

Foundation for Alcohol
Research and Education
**Alcohol harms in NSW:
What to expect this summer**
December 2012



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About the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is an independent charitable organisation working to prevent the harmful use of alcohol in Australia. Our mission is to help Australia change the way it drinks by:

- helping communities to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms;
- building the case for alcohol policy reform; and
- engaging Australians in conversations about our drinking culture.

Over the last ten years FARE has invested more than \$115 million, helped 750 organisations and funded over 1,400 projects addressing the harms caused by alcohol misuse.

FARE is guided by the World Health Organisation's Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol for addressing alcohol-related harms through population-based strategies, problem-directed policies, and direct interventions.

Executive summary

Over the summer months, there is an increase in alcohol-related harms in Australia.¹ Summer includes a number of public holidays which are associated with increased alcohol consumption such as Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Years Day and Australia Day. The warmer months of the year are also peak times for alcohol-related assaults, family incidents, motor vehicle accidents and hospital presentations.²

This report seeks to estimate the alcohol-related harms that will occur in the summer of 2012-13 in New South Wales (NSW). The analysis uses available NSW Government data to determine the projections for a range of alcohol-related harms including assaults, domestic violence, road traffic accidents, hospitalisations and deaths.

Based on the analysis, in NSW over the three month period commencing 1 December 2012 to 28 February 2013, it is projected that there will be 7,883 alcohol-related assaults, including 3,086 alcohol-related domestic violence assaults. On NSW roads there will be 15 fatalities and 215 injuries from road traffic accidents where alcohol is involved.

Alcohol use and misuse will also impact significantly on the NSW health system with 4,474 treatment episodes where alcohol is the principal drug of concern and 12,352 alcohol-related hospitalisations. Most concerning is that over the summer of 2012-13 it is forecast that 306 people will die from alcohol-related deaths.

Awareness of these harms is important for decision makers who are responsible for developing policies aimed at reducing the alcohol-related harms across NSW. Evidence-based policies to address alcohol-related harms are needed to ensure that harms from alcohol consumption are prevented in the future.

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The Approach

Government data sources were analysed to gain information on alcohol-related harms in NSW. The data sources identified were Health Statistics NSW, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOSCAR), Transport for NSW and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

From the analysis of these datasets, information on a range of alcohol-related harms was ascertained including:

- Alcohol-attributable deaths
- Alcohol-attributable hospitalisations
- Alcohol-related assaults, including alcohol-related domestic violence
- Treatment episodes where alcohol is the principal drug of concern, and
- Road vehicle accidents where alcohol was involved.

In order to isolate the data specific to the summer months, two approaches were used. First for information that was available on a monthly basis, calculations were made for the harms from alcohol that occurred in the summer months January, February and December of the most recent year of data available.

Where a monthly figure was not available, a seasonal average was calculated by dividing the annual figures into quarters. These figures would be more conservative given that where monthly data breakdowns are available alcohol-related harms peak during the summer months.

Findings

Data were gained from four sources which provided nine different measures of alcohol-related harms in NSW. The table below outlines the original data sources and alcohol-related harms identified.

Source	Alcohol-related harms
Health statistics NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Alcohol-attributable deathsAlcohol-attributable hospitalisations
BOCSAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Alcohol-related assaultsAlcohol-related domestic violenceAlcohol-related assaults on police
AIHW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Treatment episodes where alcohol is the principal drug of concern
Transport for NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Road vehicle accidents where alcohol was involvedRoad vehicle accidents where alcohol was involved and resulted in fatalityRoad vehicle accidents where alcohol was involved and resulted in injury

Alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations

Over the 2012-13 summer in NSW, it is projected that there will be:

- 12,352 hospitalisations attributable to alcohol, and
- 306 alcohol-related deaths.

Alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations were sourced from Health Statistics NSW, an open data web portal managed by NSW Ministry of Health. Alcohol-attributable death and hospitalisation estimates use age and sex-specific aetiologic fractions developed by Begg, Voss and Barker for the AIHW and published in *The burden of disease and injury in Australia*.³

Alcohol-attributable deaths

Health Statistics NSW mortality figures are based on the information contained in death certificates. Although Health Statistics NSW do not state what the most common causes of alcohol-related deaths are, other sources have stated that the most common cause of death due to risky drinking in Australia is liver cirrhosis.⁴

The latest available figures show that there were a total of 1,224 alcohol-attributable deaths in NSW in 2007.⁵ Given that there was no monthly breakdown for alcohol-attributable deaths, a seasonal average was calculated for the projected summer forecast. The NSW seasonal average for alcohol-related deaths in 2007 was 306 deaths.

