds and only one-third of 17 year olds are current drinkers.
- More and more teenagers are choosing not to drink: the proportion of teens drinking has declined over time, with a big drop in drinking since 2002.
- Who didn't drink alcohol last week?



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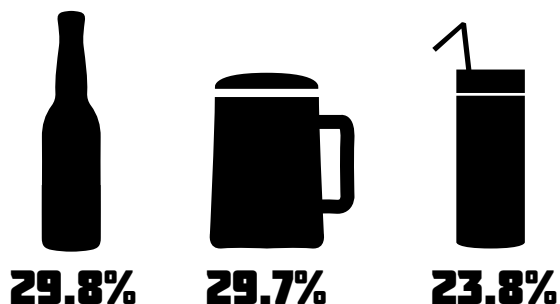
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# 3. WHAT ARE TEENS DRINKING & WHERE ARE THEY GETTING IT FROM?

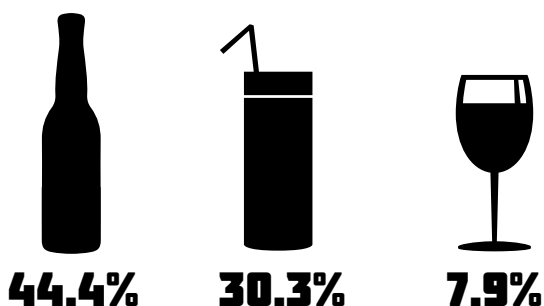
It is important to note that only 17% of teenagers aged 12-17 years are 'current drinkers' – that is 83% of teens did not drink alcohol in the last week and 71% did not drink alcohol in the last month.

## What are teens drinking?

The most common types of alcohol consumed by teenagers – across all age groups and both genders – are premixed spirits (RTDs/alcopops) and other spirits.



The most popular drinks among boys are premixed spirits (29.8% of current drinkers), beer (29.7%) and other spirits (23.8%).



The most popular drinks among girls are premixed spirits (44.4% of current drinkers), other spirits (30.3%) and wine (7.9%).

This strong preference for spirits (premixed and non-premixed), particularly among teenage girls, is concerning given the variation in alcohol content of these products. For example, a 2008 audit of 52 New South Wales bottleshops identified 150 different RTD alcohol products; they ranged in strength from 4.8% to 7.5% alcohol by volume (ABV) and from 1.0 to 2.7 standard drinks per unit.

## Where do teens get their alcohol from (and where do they drink it)?

In the 2011 Australian Secondary Schools Alcohol & Drug (ASSAD) survey current drinkers (drank alcohol in the last week) were asked where they got their last drink from.

One-third of 12-17 year old current drinkers reported that their parents gave them their last drink (not including the 5% who took the alcohol from home without their parents' knowledge). Approximately one in five got their last drink from a friend, and one in five had someone else buy it for them (most commonly a friend aged 18 or older). Only 3% of 12 to 15 year olds and 8% of 16 to 17 year olds reported that they bought their last alcoholic drink themselves; with the most common place of purchase being a liquor store or supermarket.

About one-third of current drinkers consumed their most recent alcoholic drink at a party, just under one-third in their own home, and 17% at a friend's house. Younger teens (12 to 15 year olds) were more likely to have consumed their last drink and home and 16 to 17 year olds more likely to have done so at a party. Two thirds of current drinkers had consumed their last alcoholic drink under adult supervision.

Teens whose last alcoholic drink was bought for them by 'someone else' generally drank more than those whose alcohol was provided by a parent or a friend; and those who drank at a party or a friend's house drank more than those who drank at home. This appears to support the view that introducing teens to alcohol at home is a safer option but the reality is more complex (see *Fact Sheet 8: Can we teach teens to drink responsibly?*).

It is particularly important to note that among 16 to 17 year olds, current drinkers consumed significantly fewer drinks when friends supplied the alcohol for the party than those who obtained their alcohol for the party by either getting it from their parents or someone else buying it for them. This is consistent with anecdotal evidence from interviews with young people which suggests that alcohol provided by parents to take to a party is consumed in addition to alcohol from other sources.

**“ If you've got one friend that's 18 and the others haven't turned 18, they're still 17; well that person is gonna buy grog for his mates. ”**

**(Young adult, Kiama)**

## Why are teens drinking?

There are many reasons why teenagers drink, just as there are many reasons that adults drink. Some of the most common reasons are:

### **SOCIAL NORMS**

Many teens think that most or all of their peers drink, and that they need to drink to fit in. In reality, most Australian teens don't drink (see *Fact Sheet 2: Are Australian teenagers drinking?* and *Fact Sheet 6: Teenage drinking and social norms*).

### **PEER PRESSURE**

As well as feeling that everyone else is doing it, some teens are directly pressured by peers who do drink; this might be subtle encouragement or direct pressure and can be very hard for teens to resist.

### **SOCIETAL ATTITUDES**

Australia has a strong drinking culture, and many young people grow up believing that drinking (and often drinking to excess) is a normal and expected part of being Australian.

