

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 1 December 2021

Survey shows fewer Kiwis drinking alcohol and harmful drinking declines as ‘old dogs’ learn new tricks

Data in the newly released New Zealand Health Survey 2020/21 shows the number of New Zealanders who consumed alcohol in the past year has declined by 3.1% and is at its lowest in 10 years, says the NZ Alcohol Beverages Council (NZABC). In 2020/21, 78.5% of Kiwis chose to drink alcohol compared to 81.6% in the previous year.ⁱ The number of people who had a drink in the past year is declining, notably, adults aged 25-34 years (-4.8%), 45-54 years (-4.3%) and 65-74 years (-4.7%), and in the Māori population (-2.7%).

“Typically, it is the younger generation drinking less, but now we are seeing a positive shift in older people’s drinking behaviours, a group that hasn’t previously shown significant changes until now. Kiwis are making better decisions about alcohol based on their personal circumstances and lifestyle and the increase in no- and low-alcohol options available. As a result, our consumption is decreasing and below the OECD average, and hazardous drinking is declining,” says Bridget MacDonald, NZABC’s Executive Director.^{ii iii}

The survey also shows that hazardous drinking across the total population has declined slightly (-1.4%). It has decreased the most in the older generations: adults aged 35-44 years (-2.1%), 45-54 years (-4.2%), 65-74 years (-1.6%), and 75+ years (-1.7%). Hazardous drinking in the Māori population has also declined (-3.2%).

“It’s evident you can teach ‘old dogs’ new tricks, with older Kiwis taking the lead on reducing hazardous drinking. The majority of New Zealanders drink moderately and sensibly, and we’re drinking about 25% less than the 70s and 80s. But the downward trend in harmful drinking shows it is possible to make further changes to our drinking culture. Our own research shows that the older age group are embracing no- and low-alcohol drinks, and those who choose to drink full-strength beverages are drinking them in a more moderate and mindful way,” says Bridget.^{iv}

“Young adults aged 18-24 years are part of the new generation of more sensible drinkers who are more likely to choose to drink smarter. Although the trend is that hazardous drinking is falling in this age group, it crept up 2.3% in the past year. It’s a timely reminder to think about ‘how’ and ‘what’ we are drinking. A good rule of thumb is ‘Go no, low or slow’ – it’s always okay to choose no alcohol, choose a drink that is low-alcohol, or simply sip and savour your drink slowly,” says Bridget.

“Alcohol can be enjoyed as part of a balanced lifestyle, but in these challenging pandemic times, we need to continue to make good choices to keep ourselves safe and social. Information and handy tips to help us make better drinking decisions can be found at [cheers.org.nz](https://www.cheers.org.nz) and [alcoholandme.org.nz](https://www.alcoholandme.org.nz),” says Bridget.

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Need help?

Call the Alcohol Drug Helpline on 0800 787 797, free txt 8681, or visit [alcoholdrughelp.org.nz](https://www.alcoholdrughelp.org.nz).

Need more information? Here are some handy tips for better drinking decisions

- Check out cheers.org.nz and alcoholandme.org.nz for more information on what a standard drink is and how to make better drinking decisions.
- A good rule of thumb is 'Go no, low or slow'. It's okay to choose no- or low-alcohol drinks. If you choose to drink, pace yourself and enjoy your drink slowly.
- Drink plenty of water, especially in between drinks stay hydrated, and eat if you are drinking.
- Support others to stay safe and social. Check in with family and friends to help them stay connected.
- Ministry of Health/HPA Guidelines: [Low-risk alcohol drinking advice](#) to reduce your long-term health risks by drinking no more than:
 - **Two** standard drinks **a day for women** and no more than **10** standard drinks **a week**,
 - **Three** standard drinks **a day for men** and no more than **15** standard drinks **a week**,
 - **AND** have at least **two alcohol-free days** every week.

CONTACT

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About NZABC

Formed in early 2018, the [NZ Alcohol Beverages Council](#) (NZABC) is a pan-industry group that speaks for those Kiwis who want to see a fair and balanced approach to alcohol attitudes, laws and regulation in New Zealand. At NZABC, we believe partnerships between local and central government, communities, and the alcohol sector, along with great education, are the best ways to reduce harm and maximise enjoyment from alcohol for everyone.

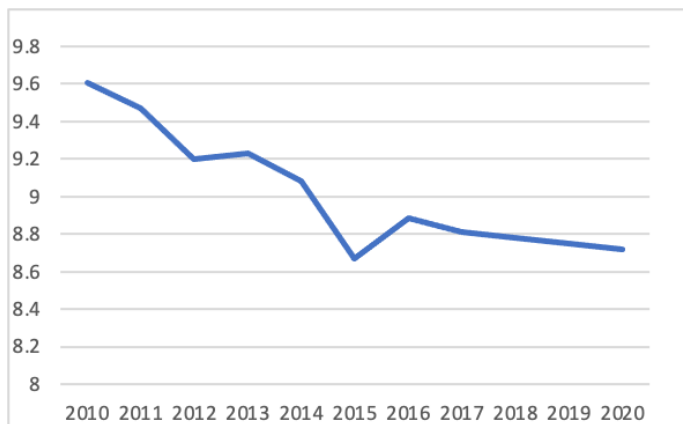
ⁱ *New Zealand Health Survey 2020/21*, 1 December 2021, <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/annual-update-key-results-2020-21-new-zealand-health-survey>

ⁱⁱ NZ Alcohol Beverages Council, *New Zealander's attitudes to alcohol research*, December 2020, poll of 1000 New Zealanders: 40% of respondents say they drink low-alcohol beverages.

