

Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia

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Health Omnibus Survey 2017: a summary of the results
relating to alcohol consumption

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Health Omnibus Survey 2017: a summary of the results relating to alcohol consumption

This Bulletin is the 16th in a series providing the most up-to-date data available on the prevalence of alcohol and other drug use, the harms associated with use, and alcohol and other drug treatment services in South Australia.

The Health Omnibus Survey (HOS) is an annual survey of a representative sample of South Australian residents, which collects data that can be used to plan, monitor and evaluate health programs and other initiatives in South Australia. Information gathered for Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia (DASSA) focuses on alcohol consumption, including risky drinking¹.

In 2017, survey results were based on 2,977 face-to-face interviews conducted by Harrison Research between September and December 2017 in both metropolitan and regional South Australia. Approximately equal numbers of men ($N=1452$; 49%) and women ($N=1524$; 51%) participated in the survey, and the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents (2.9%) was representative of the South Australian population.

A total of 10 questions relating to alcohol consumption were included in the 2017 survey. Questions were adapted from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS)². The NDSHS questions were first included in the HOS in 2011; comparisons are therefore made from 2011 to 2017. Information on risky drinking is presented separately for single occasion and lifetime use, with comparisons made between 2011 and 2017, and between 2016 and 2017.

Summary of findings

Alcohol consumption: frequency

In 2017, 81% of South Australians aged 15 years and over had consumed alcohol at least once in the previous 12 months (46% drank at least weekly and 7.5% daily), and 19% were abstainers³. This has remained stable since 2011, although there are sex and age differences.

A greater proportion of men consumed alcohol than women (85% compared with 77%) and twice as many drink daily (10% compared with 5.1%). Daily drinking decreased among men between 2011 (12%) and 2016 (9.6%), but remained stable in 2017.

Older South Australians consumed alcohol more often than younger people, with at least weekly consumption in 2017 highest among those aged 40-49 years (56%), followed by those aged 50-59 years (52%). Daily drinking was highest among those aged 60 years and over (14%). In contrast, there has been an increase in South Australians aged 15-19 years who have never consumed alcohol (from 30% to 49%), as well as a decrease in the proportion of both 15-19 and 20-29 year olds who consume alcohol at least weekly (from 21% to 11%, and from 47% to 38%, respectively).

There has been an increase in South Australians aged 15-19 years who have never consumed alcohol, as well as a decrease in the proportion who consume at least weekly. South Australians aged 20-29 years also reduced their drinking frequency.

Alcohol consumption: quantity

For the majority (78%) of South Australians in 2017, quantities of alcohol *usually* consumed in a session fell within the national guidelines for consumption at levels that would not put them at risk of injury from a single drinking occasion (four drinks or less). Just over half (53%) of South Australians reported usually drinking quantities of alcohol that fell within the national guidelines for consumption at levels that would not put them at risk of disease or injury over a lifetime (two drinks or less on average).

Men consumed larger quantities of alcohol than women, with 28% usually drinking five drinks or more (14% of women). In addition, the proportion drinking larger quantities increased among those aged 40-49 years, from 17% to 25%. Although the youngest age group (15-19 years) was most likely to consume five drinks or more in 2017 (34%), this has decreased over time, from 51% in 2011.

South Australian men and young people drink larger quantities of alcohol, although this has decreased among 15-19 year old South Australians and increased among 40-49 year olds.

Risky drinking

In 2017, 25% of South Australians aged 15 years and over drank at levels that put them at risk of injury on a single occasion at least monthly, unchanged from both 2011 and 2016. A higher proportion of men (34%) than women (16%) drank at these levels at least monthly, but there was a decrease in men drinking at these levels at least weekly (from 22% in 2011 to 18% in 2017).

In 2017, 16% of South Australians aged 15 years and over drank at levels that put them at risk of injury or disease over a lifetime. Again, a higher proportion of men (24%) than women (7.8%) drank at these levels, but there was a decrease between 2011 and 2017 for men (from 29% to 24%).

A higher proportion of South Australian men drink at risky levels both on a single occasion of drinking and over a lifetime, but there have been decreases over time in both risk measures.

From 2011 to 2017, 20-29 year olds had the highest proportion drinking at risky levels at least monthly (ranging from 39% to 48%); In 2017 this was followed by those aged 40-49 years (32%). Risky drinking at least monthly has decreased between 2011 and 2017 among those aged 15-19 (from 29% to 15%) and 30-39 years (from 32% to 26%).

Single occasion risky drinking at least monthly in 2017 is highest among 20-29 and 40-49 year old South Australians, with a decrease over time for those age groups under 40 years.

In 2016 and 2017, the highest proportion of South Australians drinking at levels that put them at risk of injury or disease over a lifetime were aged 40-49 years (22% in 2017) and 50-59 years (20% in 2017). There were decreases in lifetime risk between 2011 and 2017 for those aged 15-19 years (from 15% to 3.7%), 20-29 years (from 24% to 14%), and 30-39 years (from 21% to 14%).

Lifetime risky drinking is more prevalent among South Australians aged 40-59 years, with a decrease among those aged less than 40 years.