Alcohol-attributable hospitalisations

Hospitalisation statistics include both overnight and day-only hospitalisations, but statistics do not include emergency department attendances. Health Statistics NSW do not detail the types of alcohol-related hospitalisations that are most common. However, other research on alcohol-attributable hospitalisations has reported that the leading cause of alcohol-related hospitalisations was alcohol dependence.⁶

The latest available figures show that there were a total of 49,409 alcohol-attributable hospitalisations in NSW in 2010-11. A monthly breakdown was not available for this figure; therefore a seasonal average was calculated for hospitalisations for the summer of 2010-11. The seasonal average for alcohol-attributable hospitalisations was 12,352.⁷

Alcohol-related assaults

Over the 2012-13 summer in NSW, it is projected that there will be:

- **7,883 alcohol-related assaults**
- **3,086 were alcohol-related domestic-violence assaults, and**
- **464 alcohol-related assaults on police.**

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOSCAR) provided FARE with a monthly breakdown of alcohol-related assaults from 2005 to 2011. From the statistics provided by BOSCAR a summer figure was calculated based on the alcohol-related assaults that occurred in January, February and December of 2011.

Alcohol-related assaults

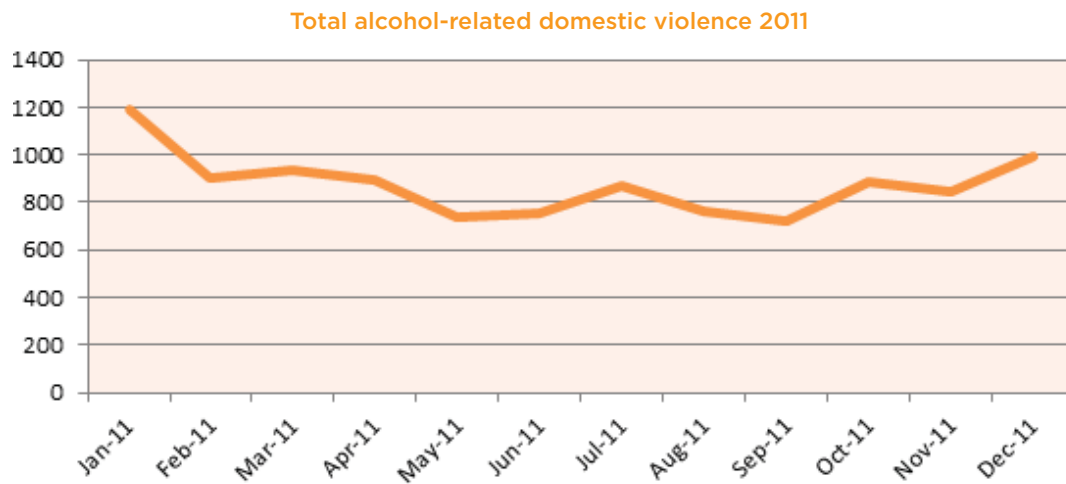
In 2011, there were a total of 27,404 alcohol-related assaults. Alcohol-related assaults in the summer months of 2011 accounted for 43 per cent of all summer assaults. There were 7,883 alcohol-related assaults in the summer months, compared to 6,265 alcohol-related assaults occurring in the winter months.⁸



Source: BOSCAR Number of incidents of assault recorded by the NSW Police Force by whether they were alcohol related from 2005 to 2011

Alcohol-related domestic violence

There were a total of 10,490 alcohol-related domestic violence assaults in 2011. Of the 7,889 alcohol-related assaults that occurred in the summer months of 2011, 3,086 were domestic-violence assaults.⁹ Alcohol-related domestic violence assaults peak in the month of January. This January peak has been consistent over the past six years.

