

## **OLDER PEOPLE AND RISKY DRINKING: THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED HARMS AND SAFE DRINKING GUIDELINE KNOWLEDGE**

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**Introduction and Aims:** While general population alcohol consumption has decreased and abstention has increased, proportionally more older Australians are drinking at risky levels. The extent to which risky alcohol consumption among older people aligns with their perceptions of alcohol-related harm and knowledge of drinking guidelines is unknown. This information is needed to minimise alcohol-related risk for this group and facilitate appropriate behaviour change strategies.

**Design and Methods:** Data from respondents aged 50+ years (N=11,886) in the 2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey were subjected to secondary analyses. Self-report, single-occasion risky alcohol consumption (defined by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines), Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), perceived level of harm from current drinking, and knowledge of guidelines were included.

**Results:** 17.0% were risky drinkers. Accurate knowledge of low-risk, single-occasion drinking guideline levels was generally low, but higher among male low-risk drinkers (14.5%) than risky drinkers (10.3%); conversely, it was higher among female risky drinkers (21.7%) than low-risk drinkers (15.7%). Most older risky drinkers were knowledgeable about the concepts of a standard drink (97.0%) and labelling (84.3%); 66.3% scored positive on AUDIT, but only 40.1% categorised their current drinking as harmful.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Important variations in guideline recognition and discrepant behaviours exist in this group, and strategies to increase knowledge of low-risk drinking guidelines and associated harms is required. It is imperative to address uncertainty and ambiguity around what constitutes low-risk drinking for older Australians and address risk perceptions within this group for effective harm reduction.

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