Frequency of alcohol consumption⁴

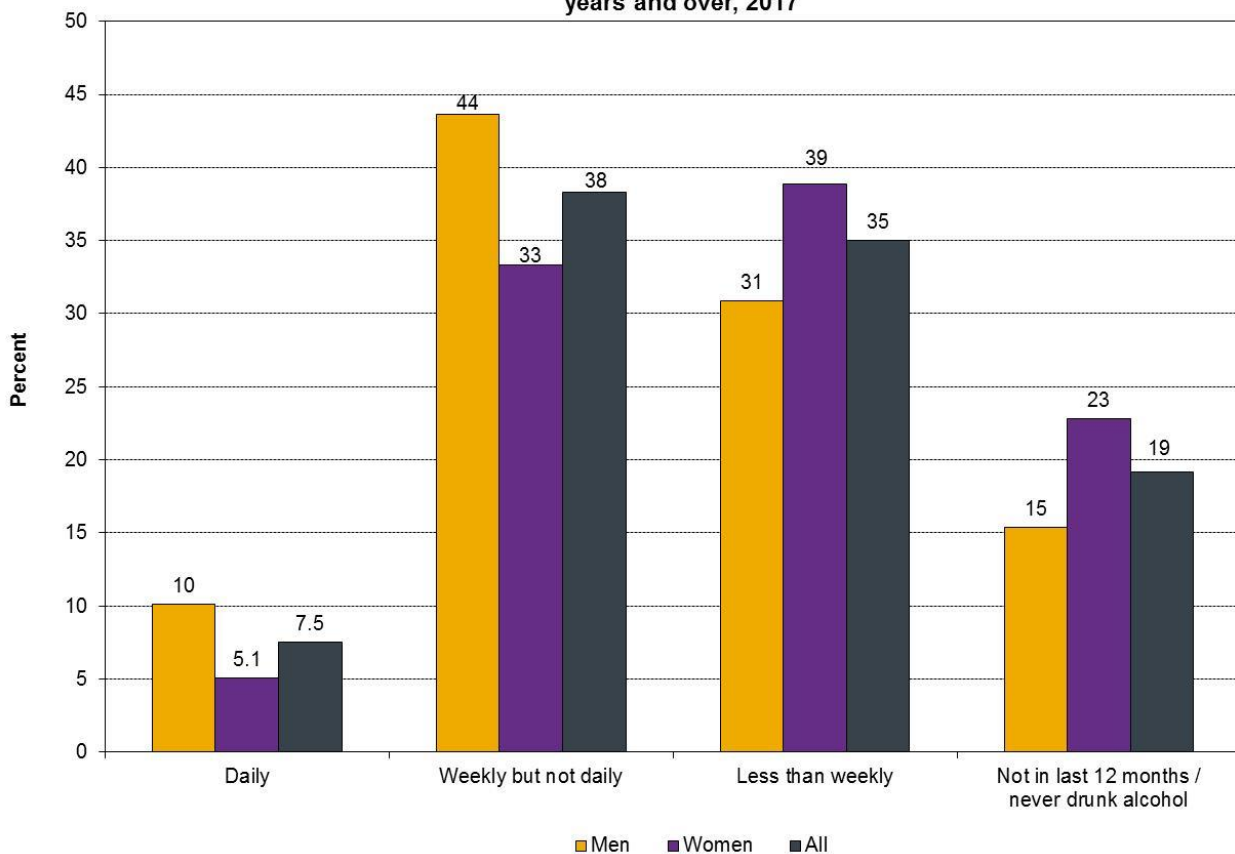
South Australian men consume alcohol more often; the significant decrease in daily drinking among men between 2011 and 2016 was not sustained in 2017.

In 2017, 81% of South Australians reported consuming alcohol in the last 12 months. This has remained relatively stable since data collection began in 2011 (79%), and similar to 2016 (80%). Just under half (46%) drank at least weekly; 7.5% daily (see Figure 1).

Almost one-fifth (19%) of South Australians in 2017 were abstainers: 61% were women and 58% were 40 years and over, with a median age of 47 years. Although there was a significant decrease between 2011 and 2015 in the proportion of women who abstained (from 25% to 21%), suggesting increased consumption among women, this was not maintained in 2016 and 2017 (both 23%).

A significantly higher proportion of men (85%) than women (77%) in 2017 reported consuming alcohol in the previous 12 months. Men were significantly more likely to consume alcohol at least once a week (54% compared with 38% of women), and twice as likely to drink daily (10% compared with 5.1% of women). The difference in drinking frequency between sexes was unchanged from previous years, and there were no significant changes in drinking frequency either between 2011 and 2017, or between 2016 and 2017, for both men and women.

Figure 1: Alcohol consumption in the previous 12 months among South Australians aged 15 years and over, 2017



Source: South Australian Health Omnibus Survey 2017

There has been an increase in South Australians aged 15-19 years who have never consumed alcohol, as well as a decrease in the proportion who consume at least weekly. South Australians aged 20-29 years also reduced their drinking frequency.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of South Australians in 2017 who reported consuming alcohol by age group. At least weekly (that is, including daily) consumption was highest among those aged 40-49 and 50-59 years (55% and 52%, respectively), and lowest among those aged 15-19 years (11%).