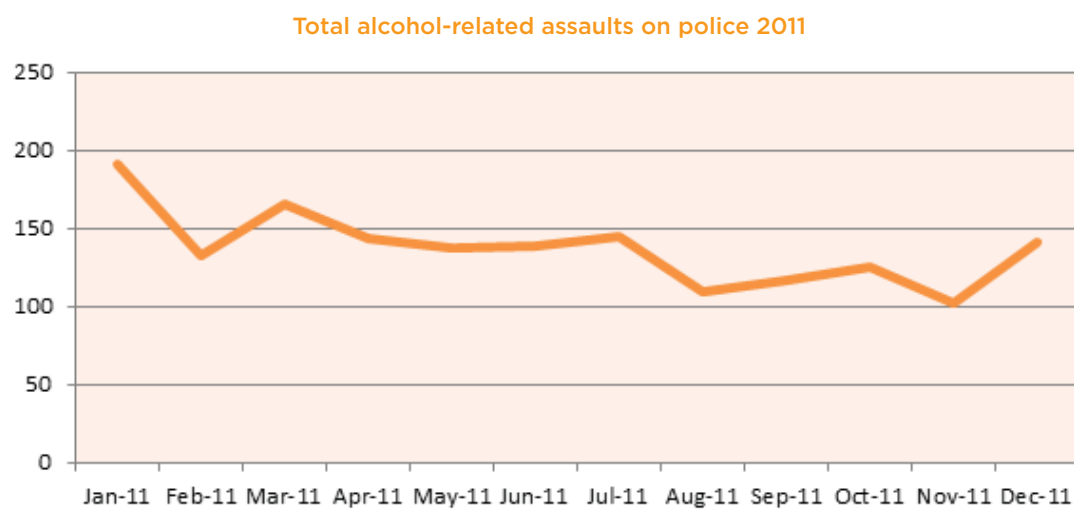


Source: BOSCAR Number of incidents of assault recorded by the NSW Police Force by whether they were alcohol related from 2005 to 2011

Alcohol-related assaults on police

There were a total of 1,649 alcohol-related assaults on police in 2011. Of the 7,889 alcohol-related assaults in the summer months of 2011, there were 464 alcohol-related assaults on police.¹⁰

The monthly data provided by BOSCAR demonstrates that there was a peak in alcohol-related assaults in the summer months across all categories of assaults recorded by NSW Police in 2011.



Source: BOSCAR Number of incidents of assault recorded by the NSW Police Force by whether they were alcohol related from 2005 to 2011

Treatment episodes where alcohol is principal drug of concern

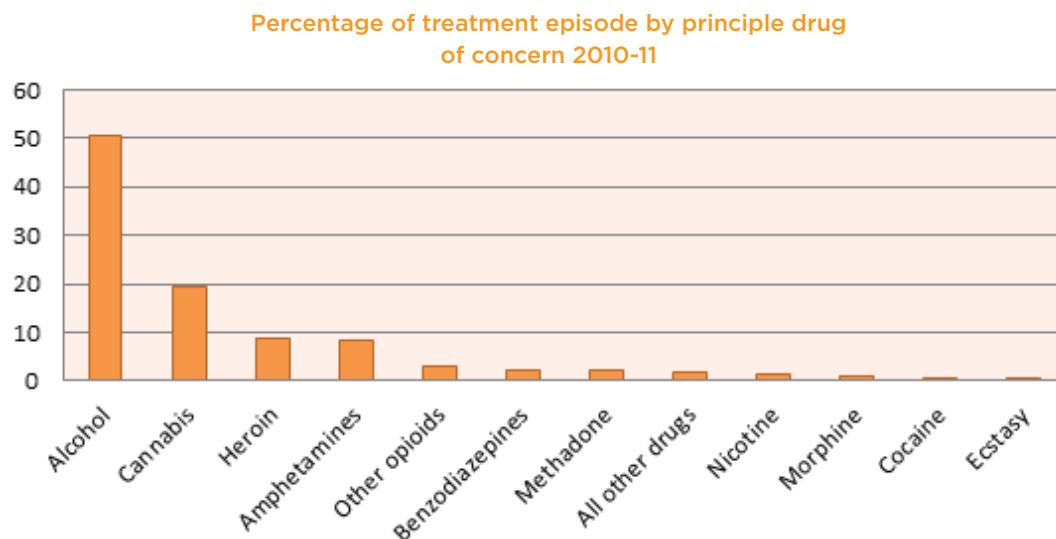
Over the 2012-13 summer in NSW, it is projected that there will be:

- 4,474 treatment episodes where alcohol is the principal drug of concern, and
- This accounts for 50 per cent of all alcohol and drug treatment episodes.

