

This section outlines the background to the project, and specifies our understanding of the research objectives

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

### 2.1 Background

'Binge drinking' as a term is "vague and often hard to define", and its meaning is therefore difficult to quantify. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), in the 2001 Australian Alcohol Guidelines (AAGs), points out that 'binge drinking' is "not a preferred term due to its lack of consistent and specific meaning [and] can refer to either a) occasional bouts of heavy drinking by young and/or non-dependent people, or b) a 'bender' engaged in by an alcohol-dependent person which may last for days or weeks".<sup>1</sup> The 2001 AAGs instead laid out a framework for categorising adult 'low risk', 'risky' and 'high risk' drinking for short-term and long-term harm, as outlined in Table 5, overleaf.

While the NHMRC guidelines have recently been updated, the 2001 guidelines were current for the November 2008 research wave and remain the standard for research on risky drinking. The previous guidelines are also likely to remain better known and accepted in the general community than the 2009 alcohol consumption guidelines for the immediate future.

Notably there are no specific quantities in either guidelines relating to alcohol consumption for those aged 15–17 years. Both the 2009 and 2001 AAGs emphasise that not drinking is the safest option for young people under 18 years of age, and if drinking occurs it should be delayed as long as possible and then only at a low risk level and in a safe environment. In the

---

<sup>1</sup> Available at: [http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/AAG01/\\$FILE/ds9.pdf](http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/AAG01/$FILE/ds9.pdf). Accessed: 15/01/09.

absence of guidelines relating to the specific quantities of alcohol that can be consumed by this age group safely, this report has applied the 2001 guidelines for adults relating to low risk of harm in the short-term as the framework for the analysis of teenagers' drinking behaviour (i.e. the low risk episodic drinking guidelines for adults). While it is acknowledged that the 2001 guidelines relating to short term risk of harm overestimate the recommended maximum levels of alcohol teenagers should consume, these guidelines were used as the framework of analysis as they reflect the harms associated with single occasion patterns of drinking typical of young drinkers.

**Table 5. Australian Alcohol Guidelines 2001 – Risk of harm from alcohol**

Type of risk	Risky alcohol use	High risk alcohol use
<b>Short-term harms</b>		
<i>Males</i>	7–10 drinks on any one day	11+ drinks on any one day
<i>Females</i>	5–6 drinks on any one day	7+ drinks on any one day
<b>Long-term harms</b>		
<i>Males</i>		
- on an average day	5–6 drinks on any one day	7+ drinks on any one day
- overall weekly level	29–42 drinks per week	43+ drinks per week
<i>Females</i>		
- on an average day	3–4 drinks on any one day	5+ drinks on any one day
- overall weekly level	15–28 drinks per week	29+ drinks per week

There have been several short-term campaigns in the past two decades aimed at reducing the levels of harm associated with alcohol use among the population, and young people in particular. While awareness of these campaigns has been high, and young people have understood and thought about the messages, the level and frequency of risky alcohol consumption have remained high. The results of the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey showed that young adults, aged 20–29 years, were the age category most likely to consume alcohol at risky or high risk levels for short-term harm at least monthly, with 40% of them doing so. Further, the age category next most likely to consume alcohol at risky or high

risk levels for short-term harm at least monthly was the 14–19 year-old group, with 26% drinking at risky or high risk levels for short-term harm.<sup>2</sup>

This seems to indicate that, while previous communication campaigns have been successful in ‘cutting through’ to their target audiences, young people’s tendency to drink at risky levels remains deeply ingrained. This is likely due to the fact that, as stated in the National Alcohol Strategy 2006-2009, “alcohol retains deep-rooted cultural significance”.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say, however, that campaigns aimed at addressing drinking behaviour are unsuccessful *per se*. Instead, a long-term adequately funded campaign is likely to be an effective way of maximising gradual behaviour change in alcohol consumption, in addition to positively building on the behaviour change effects engendered through previous campaigns.

It is within this context that, in March 2008, the Australian Government, as part of a National Binge Drinking Strategy, announced the funding of a \$20 million harm minimisation and behavioural change campaign aimed at confronting 15 to 25 year-olds with the “costs and consequences of binge drinking”.<sup>4</sup> The overall goal of the campaign is to increase the likelihood that 15–25 year-olds who choose to drink alcohol do so at a low risk level for short-term harm. The objectives of the communication strategy to achieve this overall goal include:

- increasing awareness of potential harms (physical and social) associated with excessive alcohol consumption, the serious nature of these potential harms, and strategies to avoid alcohol-related harm;
- changing attitudes towards excessive alcohol consumption by reducing the perceived acceptability of intoxicated behaviour and reinforcing the unacceptability of the harms associated with excessive alcohol consumption and intoxication; and
- generating and reinforcing intentions to avoid drinking to intoxication and to adopt strategies to avoid alcohol-related harm, and generating intentions among those who experience alcohol-related problems to seek help.