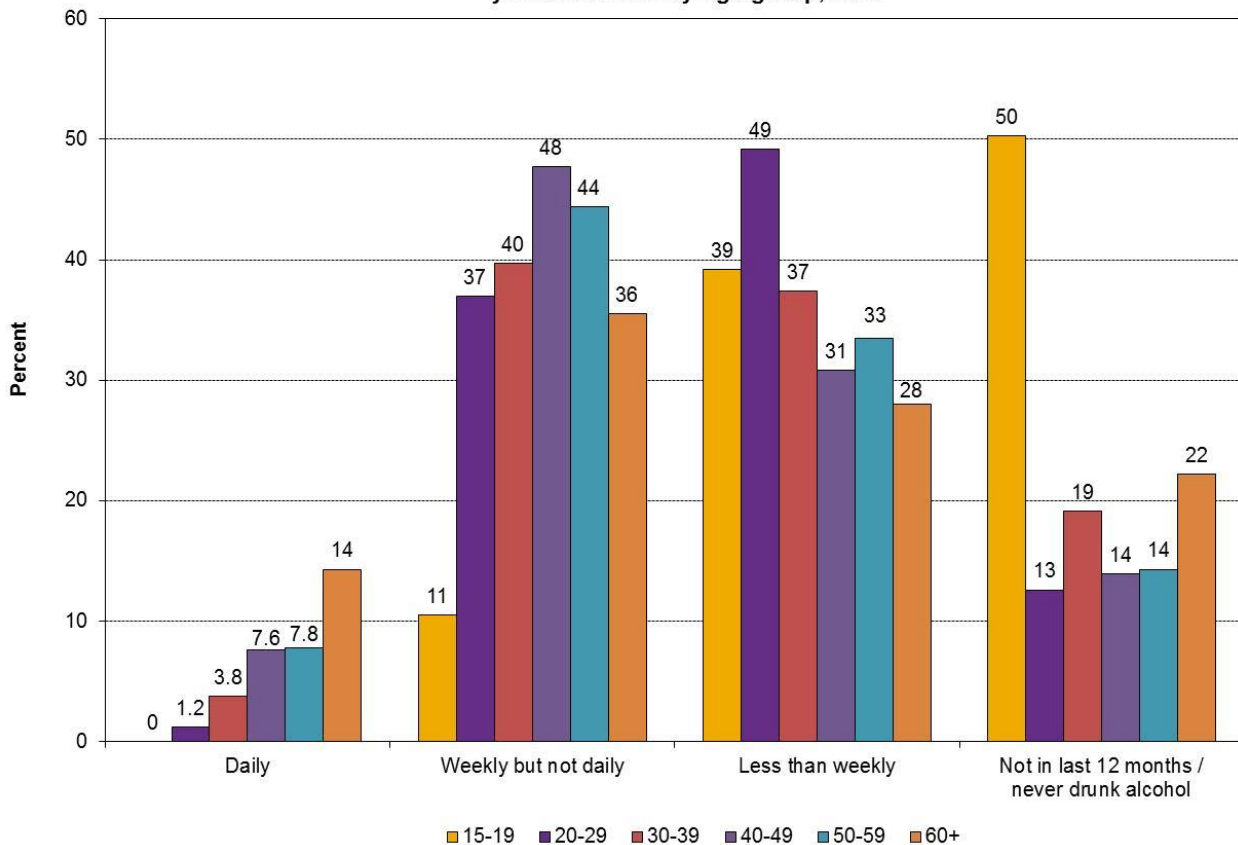
Between 2011 and 2017, there were significant changes in drinking frequency for those aged 15-19 years and 20-29 years. For the youngest age group, the proportion of abstainers increased from 38% to 50%. Conversely, the proportion decreased among those aged 20-29 years, from 17% to 13%. This translates to a significant decrease in at least weekly drinking among both age groups, from 21% to 11% among 15-19 year olds, and from 47% to 38% among 20-29 year olds, and increases in drinking less than weekly. In addition, there was a significant change in drinking frequency between 2016 and 2017 among those aged 15-19 years, with abstainers increasing from 34% to 50% (a 47 percent increase), and at least weekly drinking decreasing from 19% to 11%.

When comparing South Australians who had never consumed alcohol with those who had consumed in the last 12 months (that is, omitting ex-drinkers); there was a significant increase between 2011 and 2017 in the proportion of 15-19 year olds who had never consumed alcohol (from 30% to 49%), and a significant decrease among those aged 60 years and over (from 13% to 9.1%). The increase among 15-19 year olds was also significant between 2016 (30%) and 2017.

South Australians aged 50-59 years have reduced their daily drinking since 2011.

Daily drinking in 2017 was highest among those aged 60 years and over (14%), stable from 2016. There was a significant decrease between 2011 and 2017 in daily drinking among those aged 50-59 years (from 13% in 2011 to 7.8% in 2017), and a significant increase between 2016 and 2017 among those aged 30-39 years (from 1.3% to 3.8%). No 15-19 year olds reported daily drinking in 2017.

Figure 2: Alcohol consumption in the previous 12 months among South Australians aged 15 years and over by age group, 2017



Source: South Australian Health Omnibus Survey 2017

Quantity⁵ of alcohol consumption⁶

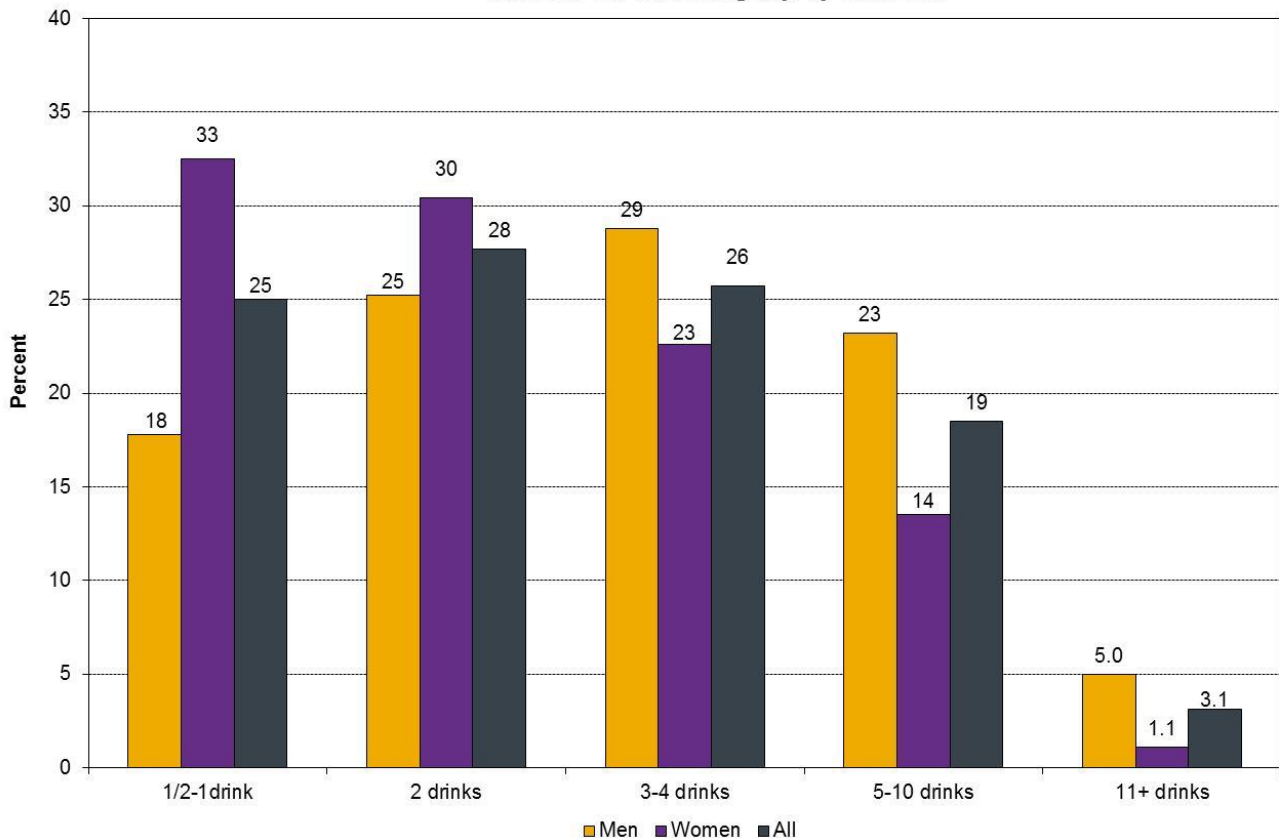
The majority of South Australians (78%) in 2017 reported that they usually consumed between a half and four standard drinks on a day they drank; this has not changed since 2011.

