

# Research on older New Zealanders' alcohol use



## Very little is known about the role of alcohol in older people's lives.

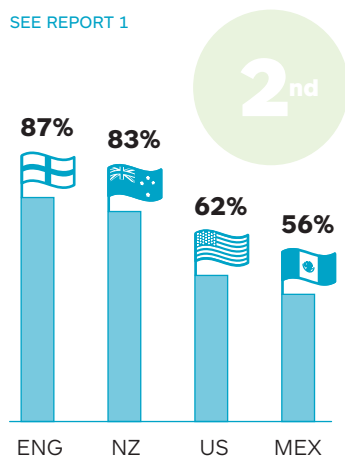
Massey University and the University of Auckland were funded through the Health Promotion Agency's Research Investments for Priorities in Alcohol (RIPA) Fund to look at the role of alcohol in older people's lives, patterns of alcohol use, and how the drinking patterns of older New Zealanders compare with eight other countries.

Data from the New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement Longitudinal Study (NZHWR) was used in this research. Older people were defined as 50+ years.

## International comparisons

New Zealand has the **second highest proportion** of older past-year drinkers (83%) behind England (87%), and considerably more than seven other countries such as the United States (62%) and Mexico (56%).

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## Lifespan patterns

Drinking patterns are **largely stable** across peoples' lifespan, with long periods of hazardous or non-hazardous drinking.

Going from non-hazardous to hazardous drinking or vice versa was usually triggered by a **single event** such as unemployment, relationship breakdown or developing a chronic health condition.

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## The first drink

**68%** of older drinkers had their first drink between the age of 14 and 18.

**88%** before the age of 23.

**4%** were lifetime abstainers.

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## Drinkers at risk

**13%** of older drinkers have alcohol consumption patterns that posed a serious and immediate risk to their health.

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## Hazardous drinking

Depending on what screening tool is used, between **35% and 40%** of older people are classified as hazardous drinkers (with co-morbidities, medication use and drinking-driving contributing to this increased risk).

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## Higher in men

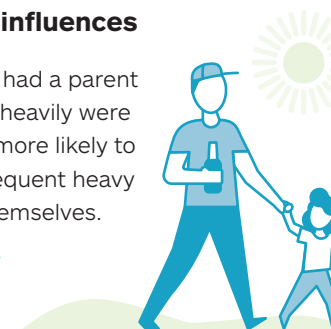
Hazardous drinking rates were higher among men, those with good economic living standards, and those in good physical health. Older Māori and non-Māori had similar hazardous drinking rates.

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## Parental influences

Those who had a parent who drank heavily were almost **5x** more likely to become frequent heavy drinkers themselves.

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## Want to know more?

The Health Promotion Agency has published the following reports:

1



### The drinking patterns of older New Zealanders: National and international comparisons

This research looked at drinking in older Māori and non-Māori New Zealanders and compared New Zealand's drinking rates against eight other countries (England, the United States, South Africa, China, Mexico, Ghana, India and the Russian Federation).



<https://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications/2017-the-drinking-patterns-of-older-new-zealanders-national-and-international-comparisons>

2



### The prevalence of hazardous drinking in older New Zealanders

This research looked at the prevalence of hazardous drinking in older adults using two screening tools: the standard AUDIT-C screen and the older adult specific CARET. It explored whether the adoption of an older adult specific assessment tool like the CARET could improve the screening of hazardous drinking in older adults.



<https://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications/prevalence-of-hazardous-drinking-in-older-new-zealanders>

3



### The longitudinal patterns of alcohol use in older New Zealanders

This report identified five distinct groups of older adults based on their drinking patterns. It then presented the different sociodemographic and health characteristics of these groups.



<https://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications/the-longitudinal-patterns-of-alcohol-use-in-older-new-zealanders>

4



### New Zealanders' alcohol consumption patterns across the lifespan

This research looked at the initiation of alcohol use, the patterns of alcohol use over the lifespan, and transitions from hazardous and non-hazardous drinking.



<https://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications/new-zealanders'-alcohol-consumption-patterns-across-the-lifespan>

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