Each year the AIHW report on the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set. The report publishes data about alcohol and other drug treatment services, consumers accessing the services, drugs of concern and the types of treatment received. From this source, treatment episodes where alcohol is the principal drug of concern in NSW were identified.

These treatment episodes are defined as “a period of contact, with defined dates of commencement and cessation, between a client and treatment agency”¹¹ where alcohol is the main substance which led them to seek treatment.¹²

In 2010-11, there were 17,894 treatment episodes where alcohol was the principal drug of concern. This accounted for 50 per cent of all treatment episodes.¹³ Given that a monthly breakdown was not reported, a seasonal average was taken for the summer of 2010-11. The NSW seasonal average for treatment episodes where alcohol was the principal drug of concern was 4,474.¹⁴



Source: AIHW Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2010-11: report on the National Minimum Data Set

Road vehicle accidents

Over the 2012-13 summer in NSW, it is projected that there will be:

- 215 road vehicle accidents resulting in injury, and
- 15 road vehicle accidents where alcohol is involved resulting in fatalities.

Transport for NSW publishes data each year on road vehicle accidents that occur on NSW roads. The statistical statement on motor vehicle accidents for the year ending 31 December 2010 was used to determine the number of road vehicle accidents which involved alcohol.

For the purposes of classifying the degree of road vehicle accidents, the report defines a fatal accident where it results in at least one death, while injury is classified as a non-fatal crash where at least one person is injured.¹⁵

Fatal road vehicle crashes where alcohol was involved

There was a total of 58 fatal road vehicle accidents in 2010 where alcohol was involved. Given that there was no monthly breakdown available a seasonal average was taken to ascertain figures for the summer period. This equates to a seasonal average of 15 fatal road vehicle crashes where alcohol was involved for the summer of 2010.

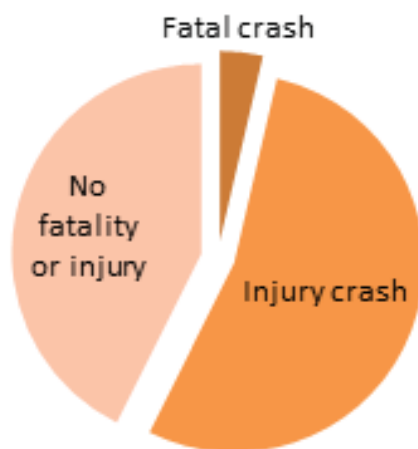
Injury road vehicle crashes where alcohol was involved

There was a total of 858 road vehicle crashes in 2010 which resulted in injuries and involved alcohol. The seasonal average was taken from this total figure, which equates to 215 road vehicle crashes resulting in injury per season in 2010 that involved alcohol.

Road vehicle crashes where alcohol is involved with no fatalities or injuries

There were 681 road vehicle crashes in 2010 where alcohol was involved but resulted in no deaths or injuries. The seasonal average was taken from this total figure, which equates to 170 road vehicle crashes that involved alcohol but led to no injury or death per season in 2010.

Road vehicle crashes where alcohol was involved 2010



Source: Centre of Road Safety (2011). Road traffic crashes in New South Wales, statistical statement for the year ended 31 December 2010

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⁴ Pascal, R., Chikritzhs, T. and Jones, P. (2009). Trends in estimated alcohol attributable deaths and hospitalisations in Australia, 1996-2005. National Alcohol Indicators, Bulletin No.12. Perth: National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology.

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⁷ Health Statistics New South Wales (2012). Alcohol attributable hospitalisations by sex, NSW 1998-99 to 2010-11. NSW Government. Available at: http://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/Indicator/beh_alcafhos

⁸ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2012). Number of incidents of assault recorded by the NSW Police Force by whether they were alcohol related from 2005 to 2011. Statistics provided by BOSCAR.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012). Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2010-11: report on the National Minimum Data Set. Drug treatment series no. 18. Cat. no. HSE 128. Canberra: AIHW

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Centre of Road Safety (2011). Road traffic crashes in New South Wales, statistical statement for the year ended 31 December 2010. Transport for NSW: Sydney.



PO Box 19,
Deakin West ACT 2600

Level 1, 40 Thesiger Court
Deakin ACT 2600

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