South Australian men consume larger quantities of alcohol than South Australian women.

On a single drinking occasion, a significantly lower proportion of men (72%) than women (86%) reported *usually* having between a half and four standard drinks (Figure 3). Thus, 28% of men and 14% of women reported usually consuming five or more drinks on a day they drank (an amount that exceeds the national guidelines for consumption at levels that would not put them at risk of injury from a single drinking occasion⁷). In addition, 57% of men and 37% of women reported usually consuming three or more drinks a day (an amount that exceeds the national guidelines for consumption at levels that would not put them at risk of disease or injury over a lifetime).⁸

Of those who drank in the last 12 months, the majority (91%) reported having at least one alcohol-free day per week in the previous 12 months; 88% of men and 93% of women. This is unchanged from previous years.

Figure 3: Number of standard drinks usually consumed by South Australians aged 15 years and over on a drinking day, by sex, 2017



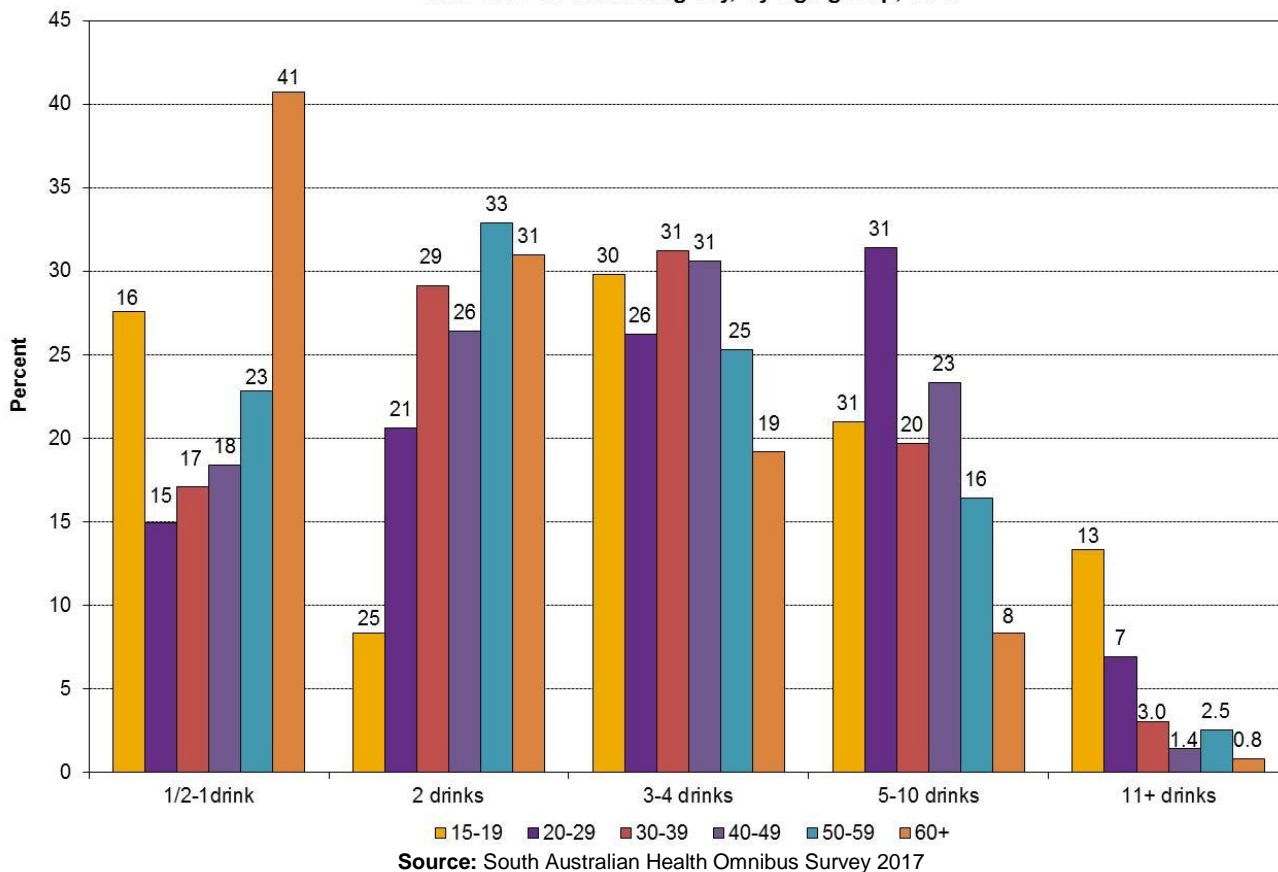
Source: South Australian Health Omnibus Survey 2017

Drinking larger quantities of alcohol decreased among 15-19 year old South Australians, and increased among 40-49 year old South Australians.

