



Alcohol use in the Northern Territory

Introduction

Alcohol consumption is a major risk factor for health and at harmful levels is directly linked with liver disease, pancreatitis, diabetes, epilepsy and specific cancers.¹ Alcohol is also associated with increased risk of injury through motor vehicle crashes and violence.^{2,3} Some key examples of the impact of alcohol in the NT are:

- The age-adjusted NT alcohol-attributable death rate for 2004-05 was 7.2 per 10,000 persons 15 years and over, compared with the national estimate of 2.1 per 10 000 persons. Deaths rates among NT Indigenous and NT non-Indigenous people were 18.6 and 3.8 per 10,000 persons respectively.^{4,6}
- The age-adjusted NT alcohol-attributable hospitalisation rate in 2005-06 was 135.4 per 10,000 persons 15 years and over, which was higher than the national rate.⁴ NT Indigenous rates (379/10,000) were much higher than non-Indigenous rates (57.6/10,000 persons).⁵
- From 2002/03 to 2006/07, an average of 10.4% of all NT road crashes were alcohol related.⁷ From 2000 to 2005, 48% of motor vehicle accident fatalities and 17% of serious injuries were alcohol related.²
- From 2000 to 2002, alcohol was associated with 56% of suicides in the NT.⁸

This fact sheet provides an overview of the level, pattern and prevalence of alcohol consumption among the NT population.

Data sources

Alcohol consumption data for the NT are available from a range of sources. There are significant variations between sources in both methods and definitions, and some caution is required when making comparisons between sources or between years. The sources include:

- 2001, 2004 and 2007 National Drug Strategy

Household Surveys (NDSHS).⁹⁻¹²

- 2004-05 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS).¹³
- 2006 Northern Territory Alcohol Consumption and Related Attitudes Household Survey.¹⁴
- 2008 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS).¹⁵

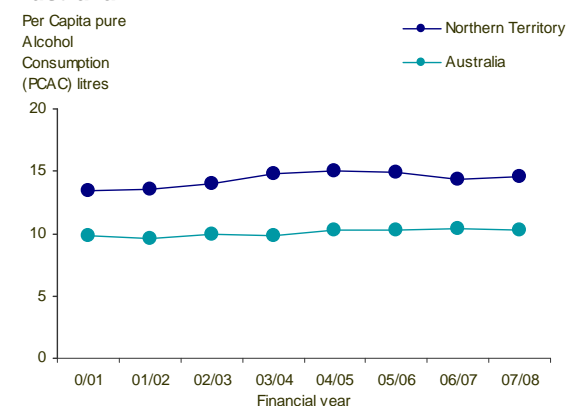
Alcohol consumption

Population level information on alcohol consumption can be estimated using both indirect and direct measurements. An example of an indirect measure is Per Capita pure Alcohol Consumption (PCAC) estimated from alcohol sales, while population surveys provide a direct, self-reported measure of alcohol consumption.

What is the current Per Capita pure Alcohol Consumption (PCAC) in the NT?

Wholesale purchase of alcohol by NT retailers is used as an important crude measure of the Per Capita pure Alcohol Consumption (PCAC). In 2007/2008, NT retailers purchased 2.76 million litres of pure alcohol from wholesalers.¹⁶

Figure 1: Per Capita pure Alcohol Consumption (PCAC) by persons aged 15 years and over in the NT^a and Australia^b



Notes:^a Calculated by dividing the quantity of pure alcohol available for consumption by the estimated resident population, with an adjustment for the estimated number of visitors of the same age. ^b Apparent consumption of alcohol, Australia, 2007-08 (ABS Cat. No. 4307.0.55.001). Sources: NT registered wholesale returns of Alcohol, Racing, Gaming and Licensing Division, Northern Territory Treasury; ABS population estimates (ABS Cat. No.3218.0.55.001) and Tourism NT unpublished data.

On the basis of these figures, the PCAC for NT residents aged 15 years and above is approximately 14.6 litres,¹⁶ substantially higher than the national figure of 10.3 litres.¹⁷ Over the period 2000/01 to 2004/05 the PCAC in the NT was trending upwards before recent moderation. Nationally the PCAC estimate has remained relatively stable (Figure 1).

What is the self-reported alcohol intake in the NT?

Recent population surveys that contain self-reported alcohol intake in the NT are the 2006 Northern Territory Alcohol Consumption and Related Attitudes Household Survey (NTACRAHS),¹⁴ 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS),¹² and 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS).¹⁵

The 2006 NTACRAHS estimated that 55% of the urban NT population aged 18 and over drank regularly or recently (in the preceding week).¹⁴ Of these, 77.7% drank at a level below the National Health Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) recommendation that one or two days per week be alcohol free. However, on drinking days, the level of consumption was more than five standard drinks per day. It should be noted that the NHMRC guidelines have recently been revised.¹⁸