### **FAMILY ATTITUDES AND EXAMPLES**

While many parents feel that they lose their influence over their children when they become adolescents, and peer influences become more powerful, there is strong evidence that teens' attitudes and behaviours towards alcohol are still influenced by their parents and families. This includes both modeling (observing parent, sibling and family drinking behaviours) and rules and discussions about drinking. (see *Fact Sheet 8: Can we teach teens to drink responsibly?*).

### **ALCOHOL ADVERTISING/MARKETING**

Young people are exposed to a constant stream of positive messages about alcohol. Alcohol advertising – on television, in magazines, in and around stores, and on the Internet – tells them that drinking will make them more attractive, interesting and popular. This message is also conveyed in entertainment media (movies, television) and by news and gossip coverage of celebrity lifestyles.

**“...the statistics say ‘85% of parents don't think it's ok for kids to drink alcohol under the age of 18' so when your kid comes to you and says ‘but everybody else is doing it' you're going ‘hold on, let's have a little chat about it'.”**

**(Kiama parent)**

## **KEY POINTS**

- Only 17% of Australian teenagers aged 12-17 years are 'current drinkers'.
- The most common types of alcohol consumed by teenagers are premixed spirits (RTDs/alcopops) and other spirits; these products are often high alcohol content and are typically sold in multi-packs.
- The three most common sources of alcohol for teens are parents, friends, and having someone else buy it for them.
- 16 to 17 year olds who attend a party with alcohol that is provided by their parents or bought for them by other adults drink more than those who get their alcohol from friends.
- Our teenagers are growing up in an environment which portrays alcohol as an essential part of socialising and associates alcohol with positive outcomes.
- We need to reduce children's and teenagers' access to alcohol and to counter the incorrect messages they receive from the media and society about the positive role of alcohol in their lives.

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# 4. WHAT ARE THE HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH TEEN DRINKING?

Teenagers can, and do, die from alcohol overdose, often due to their smaller body size and lower alcohol tolerance. 56% of emergency-department poisoning admissions observed in a recent study were due to acute alcohol intoxication.



## Risk of injury and self-harm

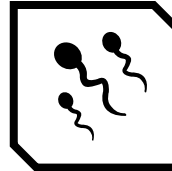
Drinking contributes to the three leading causes of death among adolescents – unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide.

Between 1993 and 2001:

- 28 per cent of all alcohol-related injury deaths and more than one-third (36 per cent) of alcohol-related injury hospitalisations were sustained by young people aged 15–29 years
- about half (54 per cent) of all serious road injuries involved young people

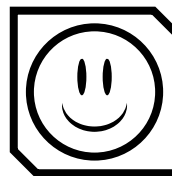
Alcohol consumption is associated with physical injury and violence in teenagers. In the 2011 Australian Secondary Schools Alcohol & Drug (ASSAD) survey, 12% of 12-17 year olds reported that they had hit someone or been in a fight when drinking alcohol and 18% had verbally abused someone.

Alcohol use increases the prevalence of risk-taking behaviours and the likelihood of injury among adolescents; for example, teens who 'binge drink' are more likely to ride in a car with an intoxicated driver and to use illicit drugs.



## Sexual risk-taking

Teenagers who drink are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour. Research shows that use of alcohol decreases the likelihood that adolescents will use a condom, especially at their first sexual experience. It also increases the risk of sexual coercion.



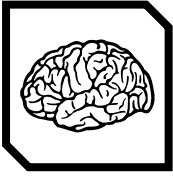
## Mental health

Data from the United States shows that alcohol use in adolescents, and particularly in pre-teenagers, is a strong predictor of both suicidal ideation and completed suicide.

The relationship between alcohol use and mental health in adolescence is complex. Alcohol use, especially when initiated at a young age, elevates the risk of many mental health and social problems. Teens with certain mental health conditions are more likely to drink at harmful levels and, at the same time, alcohol use contributes to poor mental health.

**“ There was a party in Berkeley and a girl got stabbed in the neck when I was there and it was meant to be just a normal party and she got stabbed in the neck. ”**

**(Kiama teenager)**



## Effect on brain development

Much of the information about the effects of alcohol on brain development is drawn from studies of animal models. Animal research has shown that young animals are more sensitive to ethanol-induced disruptions in brain plasticity and are also less sensitive to cues that serve to moderate alcohol intake.

Young people with alcohol-use disorders display significant and detrimental changes in brain development compared with their non-alcohol-using peers.

Studies have shown that heavy drinking in adolescence is associated with significant changes in brain structure, including:

- smaller pre-frontal cortices and white matter volumes (particularly among males)
- white matter structural irregularities and reduced hippocampal volumes
- diminished retrieval of verbal and non-verbal material, and poorer performance on attention-based testing

### Does it really matter what age they start?

There is growing evidence that the later adolescents start drinking, the less likely they are to become heavy drinkers or to be alcohol dependent as adults. This is even more pronounced among younger teens – for example, studies have shown that being a drinker at 16 years is a predictor of negative alcohol outcomes as a young adult. Furthermore, teens who begin drinking by 14 years are more likely to experience alcohol dependence than those who wait until they are 21 or over.