The proportion of South Australians who usually consumed four drinks or less on a single drinking occasion (within the guidelines) generally increased with age (see Figure 4). Almost two-thirds (66%) of those aged 15-19 years consumed four drinks or less, followed by 62% of those aged 20-29 years, and 77% of those aged 30-39 years. This decreased to 75% of those aged 40-49 years, followed by 81% of those aged 50-59 years. Ninety-one percent of those aged 60 years and over usually

consumed four drinks or less on a single drinking occasion. There was a significant decrease between 2011 and 2017 in the proportion consuming five or more drinks among those aged 15-19 years, from 51% to 34%, and a significant increase among those aged 40-49 years, from 17% to 25%. There were no significant changes among other age groups, and none between 2016 and 2017.

Figure 4: Number of standard drinks usually consumed by South Australians aged 15 years and over on a drinking day, by age group, 2017



Risky alcohol consumption – single occasion

Single occasion risky drinking at least monthly has remained stable over time among South Australian men and women, but single occasion risky drinking at least weekly has decreased among South Australian men.

In 2017, 25% of South Australians aged 15 years and over drank at levels that put them at risk of injury on a single occasion **at least monthly** (Figure 5). There was no change between 2011 and 2017 in the proportion of South Australians that reported drinking at levels that increased their risk of injury from a single occasion **at least once in the previous 12 months** (43% in both years). In 2017, men were significantly more likely to drink at these levels at least monthly (34% compared with 16% of women).

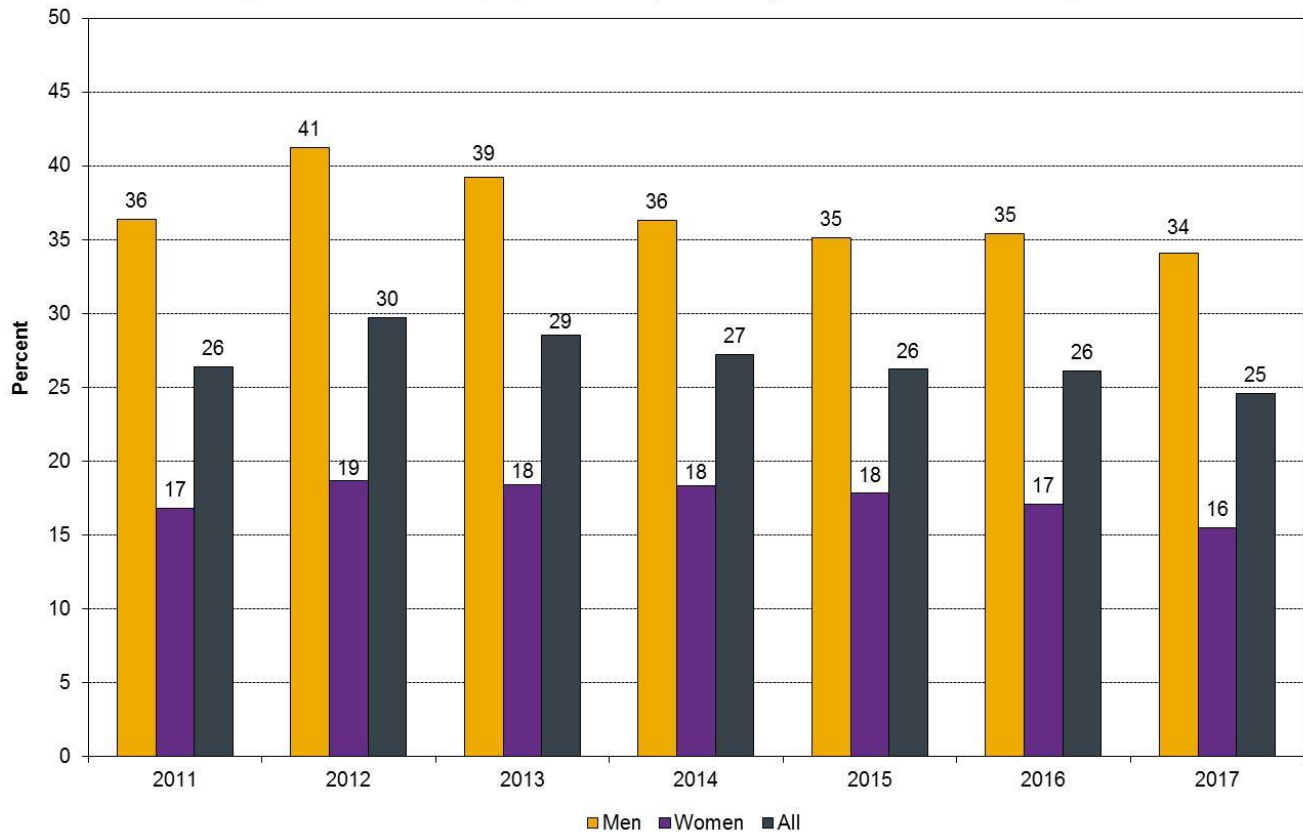
While single occasion risk at least monthly has fluctuated, there was a significant decrease between 2011 and 2016 in the proportion that reported drinking at these levels **at least weekly**, from 14% to 11%. However, this was not significant between 2011 and 2017, with a small increase in at least weekly risky drinking in 2017 (12%).

