

Promoting cheap alcohol: Trends and patterns in price discounting in Australian off-premise alcohol retail markets

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Introduction: Alcohol price promotions can make alcohol substantially cheaper and may drive purchasing and consumption, yet these practices remain largely unregulated. Evidence on how discounting varies across products and locations is limited. This study examined the extent and patterns of alcohol price discounting across metropolitan and remote retail markets in New South Wales over time.

Methods: Quarterly price data were collected between July 2023 and April 2025 for all alcohol products on websites of five major alcohol retailers, sampling one store per retailer in a capital city and a remote NSW location. Products were classified as discounted if they were sold below base price through multi-pack discounts, promotional discounts, or multibuy promotional offers (e.g., “2 for \$x”). Analyses compared discount prevalence and discount type by financial year, location, beverage type and subtype.

Results: Analyses of 123,943 product observations showed that beer and cider had the highest prevalence of discounted products (approximately 80–88%), followed by premix beverages, while spirits had the lowest prevalence (27–34%). Wine discounting was substantially more common in the capital city location. Beer, cider and premix products were predominantly discounted through multi-pack discounts, whereas wine was mainly discounted through multibuy promotional offers. From 2023/24 to 2024/25, discounting decreased for beer, cider and premixes, while it increased for wine, particularly in remote areas.

Discussion: Alcohol discounting was common across major beverage categories, with distinct differences in discounting strategies by beverage type and location. The increasing use of promotional and multibuy discounts, particularly for wine products in remote areas, may contribute to greater alcohol affordability and increased consumption risk.

Implications: These findings highlight the need for ongoing monitoring of alcohol pricing practices and consideration of regulatory approaches targeting volume-based and promotional discounting strategies as part of broader alcohol policy.

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