The evidence suggests that both the age at which teens start drinking and the age at which they first experience feeling drunk both increase the odds of problem drinking in adulthood.

There is considerable debate around the best way to introduce adolescents to alcohol (see *Fact Sheet 8: Can we teach teens to drink responsibly?*) but what is very clear is that the longer we can delay alcohol initiation, the better the physical, mental and social outcomes for our teens.

## KEY POINTS

- Drinking contributes to the three leading causes of death among adolescents.
- Teenagers who drink are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours.
- Heavy drinking in adolescence is associated with significant changes in brain structure.
- The later teens start drinking, the less likely they are to become heavy drinkers.

**“ ... they were drinking on New Year’s Eve.... and they woke up the next morning and realised one of them wasn’t there and then they went looking everywhere and they found him passed out on Surf Beach, and they’d left him there and they didn’t even realise. ”**

**(Kiama teenager)**

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# 5. TEENAGERS AND 'BINGE' DRINKING

We often hear people talk about teenagers and 'binge drinking'. Media stories often suggest that this is a really common behaviour among teenagers.

## What is binge drinking?

There is actually no 'official' definition of binge drinking, although the term is commonly used to refer to a pattern of drinking a large amount of alcohol in a single drinking session.

The 2009 NHMRC Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol intentionally do not include the term 'binge drinking' but state that "drinking four standard drinks on a single occasion more than doubles the relative risk of an injury in the six hours afterwards, and this relative risk rises even more rapidly when more than four drinks are consumed on a single occasion".

The Australian Secondary Schools Alcohol & Drug (ASSAD) Survey reports data for 12-17 year olds categorised as a "single occasion risky drinker" (defined as a person who drank more than 4 drinks on one day in the past seven days). Given that this level of consumption is known to double the risk of harm among adults, and that adolescents are more susceptible to the effects of alcohol, the use of the term 'risky' seems justified.

**" Most teenagers drink to get drunk whereas most adults drink to socialise. "**

**(Kiama young adult)**

**" Most adults can have a beer or something because they like the taste but most teens drink to get drunk. "**

**(Kiama teenager)**

## Are teens binge drinking?

While the proportion of Australian teenagers who drink alcohol has declined in recent years (*see Fact Sheet 2: Are Australian teenagers drinking?*), those who do drink appear to be drinking more frequently and drinking at riskier levels.

In the 2011 ASSAD survey, among the 'current drinkers' the average number of alcoholic drinks consumed in the seven days before the survey increased from 3.7 drinks among 12 year olds to 8.1 drinks among 17 year olds.



Of those current drinkers, 11% of 12 year olds, 32% of 15 year olds and 51% among 17 year olds drank more than four drinks on at least one occasion in the seven days before the survey.

## Why are teens binge drinking?

The reasons for drinking among teens are complex, as they are among adults. The ASSAD survey asks students whether they drink alcohol with the intention of getting drunk. In 2011, 36.4% of 12-17 year old 'current drinkers' stated that they always and 40% that they sometimes drink with the intention of getting drunk.

## What are the consequences of binge drinking?

The 2011 ASSAD survey asked teens about the negative effects they had experienced as a result of drinking. In the previous 12 months, among 16-17 year old 'current drinkers':



**46%** vomited from drinking



**31%** had an argument



**22%** verbally abused someone



**22%** tried drugs



**17%** created a public disturbance

Among 12-17 year old 'current drinkers'



**19%** had experienced one negative consequence



**12.5%** had experienced two negative consequences



**30.5%** had experienced three or more negative consequences

## KEY POINTS

- Most teenagers don't drink alcohol, but those who do tend to drink at risky levels.
- Three quarters of teens who drank alcohol in the last week always or sometimes drink with the intention of getting drunk.
- Two-thirds of 12 to 17 year old drinkers have experienced at least one negative consequence as a result of their drinking, and amongst one-third have experienced three or more negative consequences.
- There is no safe level of alcohol consumption among teenagers.

**" Absolutely (for teenagers) you've had a great night if you've vomited in the gutter and they had to help you up. "**

**(Kiama community member)**

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# 6. TEENAGE DRINKING AND SOCIAL NORMS

## Why are social norms important?

Research across multiple settings suggests young people's perceptions of social norms have an immediate and lasting effect on their behaviour. An adolescent's perceptions of what is 'normative' (what others do and what others think they should do) has an even stronger influence on their behaviour than peer pressure.

There is evidence from numerous studies conducted around the world that adolescents' perceptions of what is normative are often inaccurate – that is, they think that their peers drink alcohol at an earlier age, drink it more often, and drink more of it than they actually do.

There is also evidence that if we can correct these misperceptions, we can reduce the pressure young people feel to drink. This means that teenagers will: start drinking later, drink less often, and drink smaller amounts of alcohol.

## Different types of social norms

There are three main types of social norms that influence teenagers' drinking:

### **DESCRIPTIVE NORMS**

Teenagers' perceptions of how much and how often other teenagers drink. The closer they are to the 'other' people, the more influential these norms are. That is, teens are generally more influenced by their perceptions of the drinking behaviour of their friends and peers in their own community.