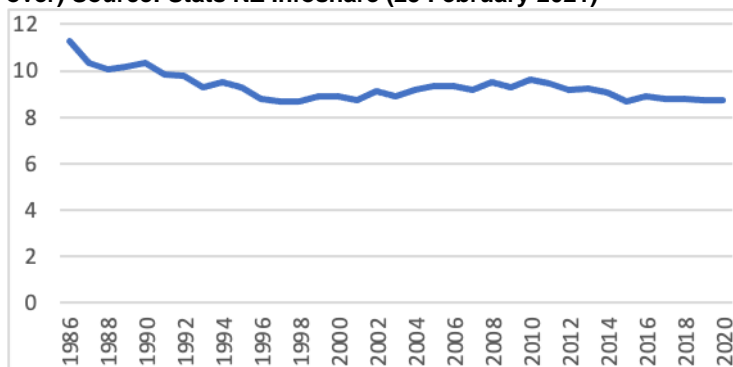
ⁱⁱⁱ StatsNZ Infoshare, Alcohol available for consumption to December 2020 (published 25 February 2021), <http://archive.stats.govt.nz/infoshare/>.

Alcohol available for consumption has been trending downward for a number of years. Data shows alcohol available for consumption was 8.719 litres per head of population (15 years and older) in December 2020 and 9.607 litres in 2010, resulting in a 9.2% decrease (see *graph 1 below*). There has been a 15.4% decrease since 1990 when it was 10.316 litres, and a 22.7% decrease since 1986 when the data was first collected where there was 11.282 litres per head of population (15 years and older) in December 2020 (see *graph 2 below*). **Note:** The per head of population (15 years and older) is the measure used by the OECD.

and over) Source: Stats NZ Infoshare (February 2021)

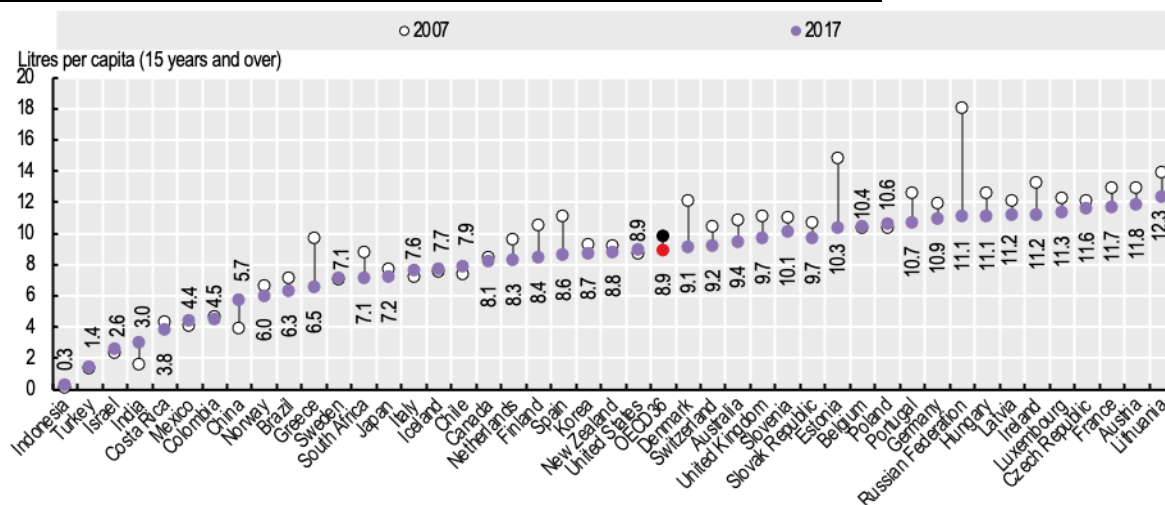


Graph 2. Litres of Alcohol Per Head of Population in New Zealand (Annual-December 1986-2020, 15 years and over) Source: Stats NZ Infoshare (25 February 2021)



OECD Alcohol Consumption, <https://data.oecd.org/healthrisk/alcohol-consumption.htm>. Alcohol consumption is defined as annual sales of pure alcohol in litres per person aged 15 years and older. The OECD average consumption is 8.9 litres/capita (aged 15 and over). New Zealand is at 8.8 litres/capita vs UK 9.7. See graph 3 below. Source: OECD Health Statistics, 2019. New Zealand figures as at 2018.

Graph 3. Litres of Alcohol Per Head of Population in New Zealand Recorded alcohol consumption among adults, 2007 and 2017 (or nearest year)



^{iv} NZ Alcohol Beverages Council, New Zealander's attitudes to alcohol research, December 2020, poll of 1000 New Zealanders: 62% saying they had a premium drink in the past year. Premiumisation is about choosing a quality drink

that may cost a little more, such as a craft beer, a fine wine, cocktail or a premium spirit or liqueur, and then taking a 'sip and savour' approach to enjoy the flavours and the experience of the drink in a slow and relaxed way. A discerning palate was the main reason for choosing a more expensive or premium drink, with 42% saying it was for taste. 40% said it was for a special occasion, and 16% for a quality drink. While 47% said they consumed a premium drink at the same speed as a regular drink, 42% said they drank a premium drink slower – only 3% said they drank it faster.