

**Youth and Alcohol  
2003 ALAC Youth Drinking Monitor**

August 2003

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# Executive summary

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## Introduction

This report presents the results for the 2003 ALAC Youth Drinking Monitor. This monitor is the sixth survey in a series commenced in 1997, designed to evaluate and provide direction for ALAC's youth strategy. In contrast to previous monitors, the current monitor "piggy-backed" on the concurrent quantitative stage of the Youth Campaign Development research programme, although this report presents findings for the Youth Monitor only, in a form similar to previous Youth Monitors to ensure ease of comparison.

Because of the demanding segmentation requirements for the Youth Campaign Development research, a considerably larger sample than the approximately 300 to 350 interviews secured for earlier Youth Monitors was required, specifically 626 interviews were conducted. The efficiencies that this approach delivered in terms of sample size has resulted in higher precision in 2003 Youth Monitor findings, and also the opportunity to report not just in terms of Māori and non-Māori, but Pacific youth as well (see Appendix B).

Interviewing for this survey took place between 4 and 30 June 2003. A total sample of 626 Youth aged between 12 and 17 were interviewed. As mentioned, unlike previous monitors, primarily for the benefit of the Youth Campaign Development research, the sample was evenly divided between Māori, Pacific and "other" youth, to allow for the examination of results in terms of the Māori and Pacific priority ethnic sub-groups, and also youth from "other" ethnic groups. Because of this deliberate over-sampling of Māori and Pacific youth, results were weighted by ethnicity, age and gender, to 2001 Census benchmarks.

Because this monitor is now the fourth survey conducted after the legal drinking age was lowered to 18 on 1 December 1999, 18-year-old teenagers were excluded from the 2003 Youth Monitor, as the impact of lowering the drinking age in December 1999 is now well understood. In fact, 18-year olds will be targeted in the upcoming quantitative research among the adult population.

Also included in the sample, for the third time, is a sample of 13-year-old teenagers, and for the first time, a sample of 12-year olds. The decision to include these young people was made in order to investigate the prevalence and frequency of risky drinking amongst this age group.

Consistent with the 2001 and 2002 surveys against which comparisons are made throughout this report, results for this survey are mainly based on 14-17 year olds. However, results for 12 and 13 year olds are also reported, where relevant.

## Summary of main findings

The following table summarises the results for 14-17 year olds, in terms of a number of key indicators<sup>1</sup>. For comparative purposes, results are also presented for the 2002 and 2001 surveys. Significant increases since 2002 are signalled with an upward pointing arrow (↑), and significant decreases with a downward pointing arrow (↓).

Note that the term, “risky drinking”, refers to drinking five or more glasses of alcohol during any one drinking occasion.

It should also be noted that the table expresses all results based on the total sample of 14-17 year olds. Figures may not correspond exactly with those presented in the body of this report, where they are sometimes based on the sub-sample of ‘current drinkers’.

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<sup>1</sup> As noted earlier, 12 and 13 year olds are a secondary target audience and their results are therefore not included for the main analysis.

**Table 1: Key indicators, 2001, 2002 and 2003 surveys**

	2003 14-17 year olds n=441 %	2002 14-17 year olds n=226 %	2001 14-17 year olds n=235 %
<b>Trial:</b>			
Ever tried alcohol (even a sip)	↓88	93	95
Ever had a <u>full</u> glass	↓72	83	80
<b>Current drinking behaviour:</b>			
% claiming first really started drinking under 15	↑42	34	42
Currently drink alcohol	↓66	82	79
Currently have a drink at least <u>once a week</u>	↓20	29	31
5 or more glasses drunk on the <u>last</u> drinking occasion	23	34	34
<b>Risky drinking:</b>			
Have had at least 1x risky drinking occasion in the last 2 weeks	↓20	29	32
Have had at least 1x risky drinking occasion in the last 3 months	na	49	54
<b>Self-perception:</b>			
Believe drinking more than last year	31	32	23
Believe drinking "far too much"/"too much"	na	20	14
Tried to cut back since last year	↑20	13	8
<b>Sources of alcohol:</b>			
Personally purchase	8	13	10
From own parents/caregivers	↓32	45	50
From friends	↓22	38	43
<b>Parental involvement:</b>			
Parents know you drink	↓55	67	67
Parents given alcohol to take to a social function	↓10	23	19
Parents given money to buy alcohol	na	7	5

With these results in mind, the main findings of the current ALAC Youth Drinking Monitor may be summarised as follows.

- **A high proportion of 14-17 year olds are drinking regularly. Although significantly less than in 2002, there is evidence that the age at which young people first start really drinking is trending downwards.**

Almost all (88%, down from 93% in 2002) of 14-17 year olds claimed they had tried alcohol and 84% of these trialists had had a *full glass* at some stage or other (or 72% of all 14-17 year olds, down from 83% in 2002). Around three in five trialists (59%) claimed they had first started really drinking when they were under 15 (or 42% of all 14-17 year olds, up from 34% in 2002).