### **INJUNCTIVE NORMS**

Teenagers' perceptions of whether other people who are important to them approve or disapprove of them drinking. This includes friends, peers, parents, family members and the broader community.

### **MORAL NORMS**

Teenagers' own personal rules of conduct – what they believe to be 'right' or 'wrong'.

## The power of social norms

We surveyed 512 NSW teenagers who were attending Schoolies on the Gold Coast. The biggest predictor of drinking at Schoolies, and of usual drinking, was their belief about how much and how often friends of the same sex drank alcohol. These teens dramatically over-estimated the descriptive norm (what others their age do): they thought that more than half of their friends drank at least one to two days per week, and that nine out of ten drank more than five standard drinks on a typical occasion. Based on national data on teen drinking, we know that these perceptions are wrong (see *Fact Sheet 2 – Are Australian teens drinking?*).

These teens also perceived that others approved of their drinking (injunctive norm). Only 27.4% thought that their parents care or care a great deal about people their age drinking; and only 7% believed that their parents might be upset or angry if they found out they were "getting drunk at Schoolies".

## Social norms influence parents too

There is strong evidence that many parents perceive that 'other parents' approve of teen drinking, and that this perception influences their behaviour. That is, many parents provide their teenagers with alcohol – even if they don't want to – because they believe that other parents think this is the right thing to do.

**“ I've found with myself, you're young and you want to be a man at that age but you're not shown how to be a man so you look at what your parents or your father figures do and they seem pissed so you do it yourself so you think that's what makes a man. ”**

**(Kiama young adult)**

## What can we do to address social norms?

The first step is to ensure that our teens, and our community, have access to accurate information about teen drinking.

### OUR TEENAGERS NEED TO KNOW THAT:

**95%** of Australian 12 year olds are not current drinkers

**92%** of Australian 13 year olds are not current drinkers

**88%** of Australian 14 year olds are not current drinkers

**80%** of Australian 15 year olds are not current drinkers

**71%** of Australian 16 year olds are not current drinkers

**63%** of Australian 17 year olds are not current drinkers

### OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS TO KNOW THAT:

- The majority of Kiama parents do not support underage drinking
- The majority of the Kiama community does not support underage drinking

**“ It depends kind of – who you’re with –some people would go ‘yeah, drink beer’. Me and my friends would just think ‘complete idiots’ - I don’t respect you for that at all. ”**

**(Kiama teenager)**

## KEY POINTS

- Social norms are a key influence on teenagers’ drinking decisions.
- Most teenagers over-estimate the number of their peers who are drinkers, and how often and how much their peers drink.
- Many parents feel pressured to provide alcohol to their teens because ‘other parents’ do so, and they do not want their teen to be excluded from their peer group.
- Our community is committed to correcting these misperceptions around teen drinking.

**“ Teenagers just drink to try and fit in with their friends; they won’t be as lonely at a party and fit in. ”**

**(Kiama teenager)**

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# 7. WHAT ARE THE LAWS AROUND TEEN DRINKING?

Australia does not have a 'legal drinking age' (that is, an age below which it is illegal for a person to drink alcohol in private homes).

However, all states and territories (including New South Wales) have restrictions on:

- the sale of alcohol to people aged under 18
- the consumption of alcohol on licensed premises and public spaces

## Is it illegal to drink alcohol under the age of 18?

People under the age of 18 (minors) are not allowed to buy, sell, possess or drink alcohol on licensed premises or in public areas.

The maximum penalty for a minor for consuming alcohol on licensed premises or in public spaces, or for buying or attempting to buy alcohol is \$2,200 (as at September 2013).

It is also an offence for a minor to refuse to provide their name, address and date of birth to an authorised person (such as a police officer) or to give false information.

## Is it illegal to sell alcohol to someone under the age of 18?

It is illegal to sell alcohol to people under the age of 18 on licensed premises or in public spaces.

The maximum penalty for selling alcohol to a minor is \$11,000 or 12 months imprisonment (or both), or an on the spot fine of \$1,100 (as at September 2013).

**" What makes underage drinking so difficult to deal with is the adults out there who think that it's OK, legally OK, to give alcohol to kids. ....So they don't understand it's an offence and they don't see the problem with it. "**

**(Kiama police officer)**



## **PENALTIES INCLUDE**

**\$1,100  
ON THE SPOT FINE**

**\$2,200 FINE**

**\$11,000 FINE**

**12 MONTHS  
IMPRISONMENT**

## What is 'secondary supply'?

Secondary supply is the supply of alcohol to minors (people under the age of 18) on private premises. In New South Wales, alcohol can only be supplied to minors by:

- parents/guardians
- people authorised by the parent/guardian
- people who have parental rights and responsibilities for the minor

This means that if you provide alcohol to teenagers at a party without the permission of their parents, you are committing an offence.

It is important to note that this also means that if your 18 year old provides alcohol to their 17 year old friend(s) they are breaking the law.

A person who provides alcohol to a minor in NSW without the permission of the minor's parents, may be subject to criminal prosecution.