For the NT non-Indigenous population aged 18 years and above¹²

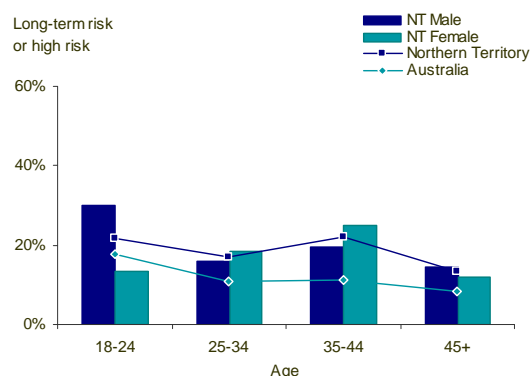
In 2007, it was estimated that 88.7% of NT non-Indigenous adults had consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months, compared with 84.6% of the rest of Australians. Of those who had consumed alcohol, 11.7% consumed alcohol daily, 48.2% weekly and 28.8% consumed alcohol on a less than weekly basis. NT men (16.4%) were more likely to drink daily than NT women (6.3%) and both are higher than rest of Australia (11.5% and 5.9% respectively). Conversely, more women (37.4%) than men (21.4%) reported drinking less than weekly.

The proportion of NT non-Indigenous persons who consumed alcohol varied across age groups. For both men and women the highest prevalence of drinking at least weekly was among those aged 35-44 years (76.3% and 55% respectively). Among men, 25.7% of those aged 45 or older drank alcohol on a daily basis.

Overall, the proportion of NT non-Indigenous alcohol drinkers was greater than the national average in all age groups.

The **long-term risk** associated with regular daily patterns of drinking, is defined by the total amount of alcohol typically consumed per week. In the 2007 NDSHS survey, 17.2% of NT non-Indigenous adults consumed alcohol in quantities that were considered risky or of high risk to health in the long-term.¹² Again these levels are considerably higher than the national average (10.6%).¹² Males (17.8%) were more likely than females (16.4%) to consume alcohol at risky or high risk levels. Men aged 18-24 years (30%) and women aged 35-44 years (24.8%) were more likely to consume alcohol at risky or high risk levels than other age groups (Figure 2).¹²

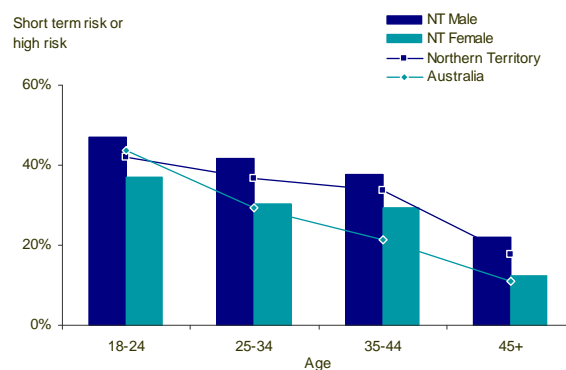
Figure 2: The proportion of non-Indigenous adults at risk or high risk^a of long term alcohol-related harm to health, Northern Territory and Australia, 2007



Notes: ^a For males, consumption of 29 or more standard drinks per week; and for females, consumption of 15 or more standard drinks per week. One standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol (equivalent to 12.5 mls of alcohol).

Source: 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (special tables).

Figure 3: The proportion of non-Indigenous adults at risk or high risk^a of short term alcohol related harm to health, Northern Territory and Australia, 2007.



Notes: ^a For males, consumption of 7 or more standard drinks on one occasion; and for females, consumption of 5 or more standard drinks on one occasion.

Source: 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (unpublished data).

The **short-term risk** associated with given levels of drinking on a single day assumes that overall drinking patterns remain within the levels set for long-term risk. In the NT, 28.7% of non-Indigenous adults were reported as drinking alcohol at a risky or high risk level for harm in the short term.¹² This was greater than the national average (20.4%). Overall, one in three NT non-Indigenous males (33%) and almost one in four females (23.6%) are at risk of short-term alcohol related harm (Figure 3).¹²

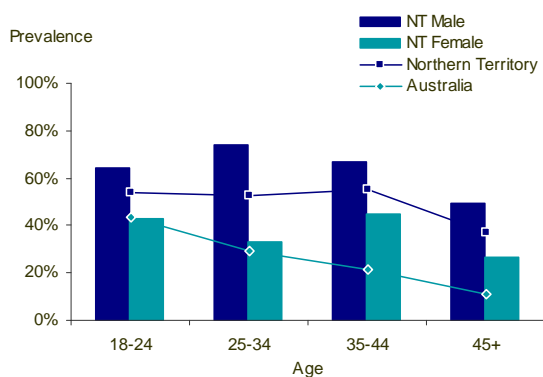
For the NT Indigenous population aged 18 years and above^{14,15}

The 2006 NT Alcohol Consumption and Related Attitudes Household Survey (NTACRAHS) results found that while fewer NT Indigenous than non-Indigenous people aged 18 years and over consumed alcohol, Indigenous drinkers consumed more than their non-Indigenous counterparts.¹⁴

The 2008, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) reported:¹⁵

- About half of NT Indigenous adults (49.2%) had consumed alcohol in the previous year
- Nearly two-thirds (63.5%) of Indigenous men reported having consumed alcohol in previous year compared to 2 in 5 (36.2%) women.
- The highest proportions of alcohol drinkers were in the age groups, 25-34 years for men (74%) and 35-44 years for women (45%).
- Overall, the prevalence of alcohol consumption among NT Indigenous people is much higher than national Indigenous average for all persons (Figure 4).

