

## **Alcohol consumption among an Australian cohort of women eligible to participate in the national breast screening program**

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**Introduction/Aims:** Alcohol is a major modifiable risk factor for breast cancer in women, yet population awareness of this risk is low. We sought to understand alcohol consumption levels among women from a large, representative breast screening program cohort, including the proportion of women whose drinking exceeds new national alcohol guidelines, and to explore associations with sociodemographic and health-related factors.

**Method:** This was a retrospective analysis of cross-sectional data from the Victorian Lifepool breast screening cohort collected between May 2010 and November 2019. The dataset comprised sociodemographic and health-related information collected via a comprehensive questionnaire completed at cohort entry.

**Results:** Of 49,240 participants, mean age was 59.94 years (SD=7.14, range 40-94). The majority of participants (84.54%, n=42,155) consumed alcohol, with 15.13% (n=7,448) drinking at a level exceeding 2020 revised Australian alcohol guidelines, and 7.87% (n=3,873) drinking daily. Women had a higher probability of exceeding revised alcohol guidelines if they were aged 50-59 years, born in Australia, living in a major city, with higher education attainment, at the lowest level of sociodemographic disadvantage, and in a healthy weight range.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** Findings highlight a need to implement strategies to reduce harmful alcohol use among a cohort who have been overlooked as a focus of public health campaigns and interventions – educated, sociodemographically advantaged women who may otherwise be engaging in positive health behaviours (e.g. maintaining a healthy weight). Targeted health promotion campaigns and broader policy changes to reduce alcohol consumption among this at-risk group could have substantial public health benefit.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** To the authors' knowledge, this is the first exploration of alcohol consumption among a population-level cohort of breast cancer screening participants. National breast screening programs may be uniquely positioned to provide timely,

strategic public health messages to prevent alcohol-attributable harm, and have potential for extensive reach.

**Implications for Translational Research:** This study highlights the need for initiatives to reduce harmful alcohol use among women attending breast screening services. Findings informed the Health4Her hybrid effectiveness-implementation trial (Clinical Trials: NCT04715516) of a brief intervention to improve alcohol literacy and reduce harmful alcohol use among women attending a Victorian breast screening service.

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