The maximum penalty for providing alcohol to a minor without their parent or guardian's permission is \$11,000 or 12 months imprisonment (or both) or an on the spot fine of \$1,100 (as at September 2013).

## Find out more

If you would like to know more about the laws around underage drinking, or would like to talk to the police about someone providing alcohol to your child, you can contact the Police Assistance Line on **131 444**.

**" We have the rule in our house where they weren't allowed to drink alcohol at parties until they were 18 and that means none of their mates could come over to our place and drink either.....we wouldn't let them do something illegal because it was cool, regardless of what their friends were saying. "**

**(Kiama parent)**

## KEY POINTS

- It is illegal for someone under the age of 18 to purchase alcohol or to consume it on licensed premises or in public spaces.
- It is illegal for someone other than a parent or guardian to provide alcohol to someone under the age of 18, unless they have the parent or guardian's permission.
- Our community is committed to reducing the provision of alcohol to people under the age of 18.

**" It is against the law to give alcohol to people under 18. And it's a trust thing between parents so I take that seriously. "**

**(Kiama parent)**

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# 8. CAN WE TEACH TEENS TO DRINK RESPONSIBLY?

In the 2011 Australian Secondary Schools Alcohol & Drug (ASSAD) survey one-third of 12-17 year old current drinkers reported that their parents gave them their last drink (*see Fact Sheet 3: What are teens drinking and where are they getting it from?*).

It is a commonly held view that introducing children to drinking in 'safe' environments, under adult supervision, is an effective strategy to teach them how to drink responsibly. Many parents recall that this was the way their parents introduced them to alcohol and look at their own experiences as evidence of the effectiveness of this approach.

However, there is increasing evidence that this may not be the case. The concept of teaching children to drink responsibly is based on the idea of role-modelling; and is influenced by traditional European drinking cultures, where alcohol is consumed as part of a meal. However, our children are growing up in an environment where alcohol is widely available, heavily promoted, and there is an apparent social norm of drinking to intoxication.

**“ I didn't want to follow the pack and it was hard....the research has shown that the earlier the exposure to alcohol the more it increases their chance of adopting alcohol more heavily in adulthood. ”**

**(Kiama parent)**

There are two types of alcohol provision commonly reported by parents: providing alcohol for teenagers to take to a party or event, and allowing children and teenagers to sip or taste alcohol in the home.

## **Providing alcohol to take to a party**

Parents report providing alcohol for their teenager to take to a party as they believe this allows them to set clear rules and boundaries, and that by providing alcohol they know what (and how much) alcohol their teen is drinking.

Research conducted with secondary students in NSW found that teenagers whose parents provided them with alcohol for consumption without adult supervision or under the supervision of other adults (such as friends' parents at a party) were four times more likely to engage in risky drinking. This is consistent with research from Sweden which found that parents' willingness to provide a specific alcoholic beverage was associated with adolescent binge drinking of that beverage; and there was no evidence of an association between parental supply and more 'responsible' drinking patterns.

However, parents often feel pressured to provide alcohol for their teenager to take to a party. This includes direct pressure from their teenager (“everyone else is bringing alcohol”) and the perception that other parents, and the broader community, think it is appropriate. In reality, the majority of parents do not want to provide alcohol to teens to take to a party – and the most powerful tool parents have is the knowledge that underage drinking is both harmful to teens and not the social norm.

81% of parents of 13-17 year olds surveyed in New Zealand believed that it was not acceptable for parents to give teens one or two drinks to take to an unsupervised party.

**“ I know scientists have come out in the last probably 10 years or so indicating the brains aren't fully developed until 24 and alcohol is actually damaging to brain development. And I think a lot of parents don't take that on board and they just think 'oh well, we did it and so our kids will do it'. But like everything you should take on board the new information - just like when we were kids we didn't have seat belts in the back seat. ”**

**(Kiama parent)**

## Providing 'sips' and 'tastes' of alcohol

Many parents have firm rules about not providing their teenagers with alcohol, but allow their children and teens to 'sip' or 'taste' alcohol at home. Reasons commonly given by parents for allowing children or teenagers to taste alcohol include beliefs that allowing them to try alcohol at home will prevent them experimenting behind their parents' backs and that they can 'teach' their child about drinking by letting them have a glass of alcohol with a meal.

As with the provision of alcohol to take to a party, there is increasing evidence that this strategy may not be effective. The strongest evidence comes from recent American studies which have followed children over time to assess the effects of allowing children to try alcohol at home.

One study which followed 371 children for 7.5 years found that being allowed to sip or taste alcohol by age 10 predicted earlier drinking initiation. A three year study of 1,388 students in Chicago found that parental provision of alcohol in 6th grade was associated with higher rates of alcohol use in the past year, past month and past week; self-reported drunkenness; heavy episodic drinking; and intentions to drink in the next month, at high school, and if offered alcohol by a friend.

Finally, a three year study which explored the impact of parent supervised drinking in Washington State, US and Victoria, Australia found that adult supervised drinking resulted in more harmful levels of drinking.

### So, what does this mean for parents?

The National Health and Medical Research Council Guidelines recommend that "the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible" (see *Fact Sheet 1: What are the guidelines around teenage drinking?*).