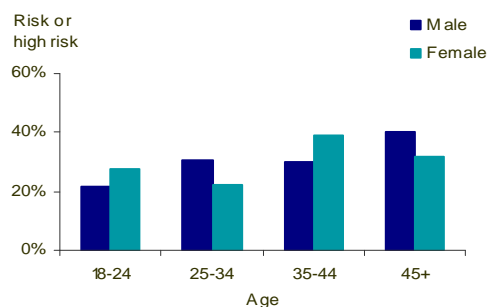
Figure 4: Prevalence of alcohol consumption among Indigenous adults by age group and sex, Northern Territory and Australia,^a 2008



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008 [data available on request].¹⁵ Source: ^a 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (special tables).

Among adults who consumed alcohol, 30.1% reported drinking alcohol at a risky or high risk level. Men in the age group 45 years and above (40%) and women in the age group 35-44 (39%) were more likely to consume alcohol at risky or high risk level than other age groups (Figure 5).¹⁵

Figure 5: The proportion of Indigenous adults at risky/high risk^a levels of alcohol consumption by age group and sex, Northern Territory



^a Measures based on amount of alcohol consumed in a single day and frequency of consumption in last 12 months. For males, 50 mls and above (4 and above standard drinks) and females, 25 mls and above (2 and above standard drinks).

Table 1: Prevalence of risky^a and high risk^b level of alcohol consumption among Indigenous adults by remoteness, Northern Territory, 2008

	Remote ¹	Non-remote ²	Northern Territory
Alcohol prevalence			
Male	60.0%	77.4%	63.5%
Female	31.4%	56.0%	36.2%
Persons	45.0%	66.4%	49.2%
% alcohol consumed at risky level^a			
Male	14.1%	22.7%	16.2%
Female	22.8%	21.2%	22.3%
Persons	17.3%	22.0%	18.6%
% alcohol consumed alcohol at high risk level^b			
Male	14.8%	10.4%	13.7%
Female	7.6%	8.9%	8.0%
Persons	12.2%	9.7%	11.5%

Notes: ^a Level of drinking at which risk of harm is significantly increased beyond any possible benefits - for males, 50 to 75 mls and above (4 to 6 standard drinks) and for females, 25 to 50 mls (2 to 4 standard drinks) per day ^b Level of drinking at which there is substantial risk of serious harm, and above which risk continues to increase rapidly - for males, more than 75 mls (more than 6 standard drinks) per day and for females, more than 50 mls (4 standard drinks) per day. Measures based on amount of alcohol consumed in a single day and frequency of consumption in last 12 months.

¹Remote (includes Remote and Very Remote) and ²non-remote (includes Major Cities, Inner and Outer Regional Area) based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA).

Alcohol prevalence among Indigenous people living in remote and non-remote area differed significantly.

- Remote area Indigenous residents (45%) were less likely to consume alcohol than non-remote residents (66.4%).¹⁵

- Of those who consumed alcohol, the level of risk differed by gender. In remote areas, Indigenous women were more likely (22.8%) to consume alcohol at risky levels than Indigenous men (14.1%). In non-remote areas, the consumption at risky levels is similar for Indigenous men and women (22.7% and 21.2%, respectively).¹⁵
- Conversely, more Indigenous men in remote area consumed alcohol (14.8%) at high risk level than in non-remote area (10.4%), and Indigenous women in remote areas (7.6%) were less likely to consume alcohol at high risk level than in non-remote areas (8.9%).¹⁵

Alcohol consumption in pregnancy

From 2003 to 2006, approximately one in eight Indigenous pregnant women and nearly one in twelve non-Indigenous pregnant women reported consuming alcohol at the time of their first antenatal visit (Table 2).¹⁹⁻²² By 36 weeks, the proportion of women consuming alcohol had fallen in both populations, by approximately 40% among Indigenous women to between 8.0 and 8.7%, and by approximately 60% in non-Indigenous to between 3.6 and 4.7%.

Table 2: Proportion of pregnant women reporting alcohol consumption at first antenatal visit, Northern Territory (2003-2006)

	2003 ¹	2004 ²	2005 ³	2006 ⁴
% alcohol consumption at first antenatal visit				
Indigenous	11.9	11.8	13.0	14.4
non-Indigenous	9.1	9.6	8.1	8.1
NT total	10.1	10.3	9.7	10.4
% alcohol consumption at 36 weeks gestation				
Indigenous	8.0	8.0	8.7	8.4
Non-Indigenous	4.2	4.7	3.6	3.8
NT total	5.5	5.9	5.4	5.4

Source: ¹⁻³Zhang X et al. Northern Territory Midwives' Collection. Mothers and Babies: 2003, 2004 and 2005. Department of Health and Families: Darwin, 2009. ⁴Tew K, Zhang X, Northern Territory Midwives' Collection. Mothers and Babies 2006. Department of Health and Families: Darwin, 2010.

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