Māori 14-17 year olds (69%) were significantly more likely than both Pacific youth (46%) and youth of “other” ethnic groups (58%) to have really started drinking under 15 years of age.

Most of these 14-17 year olds (91%) claimed they were current drinkers (or 66% of all 14-17 year olds, down from 82% in 2002), with 29% of 14-17 year old current drinkers claiming they drank at least once every week (or 20% of all 14-17 year olds, down from 29% in 2002).

- **Since 2001, proportions of “heavier drinkers” and “lighter drinkers” have decreased significantly, while the proportion of “non-drinkers” has increased significantly.**

The proportions of both “heavier drinkers” and “lighter drinkers” have decreased significantly since 2002 (25% in 2003 for “heavier drinkers”, down from 33% in 2002, 31% in 2001, and 35% in 2000; and 41% for “lighter drinkers”, down from 47% in 2002, 44% in 2001, and 49% in 2000). Conversely, there has been a compensating significant increase in the proportion of 14-17 year olds claiming to be current non-drinkers (34% in 2003, compared to 20% in 2002, 25% in 2001, and 16% in 2000).

- **Although some positive improvements since 2002, risky, or “binge” drinking remains prevalent.**

When asked about their last drinking occasion, 36% of 14-17 year old current drinkers claimed they had five or more glasses, or 23% of all 14-17 year olds. These results signal a decrease from 42% of 14-17 year old current drinkers in 2002 (or 34% of all 14-17 year olds).

In fact, 48% of current 14-17 year old drinkers claimed they had drunk this amount during at least one drinking occasion in the last two weeks (or 20% of all 14-17 year olds). This is a significant increase on the 35% of current 14-17 year olds who reported drinking five or more drinks on the last occasion in 2002.

Māori and Pacific 14-17 year old current drinkers were significantly more likely to have reported drinking five or more glasses on the last drinking occasion (48% for Māori and 45% for Pacific youth, compared to 30% for youth of “other” ethnic groups). Furthermore, almost one in three (29%) 14-17 year old current drinkers of Pacific ethnic origin reported drinking 10 or more glasses on the last drinking occasion. This is significantly higher than the 10% measured for youth of “other” ethnic groups, and also higher (although not significantly so) than the 21% measured for Māori youth.

- **The proportion of 14-17 year olds defined as “Heavier drinkers” or “Lighter drinkers” has decreased significantly since 2002, and the proportion of “Non-drinkers” has increased significantly. However, there is evidence of even more risky drinking behaviour among “Heavier drinkers”.**

When the frequency and amount drunk is taken into account (using ALAC’s definition of five or more glasses for risky drinking), 25% of all 14-17 year olds are defined as “Heavier drinkers”, 41% as “Lighter drinkers” and 34% as “Non-drinkers”. This compares positively to 33%, 47%, and 20% respectively, in 2002.

“Heavier drinkers” tend to have an older age profile in comparison to the other two segments, are significantly more likely to be male, Māori, and working (and relatedly, not studying). They are also significantly more likely to live in one parent/guardian households, significantly less likely to be active churchgoers, and slightly less likely to live in large towns/cities with a population of 30,000 or more.

When questioned about their last drinking occasion, half (50%) of the “Heavier drinkers” claimed they drunk nine or more glasses – more than the 41% measured in 2002, although not significantly more. Two in five (39%) drank more than 10 drinks on the last occasion (twice ALAC’s definition of heavy or excessive drinking), and a significant increase on the 23% measured in 2002.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of “Heavier drinkers” claimed they had drunk five or more glasses in at least one drinking occasion in the last two weeks, compared to 73% in 2002.

- **Despite a decrease in the proportion of all 14-17 year olds who reported trialling alcohol, almost half the current drinkers in this age group reported drinking more than last year.**

Almost half (47%) of 14-17 year old current drinkers claimed to be drinking *more* now than they were last year (or 31% of all 14-17 year olds, similar to the 32% measured in 2002, but significantly higher than the 23% measured in 2001).

Conversely, 25% of 14-17 year old current drinkers reported drinking less than in 2002 (or 16% of all 14-17 year olds, compared to 26% in 2002).

- **Drinking to excess, drink driving, and the adverse behavioural effects of drinking alcohol continue to be most often reported as a worry for young people.**

On an unprompted basis, 31% of 14-17 year old current drinkers mentioned “*drinking too much/comatose*” as a worry to them and other teenagers in relation to alcohol, compared to 39% in 2002. Other frequently mentioned concerns were:

- *Behavioural effects of drinking (change in behaviour)* – 29% of 14-17 year old current drinkers, compared to 27% in 2002.
- *Drink driving* – 20%, compared to 16% in 2002.
- *Violent/aggressive situations* – 20%, compared to 14% in 2002.