## KEY POINTS

- There is increasing evidence that providing teens with alcohol to take to a party or event does not reduce the amount of alcohol they consume.
- There is increasing evidence that allowing children and teens to sip or taste alcohol is associated with early drinking initiation and more harmful drinking patterns.
- Most parents do not want to provide alcohol to children and teens but feel pressured to do so by their children and by perceptions of what other parents do.
- The most effective tool we have is to talk to other parents and support each other in not providing alcohol to teens.

**" Yeah, because a parent will sit down at dinner and have a glass of wine but then you don't really see a person of 15 just... sitting down with a glass. "**

**(Kiama teenager)**

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# 9. DO PARENTS AND FAMILIES INFLUENCE TEEN DRINKING?

Many parents believe that they have limited influence on their children's drinking, as they become older and are more influenced by their peers. While it is true that the behaviours and attitudes of peers have a significant influence on teens' drinking, parents and families continue to play a key role in shaping teens' alcohol-related attitudes and behaviours.

## Direct influence: Parental supply of alcohol

In 2011, one-third of 12-17 year old current drinkers reported that their parents gave them their last drink (*see Fact Sheet 3: What are teens drinking and where are they getting it from?*). However, there is evidence that this figure is declining over time as parents' awareness of the risks of teenage drinking increase and more parents feel empowered to refuse their teens' requests for alcohol.

This is a complex issue, as parents are confronted with conflicting messages about the impact of parental supply and whether this is associated with higher or lower rates of drinking. However, what is very clear is that the earlier young people are introduced to alcohol the more they drink and the more harm they experience.

## Direct influence: Parental attitudes to teen drinking and rules about drinking

It is important that parents talk to their children and teens about drinking, and make sure that their teens understand how they feel about them drinking.

Teens need to understand that underage drinking is associated with a range of negative health and social outcomes, and that there are laws around underage drinking and provision of alcohol to minors.

They also need to know that their parents do not support underage drinking. Many parents disapprove of underage drinking but are reluctant to communicate this to their teenagers because they do not want to damage the relationship. However, research into family relationships consistently shows that teens want and need boundaries and that having clear rules around drinking can improve communication between teens and their parents.

Large scale studies that have followed children through adolescence consistently show that children and teens are more likely to start drinking, to drink at high levels, and to experience alcohol-related harms if their parents: permit, or are accepting of, underage drinking; and are perceived to have favourable attitudes towards drinking.

Conversely, children and teens are less likely to drink if their parents:

- are opposed to alcohol consumption
- apply prohibitions and strict rules regarding drinking
- emphasise the negative effects of alcohol

While many of these studies were conducted in America, local studies confirm these findings. Research conducted by the Centre for Health Initiatives with over 800 adolescents found that those who believed that their parents or siblings approved of them drinking to get drunk were more likely to have consumed alcohol on a weekly and/or fortnightly basis.

**“ Well that’s where I’m at now with my girl who’s 17 and in year 12. There are parties on, there is lots of drinking, lots of binge drinking going on but she’s actually said to me ‘I wouldn’t have a drink because I know how disappointed you would be’. ”**

**(Kiama parent)**

## Indirect influences: Parental modelling and attitudes to drinking

Parents' attitudes to drinking are communicated to children from a young age. The things children hear their parents say about alcohol and the drinking behaviours they see in their families and social circles influence their own attitudes to alcohol as well as their drinking behaviours.

Children learn from watching the behaviours of others, and the outcomes associated with those behaviours. It is important that parents avoid children and teens being exposed to conversations and behaviours that imply that drinking is essential to social activities or that alcohol is a way of solving problems or making life more enjoyable.

There is evidence that teenagers who have seen their parents get drunk are more likely to think that drunkenness is acceptable and to get drunk themselves.

This does not mean that parents should not drink in their own homes, rather that they should ensure that children and teens see responsible drinking and see that not drinking is also a viable choice.

### Recommendations for parents <sup>1</sup>

- Research suggests more favourable outcomes when adolescent initiation to alcohol use is delayed.
- Children model themselves on their parents, therefore:
  - Do not drink large amounts of alcohol in front of children.
  - Confine alcohol use to times when children are not present where possible.
- If drinking in front of children, drink moderately with food.
- If an adolescent is going to drink, alcohol use should be supervised by parents.
- To minimise the impact of indirect or external influences, try to develop open and honest communication with adolescents and be involved in broader monitoring of activities.
- Early intervention is paramount, so help should be sought when guidance is needed or when warning signs appear.

1.Hutchinson et al (2008) Adolescent drinking: The influence of parental attitudes, modeling and alcohol supply. InPsych, October.

For more tips on how to support your teen to choose not to drink, see Fact Sheet 10: Tips for Parents.

## KEY POINTS

- Parents and families continue to have a significant influence on teenagers' decisions about drinking.
- Children and teens are less likely to drink if their families have clear rules about underage drinking.
- It is important to ensure that parents have ongoing conversations with their children and teens about drinking.

