

3.2 Alcohol-free pregnancy

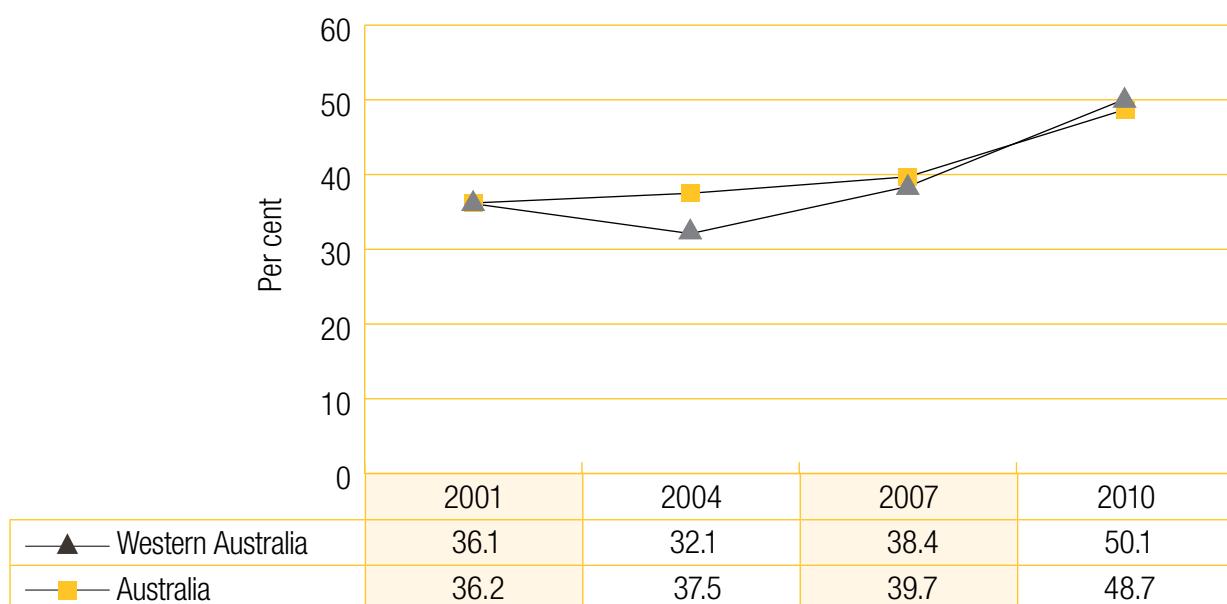
Why this measure is included

The consumption of alcohol in pregnancy can have a negative effect on a baby's wellbeing. Drinking during pregnancy is linked to a range of conditions including low birth weight, alcohol-related birth defects, alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorders and a number of conditions that are broadly classified as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.⁵⁶

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder can result in learning difficulties, behavioural problems, mental illness and other wellbeing issues throughout the child's life and into adulthood.⁵⁷ Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is a severe alcohol-related condition in children that can result from drinking alcohol during pregnancy, and is one of the conditions which fall under the classification of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. FAS is the most common preventable cause of intellectual disability in children.⁵⁸

The *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol*⁵⁹ recommend not drinking alcohol at all during pregnancy to eliminate the risk of fetal alcohol exposure.

Figure 3.3: Women who consumed no alcohol in pregnancy: in per cent, Western Australia and Australia, 2001 to 2010



Source: Data supplied by AIHW 2011, from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) data 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010, custom report (unpublished)

Note: Base includes women aged 14 to 49 years who were pregnant or pregnant and breastfeeding at the same time.

Table 3.3: Women who consumed no alcohol in pregnancy: in per cent, Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Australia, 2001 to 2010

	WA	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	Australia
2001	36.1	39.5	37.5	32.1	32.7	36.2
2004	32.1	38.7	42.0	31.8	42.3	37.5
2007	38.4	43.0	39.2	33.9	45.1	39.7
2010	50.1	48.7	51.5	50.0	39.0	48.7

Source: Data supplied by AIHW 2011, from NDSHS data 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010 (unpublished).



Note: Base includes women aged 14 to 49 years who were pregnant or pregnant and breastfeeding at the same time. Results for the ACT, NT and Tas are not shown due to small sample sizes in these jurisdictions; but are included in the Australian total.

Table 3.4: Proportion of women who drank more, less or the same amount of alcohol while pregnant: in per cent, Western Australia, 2001 to 2010

	2001	2004	2007	2010
More or same	*6.6	**4.5	**2.8	**1.0
Less	57.3	63.4	58.8	48.8
Did not drink alcohol	36.1	32.1	38.4	50.1

Source: Data supplied by AIHW 2011, from NDSHS data 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010 (unpublished).