As was found for all South Australians, single occasion risky drinking at least monthly did not change significantly among men between 2011 (36%) and 2017 (34%) or between 2016 (25%) and 2017. There was also no significant change in the proportion that drank at these levels at least yearly (from

55% in 2011 to 53% in 2017). However, there was a significant decrease between 2011 (22%) and 2017 (18%) in the proportion of men who reported drinking at these levels at least weekly.

There was no significant change among women between 2011 (17%) and 2017 (16%) or between 2016 (17%) and 2017 in the proportion that reported drinking at these levels that at least monthly. There was also no significant change in the proportion that drank at these levels at least yearly (34% in both 2011 and 2017) or at least weekly (from 6.7% in 2011 to 6.5% in 2017).

Figure 5: The proportion of South Australians aged 15 years and over who drank at levels that put them at risk of injury from a single drinking occasion at least monthly, 2011-2017



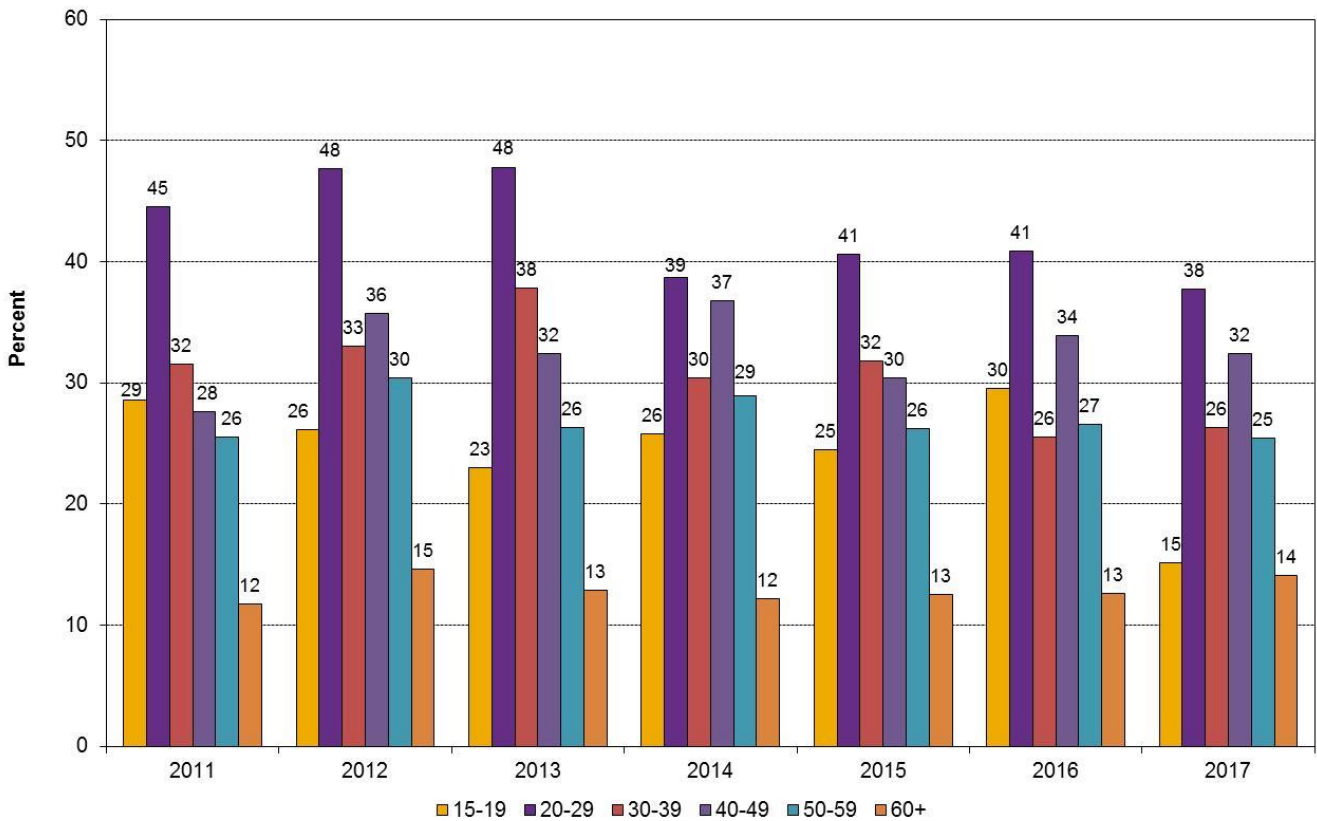
Source: South Australian Health Omnibus Survey 2011-2017

Single occasion risky drinking at least monthly is highest among 20-29 and 40-49 year old South Australians, with a decrease over time for those aged 15-19, 20-29 and 30-39 years.

Figure 6 shows that in all seven years (2011 to 2017), the group with the highest proportion drinking at risky levels at least monthly was aged 20-29 years (ranging from 38% to 48%). In 2017 this was followed by those aged 40-49 (32%) and 30-39 (26%) years. The groups with the lowest proportion in 2017 were aged 60 years or over (14%) and 15-19 (15%). This differs from previous years, where the proportion of 15-19 year olds drinking at these levels was much higher, ranging from 23% to 30%.

Although 20-29 year olds had the highest proportion that drank at risky levels at least monthly, there has been a significant decrease among this group since its peak in 2012 (48%), to 38% in 2017. However, there was no change between 2016 (41%) and 2017. Between 2011 and 2017, there were significant decreases in risky drinking at least monthly among those aged 15-19 (from 29% to 15%) and 30-39 (from 32% to 26%) years. Drinking at risky levels at least monthly also decreased significantly among 15-19 year olds between 2016 (30%) and 2017 (15%), and drinking at risky levels at least weekly between 2011 and 2017 (from 13% to 5.3%). There were no changes among older South Australians.