**“ Parents can still be cool if they don't let you drink....Yeah they might play monopoly with you... They just might be against it cos they are worried but they are still cool. ”**

**(Kiama teenager)**

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# 10. TIPS FOR PARENTS

**1**

Talk about family expectations and rules about alcohol use. Clearly state and enforce the consequences for breaking the rules.

**2**

Be a role model. If you drink, do so responsibly. Never drink and drive; and do not show your teens that alcohol is used as a way to cope with stress, depression, or anger. Talk to your teens about why adults drink.

**3**

Talk about personal, family, social, or religious values that give your teen reasons not to drink.

**4**

When your teen wants to talk about alcohol, listen to their opinions, help them make good decisions, and treat them with respect.

**5**

Talk with your teen about ways to handle pressure from friends to drink. Teach your teen how to say "no" and to suggest doing something different (safe). Be aware that some other teens do drink and that your teen will be exposed to offers of alcohol. They need to feel comfortable talking openly with you, and know that you will not punish them for being honest.

**6**

Talk about what you know and how you feel about underage drinking. Make sure your children and teenagers know about the health risks associated with underage drinking. This should not be a one-off conversation but an ongoing topic of discussion with your teenagers.

**7**

Know where your teen is and who they are with. Every parent has the right to know the answer to these 6 questions:

- Where are you going?
- What are you doing?
- Who will you be hanging out with?
- How will you get home?
- What time will you be home?
- How can I contact you?

**8**

Do not serve alcohol to your teen or their friends, and do not allow others to provide alcohol to teens in your home.

**9**

Talk with your teens' friends' parents about alcohol. Know what the rules are about drinking in the homes of your teens' friends. Remember that most parents don't want to provide their teens with alcohol but believe that other parents do.

**10**

Do not ask your teen to open a bottle of wine, bring you a beer, or pour drinks.

**11**

Help your teen to develop outside interests. Encourage them to join a team or club, become a volunteer, get a part-time job, or take music lessons.

**12**

Make it clear that drinking and driving or riding with someone who has been drinking will not be tolerated. Ask your teen to call for a ride, take a cab, or call for permission to stay overnight if he or she or a friend who is driving has been drinking. This does not give teens permission to drink, it tells them that their safety is most important.

**13**

Get to know your teen's friends. Know where they hang out and what they are doing.

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# II. HOW DOES MARKETING INFLUENCE UNDERAGE DRINKING?

## Alcohol advertising

Every day in Australia, young people are exposed to increasing levels of alcohol advertising and marketing. Alcohol advertising and promotion encourages positive associations with alcohol and links drinking alcohol with attractive symbols and role models.

For example, beer advertisements often suggest that the product can help the drinker to be more relaxed, happy and successful; and advertisements for “alcopops” (alcoholic lemonades) often link consumption of the product with social, sexual and business success.

## How much alcohol advertising is there in Australia?

# \$125,000,000

Alcohol companies spend more than \$125 million per year on advertising in Australia, mainly on television, billboards and magazines. It is important to note that this figure only includes advertising – it does not include sponsorship, point-of-sale, internet, or other marketing activities.

A recent study in the Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan areas found that 13-17 year olds see almost as much alcohol advertising on television as 18-29 year olds.

## Does it matter if children and teenagers see alcohol advertising?

We know that exposure to alcohol advertising increases young people’s perceptions of drinking as a ‘normal’ behaviour. Research conducted by the Centre for Health Initiatives with young Australians aged 15-24 has also found that they believe these advertisements tell them that drinking will help them have a great time, fit in, feel more confident, and be more attractive to the opposite sex.

## Are there rules about alcohol advertising in Australia?

Advertising in Australia (including alcohol advertising) is covered by industry self-regulation. This means that the industry develops, implements, and monitors the rules around the types of messages that can be included in alcohol advertisements.

There are two separate codes that apply to alcohol advertisements. The Advertiser Code of Ethics, developed by the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA), applies to all forms of advertising and covers issues such as taste and decency. The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) and Complaints Management System is the self-regulatory advertising scheme that specifically covers alcohol advertising.

## What can community members do?

- Lodge complaints about inappropriate alcohol advertisements with the Advertising Standards Board
- Educate schools and community groups about the ineffective regulation of alcohol advertising
- Lobby for stricter regulations on the advertising of alcohol, and for penalties for inappropriate advertisements

## Point-of-sale marketing

Point of Sale (POS) promotion refers to promotional materials, events and specials that are found within a store or venue, at the point where a purchase can be made. For alcohol, this can be either at a bottle shop (where the alcohol is not consumed on the premises), or licensed venues such as bars, pubs and clubs.

**“ Bundy Rum is advertised more so you think it’s obviously pretty good. ”**

(Kiama teen)

## What impact can point-of-sale promotions have?

Increased availability of alcohol is associated with increased alcohol consumption. It is also very clear that reducing the price of alcohol increases the amount consumed, particularly among young people.

As early as the 1970's, an experimental study in the US found that alcohol consumption was more than doubled during simulated 'happy hours' among both heavy and light drinkers. More recent research in the US has found that higher binge drinking rates are associated with lower prices, weekend beer specials, and the availability of promotions in the next 30 days.