- **Parents and friends (in particular friends aged 18 and over) remain a key supply channel.**

The majority of 14-17 year old current drinkers (84%) claimed their parents knew they drank on the last occasion, similar to the 81% measured in 2002. This was significantly less likely to be reported by Pacific youth (55%), but no differences were measured with regard to Māori and “other” ethnic groups.

Most 14-17 year old current drinkers acquired their alcohol from their parents (49%, or 32% of all 14-17 year olds; compared to 55% and 45% respectively in 2002), and friends aged 18 and over (29%, or 19% of all 14-17 year olds). In addition, 8% of 14-17 year old current drinkers (5% of all 14-17 year olds) reported mainly obtaining alcohol from friends aged *less than 18*. In 2003, on a “net friends” basis, i.e. irrespective of whether under or over 18 years of age, 34% reported usually obtaining alcohol from friends, significantly lower than 49% measured in 2002 (or 22% and 38% in 2003 and 2002 respectively, for all 14-17 year olds).

However, 36% of current drinkers in this age group claimed that in the last six months, their parents had supplied them with alcohol to attend a social function they were going to without them (or 10% of all 14-17 year olds, significantly lower than the 23% measured in 2002). Furthermore, 84% of 14-17 year old current drinkers reported that their parents/caregivers knew they were drinking on the last occasion, similar to the 81% measured in 2002.

Fourteen to 17 year old Pacific current drinkers were less likely than other ethnic groups to have reported that their parents had supplied them with alcohol to take to a social function (18% among Pacific youth, compared to 32% of Māori and 37% of youth of “other” ethnic groups, although not significant differences due to the small sub-sample sizes that answered this question).

Also, for the first time in 2003, the *nature* of parent/guardian supervision on the last supervised drinking occasion was also measured. Approximately three-quarters (77%) of 14-17 year old current drinkers (or 40% of all 14-17 year olds) reported that they were supervised by their own parent(s)/guardian(s), while 23% reported having been supervised by someone else’s parent(s)/guardian(s).

- **Despite the continuing prevalence of risky drinking, young people report talking openly and honestly with parents about alcohol, coupled with a high awareness, perhaps even tolerance, of young people’s drinking.<sup>2</sup>**

The majority of 14-17 year old current drinkers (87%) agreed that *my parents talk openly and honestly with me about alcohol* (or 57% of all 14-17 year olds). Further, 81% agreed that *my parents don’t mind if I drink but I’m not allowed to get trashed*, 80% agreed that *my parents know that I drink and are OK about it*, 77% agreed that *my parents when I drink*, and just 33% disagreed that *my parents know that I drink alcohol but disapprove*.

With regard to statements designed to elicit an understanding of parental “control”, 81% of 14-17 year old current drinkers agreed that *my parents don’t mind if I drink alcohol but I’m not allowed to get trashed*, 62% agreed that *both I will get into trouble from my parents if I drink too much*, and *my parents worry about how much I drink*, and 60% agreed that *my parents set strict rules about me drinking alcohol*.

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<sup>2</sup> This area of questioning has changed considerably since 2002, and as such there is no basis of comparison to previous Youth Monitors.



- **The perceived (or real) benefits of drinking alcohol appear to be balanced by a reasonable awareness of the negative consequences, or inhibitors, to drinking alcohol.<sup>3</sup>**

Two-thirds (68%) of 14-17 year old current drinkers agree that both *when I drink alcohol it is easier to meet and get to know people*, and *I enjoy the buzz I get when I drink alcohol*. Further, 65% agreed that *alcohol helps me wind down and relax*, and 55% agreed that both *it's easier to chat people up when I drink alcohol* and *everything seems happier when I drink alcohol*.

In terms of inhibitors to drinking alcohol, 86% of 14-17 year old current drinkers agreed that *I try not to pass out or throw up from drinking too much*, 82% agreed that *I am OK not drinking when I spend time with my friends who are drinking*, 80% agreed that *I limit the amount of alcohol I drink so that I don't do anything I would regret later*, and 77% agreed that *I limit the amount of alcohol I drink so that it doesn't affect my mental performance*.

- **Under-age drinkers purchasing alcohol remain unlikely to be asked for ID.**

When asked directly, 13% of 14-17 year old current drinkers claimed to purchase alcohol themselves (or 8% of all 14-17 year olds, compared to 13% in 2002).

As in 2002, bottle stores appear to be the main retail outlets used, with 83% of those claiming to personally purchase alcohol mentioning bottle stores as most often used. Among those who personally purchase alcohol, 29% are *always* or *mostly* asked for ID, however almost half (47%) reported *hardly ever* or *never* being asked for ID, a similar result to the 53% measured in 2002.

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<sup>3</sup> Again, a completely revised set of attitude statements in 2003 has resulted in no basis of comparison to previous Youth Monitors.