Figure 6: The proportion of South Australians aged 15 years and over who drank at levels that put them at risk of injury from a single drinking occasion at least monthly, by age group, 2011-2017



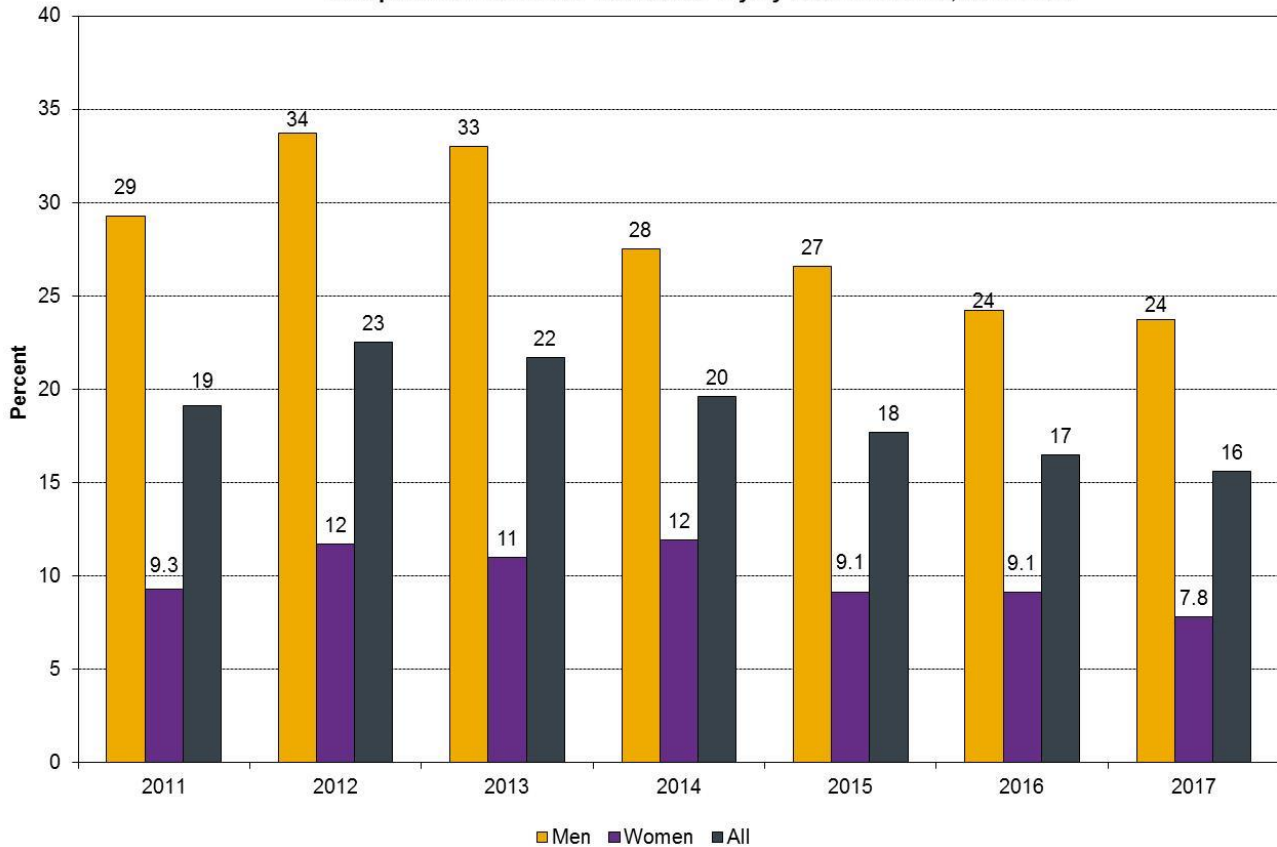
Source: South Australian Health Omnibus Survey 2011-2017

Risky alcohol consumption – lifetime

Lifetime risk has decreased significantly over time among South Australian men.

Figure 7 shows that in 2017, 16% of South Australians aged 15 years and over drank at levels that put them at risk of injury or disease over a lifetime. There was a significant increase between 2011 (19%) and 2013 (22%) for both men and women, followed by a return to 2011 levels in 2014 (20%). However, there has been a significant decrease since data collection began, from 19% in 2011 to 16% in 2017. Lifetime risky drinking also decreased significantly among men (29% to 24%) but not women (9.3% to 7.8%). There were no changes between 2016 and 2017.

Figure 7: The proportion of South Australians aged 15 years and over who drank at levels that put them at risk of disease or injury over a lifetime, 2011-2017