There is also substantial evidence that ownership of alcohol branded merchandise (such as clothing, hats, and accessories) is associated with earlier drinking initiation and more harmful drinking among children and teenagers.

## Are there rules about point-of-sale in Australia?

The rules about point-of-sale alcohol marketing are implemented at a state level – which means they may vary between states (although they tend to address similar issues). In New South Wales the Director of Liquor and Gaming has published a detailed set of 'Liquor Promotion Guidelines' [[http://www.olgr.nsw.gov.au/dlg\\_guidelines.asp](http://www.olgr.nsw.gov.au/dlg_guidelines.asp)].

## What do we know about point-of-sale promotions in Australia?

There has been very little research on point-of-sale promotions in Australia. The Centre for Health Initiatives has conducted several studies which found that:

- point-of-sale promotions are widespread in NSW.
- young people see these promotions as direct encouragement to consume more alcohol and, particularly among young men, as an incentive to 'compete' with each other to see who can drink the most.

**“ Makes it look like you have heaps of fun drinking it.. [it] looks really fun for young people at nightclubs and parties. ”**

**(Kiama teen)**

## WHAT CAN COMMUNITY MEMBERS DO?

If you see an inappropriate alcohol promotion – particularly one that you think would be appealing to young people or that sends the wrong message to young people about drinking – you can:

- 1** Lodge a complaint with the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing.
- 2** Talk to the pub or bottleshop owner and express your concerns – ask them to remove the promotion.

If you see an alcohol promotion outside of an alcohol outlet – for example, alcohol branded gifts or clothing in a supermarket or department store:

- 1** Speak to the store owner – ask them not to sell or promote the products where children can see them.
- 2** Raise awareness among other community members about the impact of these types of products on children's attitudes and beliefs regarding alcohol.

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# 12. WHAT COMMUNITIES CAN DO ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING

While many teens drink, underage alcohol use is not inevitable. It will take everyone in the community to make change happen. All of us can help change attitudes about teen drinking and help replace environments that enable underage alcohol use with environments that discourage it.

After all, changing how people think isn't easy. Drinking is legal for adults. That's why some people think drinking is a rite of passage for youth. Many young people think drinking is a way for them to feel more grown up. People of all ages forget that underage drinking is dangerous.

Communities can come together to encourage a new attitude about underage drinking. A community that opposes underage drinking can help change how people think and act. But it takes time. So it's important to keep sending the message that the community does not approve of underage drinking. Together, communities can support teen decisions NOT to drink.

**1**

## Get organised

- Work on underage drinking as a community health and safety problem that everyone can solve together.
- Organise groups to change community thinking about underage alcohol use.

**2**

## Share knowledge

- Get the word out about policies to prevent underage drinking. This includes age checks for people buying alcohol, including on the Internet.
- Help people learn about the latest research on underage alcohol use. Include information about the dangers of youth alcohol use for teens and others. An informed public is key to ending underage drinking.
- Teach young people about the dangers of underage alcohol use. Support programs that help teens already involved with drinking.

**3**

## Support the message that underage drinking is not okay

- Work with sponsors of community events to help them send the message that underage drinking is not allowed.

**4**

## Change the teen scene

- Create friendly, alcohol-free places where teens can gather.
- Take action when you see alcohol advertising or promotions that target, or appeal to, children and teenagers
- Create programs, including volunteer work, where young people can grow, explore their options, succeed, and feel good about themselves without alcohol.
- Help teens realize that, like "doing drugs" or smoking, underage drinking is unhealthy and can drastically impact their lives.
- Let teens involved with underage drinking know that it's okay to ask for and get help.



## Take Action

- Work to change community attitudes about underage drinking.
- If you see people who are under 18 drinking, or people buying or providing alcohol for people who are under 18, speak out. Remind them that it is illegal and harmful to developing brains.
- Focus as much community attention on underage drinking as on tobacco and drug use
- Work with national, state and local groups to reduce underage drinking.
- Make it easier for young people who are involved with or at risk for underage drinking to get help.
- Get the word out about underage drinking laws. The law that makes buying alcohol and drinking in public places under age 18 illegal is only one of them. Other laws forbid selling or giving alcohol to youth. Others make it against the law to drink and drive. Work to ensure these laws are always enforced.

Adapted from [www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/underagedrinking/communityguide.pdf](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/underagedrinking/communityguide.pdf) P10-11

## THE KIAMA COMMUNITY

From Minnamurra to Gerroa to Jamberoo, the Kiama community is coming together to make our region a place where teens feel supported not to drink.

Community members, teens and parents can register their support for keeping Kiama teens alcohol free at [www.stopunderagedrinking.com.au](http://www.stopunderagedrinking.com.au)

## KEY POINTS

- Communities can support teen decisions not to drink. Working together we can:

- 1** Get organised
- 2** Share Knowledge
- 3** Support the message that underage drinking is not OK
- 4** Change the teen scene
- 5** Take action

Our community is committed to reducing underage drinking.

**“ I think it’s getting to the stage that the majority don’t agree with it. They feel like it’s out of control. ”**

**(Kiama community member)**

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