

# Attitudes of Australian cider drinkers

## Fact Sheet

Preventing harm from alcohol

In response to the recent rapid growth in popularity of alcoholic cider beverages, VicHealth conducted an online survey of 6000 Australians. The intent was to understand why cider is becoming the drink of choice for many Australians. It looks at why cider drinkers prefer the beverage over others, who is drinking it, whether there is a perception that it is healthier than other types of alcohol, and if it is being consumed in excess. The survey reveals that cider drinkers are generally health conscious and would consider a lower alcohol content option, if one were available on the market.

### Australians' alcohol choices over time

The Australian alcohol palette is changing. Beer, a long-time fixture on the Australian alcohol market, is decreasing in popularity each year as more drinkers turn to wine, spirits and, increasingly, cider.

It is clear that the growth of the cider market reflects broader changes in the alcohol tastes and preferences of Australian consumers. There is limited knowledge about what is driving the growing popularity of cider and whether this should be of concern to public health authorities and the community.

### The growing popularity of cider

Australian tastes in drinking are broadening from predominately domestic beers to a wider range of alcoholic beverages, including wine and boutique beers. Cider is one of the fastest growing alcohol categories in Australia, with the volume of cider available on the market increasing by 30% in 2011 alone.<sup>i</sup> The following year, sweetened ciders such as Kopparberg and Rekorderlig recorded growth of almost 300%.<sup>ii</sup> While the lower rate that apple and pear ciders are taxed at compared to beer and spirits may account for some of this growth, others cite the successful marketing of cider as a 'summer drink' as a reason for its growing popularity.<sup>iii, iv</sup>

### The survey

In June 2012, 6000 Australian drinkers aged over 18 completed VicHealth's online survey on the attitudes of Australian cider drinkers. One in five (19%) survey participants selected cider as their main or usual drink, and in this fact sheet are referred to as regular cider drinkers. Analysis was conducted on this group and was compared to those who did not regularly drink cider, referred to as non-cider drinkers. The first part of the key findings focuses on these groups.

The second section of the key findings focuses on the attitudes of cider drinkers, and includes survey participants who had consumed cider in the previous 12 months. Comparisons were made between regular cider drinkers, and those who had drunk cider in the last 12 months but did not select it as a main or usual drink. The latter are referred to as occasional cider drinkers. Other drinkers were excluded from this section of the analysis.

Statistical differences within data were determined when statistical results produced p-values of 0.05 or less. Except where otherwise noted, the data presented in this report was cross tabulated and checked for significance.

### Key findings

#### Who drinks cider?

Australian drinkers with a preference for cider were more likely to be young (aged under 30), female and hold a university degree. For instance:

- 30% of drinkers aged under 30 had a preference for cider, compared to 23% of drinkers aged 30–39, 18% aged 40–49 and 13% aged 50+.
- Female drinkers (21%) were also more likely to select cider as a preferred drink compared to males (18%).
- Respondents with a university degree were more likely to drink cider (27%) compared to those without a university degree (16%).

This fact sheet provides highlights from a VicHealth study of the drinking behaviours, beliefs and preferences of Australian cider drinkers. This and the research summary are available at [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/cider](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/cider)

## Do cider drinkers drink more than other drinkers?

Over half of the drinkers (55%) participating in the survey reported consuming alcohol at levels that put them at risk of injury from a single occasion of drinking (five or more standard drinks)<sup>v</sup> within the previous 12 months, with no significant difference between regular cider drinkers and non-cider drinkers. However, there was some limited evidence of heavier episodic drinking among regular cider drinkers when age and other factors were taken into account:

- Eight out of ten (80%) regular cider drinkers aged under 30 drank five or more standard drinks in a single sitting at least once a year compared to seven out of ten (67%) non-cider drinkers in the same age group.
- Three out of ten (32%) regular cider drinkers had consumed more than 11 standard drinks on a drinking occasion during the previous year, compared to two out of ten (24%) of non-cider drinkers. This is the equivalent of drinking almost a full bottle of wine in a sitting.
- Regular cider drinkers are also more likely to drink at a greater number and range of social events than non-cider drinkers.

## Health beliefs of Australian cider drinkers

Overall, regular cider drinkers reported trying to follow a healthy diet, but were ambivalent about the extent to which alcohol may contribute to poor health. Compared to other drinkers, regular cider drinkers were more likely to report trying to follow a healthy and balanced diet (84% vs. 80%), but were less likely to agree with the statement 'alcohol cannot be part of a healthy lifestyle' (24% vs. 30%). While three quarters (75%) of people think Australians have a problem with alcohol, only 28% feel they sometimes drink too much or are uncomfortable with their drinking.<sup>vi</sup> This suggests a disconnect between how people view the impact of alcohol more broadly, and how they see it impacting upon their own individual health and wellbeing.