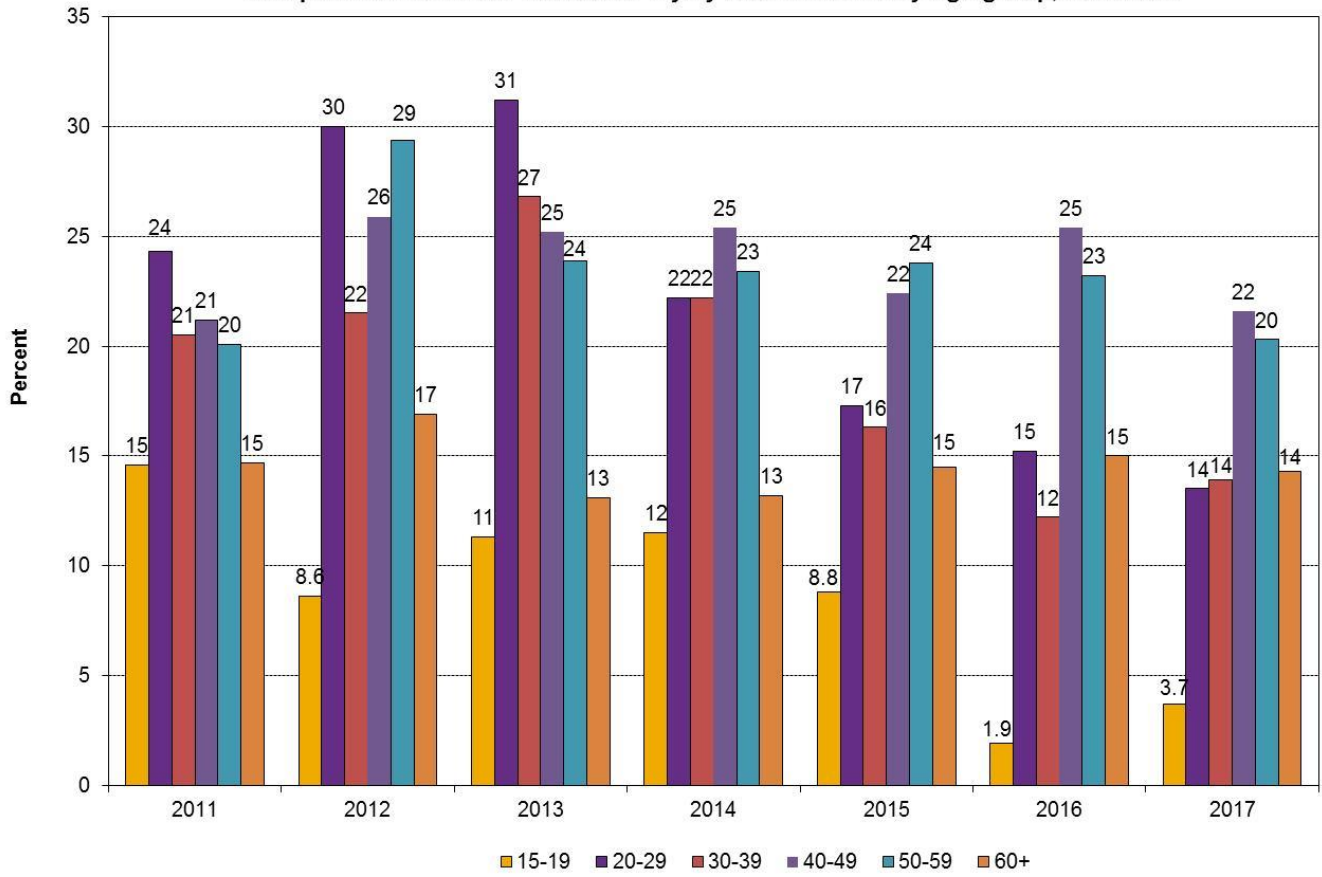
Source: South Australian Health Omnibus Survey 2011-2017

Lifetime risky drinking is highest among 40-49 and 50-59 year old South Australians, with a decrease among those aged less than 40 years.

Figure 8 shows that from 2011-2013, the group with the highest proportion drinking at levels that put them at risk of injury or disease over a lifetime was aged 20-29 years (ranging from 24% in 2011 to 31% in 2013). However, by 2017 the proportion had decreased significantly, to 14%.

From 2014 to 2017, the highest proportion drinking at these levels were aged 40-49 (22% in 2017) and 50-59 (20% in 2017) years. There were significant decreases in lifetime risk between 2011 and 2017 for those aged 15-19 (from 15% to 3.7%), 20-29 (from 24% to 14%), and 30-39 (from 21% to 14%) years. There were no changes among the other age groups, or between 2016 and 2017.

Figure 8: The proportion of South Australians aged 15 years and over who drank at levels that put them at risk of disease or injury over a lifetime by age group, 2011-2017



Source: South Australian Health Omnibus Survey 2011-2017

For more information

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Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia acknowledges the contribution of Kamalesh Venugopal, Principal Statistician, Knowledge Translation & Strategy, Prevention & Population Health, SA Department of Health and Ageing, for his ongoing statistical assistance and advice.

1 Statistical tests include: The Pearson chi-squared statistic and linear regression. The Pearson chi-squared is corrected for the survey design with the second-order correction of Rao & Scott (1984: On chi-squared tests for multi-way contingency tables with cell proportions estimated from survey data. *Annals of Statistics* 12: 46-60) and is converted into an F statistic. Statistical significance was accepted at $p < 0.05$. All figures presented in this report are rounded to one decimal place in graphs and to zero decimal places in the text unless values fall below 10%. Two types of analyses are carried out on the risky drinking data: (1) Two-level ordinal variable: 'not risky at least monthly' and 'risky at least monthly' for single occasion risk, and 'no risk' 'risk' for lifetime risk; (2) Multi-level ordinal variables that include all levels of risk, including abstainers. Analyses on alcohol quantity and frequency are based on both multi-level ordinal variables: five for quantity and 11 for frequency, as well as more specific comparisons ('four drinks or less' vs 'five drinks or more' for quantity, and 'abstainers' vs 'less than weekly' vs 'at least weekly', 'any alcohol use' vs 'abstainers', 'never drank alcohol' vs 'drank alcohol' for frequency). For age and sex breakdowns, unless otherwise stated, comparisons are as stated above for the total sample. When statistically significant results are described as an overall trend or association, where all data from 2011-2017 are included, comparisons over time are made between 2011 vs 2017, and 2016 vs 2017 only.

2 The NDSHS is conducted triennially by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) since 1995. The survey provides information on drug use patterns, attitudes and behaviours among South Australians aged 12 years and over. Go to <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illicit-use-of-drugs/ndshs-2016-key-findings/contents/summary>.

3 Abstainers include both ex-drinkers who had not consumed alcohol in the last 12 months, or non-drinkers, who had never consumed alcohol.

4 'In the last 12 months, how often did you have an alcoholic drink of any kind?' (N=2977).

5 This section excludes participants who had not consumed alcohol in the last 12 months, or had never consumed alcohol.

6 'On a day that you drink, how many standard drinks do you usually have?' (N= 2406).

7 http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ds10-alcohol.pdf

8 *Ibid.*