---

<sup>2</sup> Evidence on the pattern of change over recent years is not consistent, with both increases and decreases identified in prevalence of consumption at risky and high risk levels for short-term harm, depending on the age band and the time period chosen. Available trend data is discussed in detail on pp.39-45 of Roche, A.M., Bywood, P., Borlagdan, J., Lunnay, B., Freeman, T., Lawton, L. Tovell, A. and Nicholas, R. (2007). *Young people and alcohol: The Role of Cultural Influences*. National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Adelaide. This covers the 2001 and 2004, but not 2007, National Drug Strategy Household Surveys, as well as other data.

<sup>3</sup> Available at:

[http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/B83AD1F91AA632ADCA25718E0081F1C3/\\$File/nas-06-09.pdf](http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/B83AD1F91AA632ADCA25718E0081F1C3/$File/nas-06-09.pdf). Accessed: 15/01/09.

<sup>4</sup> Available at: [http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media\\_release\\_0126.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media_release_0126.cfm). Accessed: 15/01/09.

The campaign, expected to run for an initial two years, uses a mix of television, cinema, radio, print, online and out-of-home advertising, brochures, as well as public relations and online and innovative media activities. The mainstream campaign tagline is “Don’t turn a night out into a nightmare”.

The television, cinema, print and out-of-home advertising all show a happy scene of young people drinking alcohol followed by a scene illustrating a serious negative consequence of intoxication for those same young people and a statistic describing that situation. The situations, actors and consequences illustrated were chosen to ensure maximum relevance for both genders and for younger and older drinkers within the 15–25 year age range. Four pairs of scenes were used:

- ‘Party bushes’, in which a couple are photographed having sex at a party in the bushes, coupled with the statistic “one in two Australians aged 15–17 who get drunk will do something they regret” (designed for maximum relevance for females and 15–17 year-olds);
- ‘Pedestrian accident’, in which a male pedestrian is hit by a car, coupled with the statistic “four Australians under 25 die due to alcohol related injuries in an average week” (designed for maximum relevance for males and 15–17 year-olds);
- ‘Coffee table’, in which a female is injured by falling through a glass table, coupled with the statistic “on average, 1 in 4 hospitalisations of people aged 15–24 happen because of alcohol” (designed for maximum relevance for females and 18–25 year-olds); and
- ‘Pub fight’, in which two males exchange blows, coupled with the statistic “70 Australians under 25 will be hospitalised due to alcohol-caused assault in an average week” (designed for maximum relevance for males and 18–25 year-olds).

Two 60-second advertisements were used on television and in the cinema. The first, which featured ‘Party bushes’ and ‘Pedestrian accident’, was designed to appeal to the younger members of the target audience. The second featured ‘Coffee table’ and ‘Pub fight’ for maximum relevance to older members of the primary target audience.

The online advertising featured a moving image of a beer glass being raised as if to the viewer’s mouth and one of the statistics mentioned above.

There were two radio commercials, one in which a policeman arrests a drunk young man, whose friend has been killed in an accident, and one in which a young man rings his friend's mother in the middle of the night to urge her to come to the hospital in a hurry<sup>5</sup>.

The brochure was entitled *Alcohol and young people: A guide for parents* and used a question-and-answer format.

Stills from the television advertisements, transcripts of radio advertisements and images of print and online executions, as well as the brochure, are included in Section 7.

The first television commercial for the campaign aired on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2008. The media plan for November 2008 to April 2009 is shown in Table 6, below.

**Table 6. Media plan (November 2008 to April 2009)**

	November	December	January	February	March	April
<b>Television</b>						
<b>Magazine/Print</b>						
<b>Radio</b>						
<b>Digital/Internet</b>						
<b>Cinema</b>						
<b>Out-of-home<sup>6</sup></b>						

As a secondary audience, the campaign targets parents of 13–17 year-olds, primarily utilising focused public relations activities, and also a brochure. The overall goal with this target audience is to increase the likelihood that these parents will talk with their children about the harms associated with excessive alcohol consumption and actively discourage drinking to intoxication, including through the modelling influence of their own drinking behaviour.

<sup>5</sup> The second radio advertisement was translated into eight languages for non-English speaking background parents of 13–17 year-olds.

<sup>6</sup> The out-of-home category includes bus interiors, Avant Cards, street furniture, washroom mirrors in nightclubs, street posters and stencil chalking.

## 2.2 Research objectives

The Department of Health and Ageing commissioned the Ipsos-Eureka Social Research Institute to conduct research to evaluate the success of the National Binge Drinking Campaign. The overall aim of the research is to evaluate the success of the campaign among the key target audiences of teenagers aged 15–17 years and young adults aged 18–25 years, and the secondary audience of parents of 13–17 year-olds.

Specifically, the research will assess the extent to which the advertising campaign delivers against the communication objectives. The key measures are illustrated below.

Evaluate effectiveness of National Binge Drinking Campaign



Measure campaign awareness and reactions

Assess attitudes and knowledge regarding binge drinking,  
including changes over time

Gauge prevention intentions and behaviour,  
including changes over time

The research methodology used to address these issues is detailed in the following section.