## Attitudes of cider drinkers

The following section features questions that were asked of respondents who had consumed cider any time in the last 12 months.

Generally, regular cider drinkers were more likely to agree with statements emphasising the social or seasonal aspects of drinking occasions, compared to occasional cider drinkers, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Cider drinking occasions

Drinking occasions: cider is	Regular cider drinkers	Occasional cider drinkers
...good to drink at a pub or bar with friends	83%	54%
...an alcoholic beverage I would usually drink in summer	79%	66%
...good to drink for big occasions and celebrations	62%	40%
...an alcoholic beverage I would usually have with meals at a home or a restaurant	56%	40%

In addition, regular cider drinkers were more likely to believe that cider is less bloating than other alcoholic beverages, compared to occasional cider drinkers (47% vs. 42%). Interestingly, there were no statistically significant differences between regular cider drinkers and occasional cider drinkers when asked to consider whether cider was healthier than other alcoholic beverages (i.e. 33% respectively), or better for the waistline than other alcoholic beverages (21% vs. 24%). Very few considered the number of calories in a drink when choosing an alcoholic beverage, although occasional cider drinkers were more likely to do so than regular cider drinkers (16% vs. 11%). This is surprising given the high proportion of regular cider drinkers who reported trying to maintain a healthy diet.

## Alcohol content in cider

Unlike beer or wine, many of the ciders available on the Australian market vary considerably when it comes to alcohol content. For example, Old Mout and Cheeky Rascal are 8% alcohol per unit, while more well-known brands like Strongbow and Rekorderlig are typically between 4% and 5% alcohol per unit. It is unknown whether cider drinkers are aware of the alcohol and energy content when choosing a brand, but there is no clear classification of alcohol content like beer – which is labelled as light, mid-strength or full-strength. This research shows that cider drinkers may try a low-strength product if one were available on the market. In fact, 79% of cider drinkers surveyed said they would consider buying cider with less than 3.5% alcohol per volume; however, no such option exists.

## Conclusions

Cider may not be an 'everyday' drink for all Australians, but when it is consumed, it is frequently consumed at harmful levels, particularly among young people. Given the rapid rise in popularity and availability of cider, it is worth considering options to reduce the potential harm arising from the excessive consumption of this product.

While regular cider drinkers are typically female, tertiary educated and concerned with their health, they do not consider alcohol to be detrimental to their health or inconsistent with keeping a balanced diet. Further, regular cider drinkers do not view the product as being healthier than other alcoholic beverages and, at best, see cider as less bloating and tasting better than beer, wine or spirits.

Regular cider drinkers tended to drink in a wider range of social situations compared to other drinkers, and are more likely to drink in licensed premises such as bars, clubs and pubs compared to non-cider drinkers. In addition, cider was seen as a good drink for big occasions, and was perceived as a 'summer drink'. In this sense, cider is primarily a social drink and aggressive marketing of the product during the warmer months has solidified its reputation as a go-to summer beverage.

From a public health perspective, cider appears to be associated with heavy episodic drinking; in keeping with perceptions of the drink being good for 'big occasions'. The inconsistency in cider alcohol content is particularly concerning in this sense as consumers may be drinking more alcohol than actually intended. In this regard, it is encouraging that cider drinkers would consider a lower strength product if one was available.

An opportunity exists for alcohol manufacturers to produce a low-alcohol cider to meet consumer demand and to demonstrate corporate responsibility to assist in reducing the toll of alcohol-related harm in the community.

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## References

- i Euromonitor International 2012, *Passport: Alcoholic drinks in Australia*, Euromonitor International, Sydney, Australia.
- ii Greenblat E 2013, 'Taxing times, but cider's still apples', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9/2/2013 accessed from [www.smh.com.au/business/taxing-times-but-ciders-still-apples-20130208-2e3x2.html](http://www.smh.com.au/business/taxing-times-but-ciders-still-apples-20130208-2e3x2.html)
- iii Carragher N, Shakeshaft A & Doran C 2012, 'Here we go again: cider's turn to highlight anomalies in Australia's alcohol taxation system,' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 37(1), pp. 95-96.
- iv Euromonitor International 2012, *Passport: Alcoholic drinks in Australia*, Euromonitor International, Sydney, Australia.
- v Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011, *2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey*, AIHW, Canberra.
- vi Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) 2013, *2013 Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education Annual Alcohol Poll: Attitudes and Behaviours*, Canberra.