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25 per cent to 50 per cent and should be used with caution

** Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50 per cent and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Note: Base includes women 14 to 49 years old who were pregnant or pregnant and breastfeeding at the same time.

What is this measure?

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) collects information on alcohol use in pregnancy. The survey is conducted every three years and was last carried out in 2013. The 2013 data is not yet available and hence this measure uses data from 2001 to 2010. In 2010 data was collected from over 26,000 people across Australia aged 12 years or over. The sample size for Western Australia (WA) in 2010 was 2,473 people overall, including 1,306 females. The data is available by state and territory.

Due to the small sample size this data is not available by region or Aboriginality.

New data on alcohol use in pregnancy is currently in preparation, one by the National Perinatal Epidemiology and Statistics Unit at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and another by the WA Department of Health.⁶⁰

Commentary

Current research indicates that even low levels of alcohol use in pregnancy may have an adverse effect on the fetus and current National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines recommend that women do not drink at all during pregnancy.⁶¹

According to the 2010 data collected for the NDSHS and shown in Figure 3.3, 50 per cent of pregnant women in WA did not drink during their pregnancy, slightly higher than the national average of 48.7 per cent. Comparison with previous surveys shows that the proportion of women abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy has increased in WA and across Australia (Table 3.3).

Of women who continue to drink alcohol during pregnancy, almost all reported that they reduced their alcohol consumption during the pregnancy (Table 3.4).

Other research has also shown that the majority of women significantly reduce or cease alcohol consumption during pregnancy.^{62 63}

While research indicates that, generally, fewer Aboriginal women than non-Aboriginal women consume alcohol, those that do, tend to drink at more harmful levels, particularly women of childbearing age⁶⁴ increasing the risk of harm from fetal alcohol exposure for Aboriginal children.⁶⁵

Strategies

Drug and Alcohol Interagency Strategic Framework for Western Australia 2011–2015, Government of Western Australia

This framework is WA's key policy document that outlines strategies which seek to prevent and reduce the adverse impacts of alcohol and other drugs in the State. It includes specific strategies for reducing alcohol use in pregnancy. The framework is available at www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?Command=Core_Download&EntryId=538&PortalId=0&TabId=211

The Alcohol Support Plan 2012–2015, Government of Western Australia

A supporting document to the Drug and Alcohol Interagency Strategic Framework for Western Australia 2011–2015 which summarises the key objectives and supporting initiatives that will be pursued over the coming years to respond to problematic alcohol use. The plan is available at www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?Command=Core_Download&EntryId=743&PortalId=0&TabId=211

Strong Spirit Strong Mind – Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Framework for Western Australia 2011-2015, Government of Western Australia

The framework guides and informs planning, development and implementation of strategies that will help address AOD related harm in Aboriginal communities. It is available at www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?Command=Core_Download&EntryId=614&PortalId=0&TabId=211

The Western Australian Health Promotion Strategic Framework 2012–2016, Government of Western Australia

The framework sets out the WA Department of Health's strategic directions and priorities for the prevention of chronic disease and injury over the next five years including reducing harmful levels of alcohol consumption. Further information is available at: www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproto/4462/2/wa_health_promotion_strategic_framework.pdf

National Drug Strategy 2010–2015: A framework for action on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government's national framework to reduce harm related to alcohol and other drugs is available at [www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/DB4076D49F13309FCA257854007BAF30/\\$File/nds2015.pdf](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/DB4076D49F13309FCA257854007BAF30/$File/nds2015.pdf)

Responding to the Impact of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders in Australia: A Commonwealth Action Plan, Commonwealth Government (released 2013)

The action plan has been developed in consultation with key Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) experts, consumer groups and organisations supporting FASD affected children, their mothers, families and carers. It has been informed by the work of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs which reported on FASD in November 2012. Further information is available at www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/response-fasd

National Binge Drinking Strategy, Commonwealth Government (released 2008)

This strategy aims to address Australia's harmful binge drinking culture, especially among young people. It focuses on raising awareness of the short and long-term impacts of harmful or 'risky' drinking and, over time, contribute to the development of a more responsible drinking culture within Australian society. Further information is available at <http://anpha.gov.au/internet/anpha/publishing.nsf/Content/harmful-alcohol-use>



Fetal Alcohol Model of Care, Government of Western Australia

The WA Department of Health has developed a model of care on FASD. Further information is available at www.healthnetworks.health.wa.gov.au/modelsofcare/docs/FASD_Model_of_Care.pdf

National clinical guidelines for the management of drug use during pregnancy, birth and the early development years of the newborn, Commonwealth Government

These guidelines have been developed for use by all health care practitioners working with pregnant women experiencing a drug or alcohol use problem. The guidelines are available at www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2006/pdf/ncg_druguse.pdf

Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, Commonwealth Government

These guidelines developed by the National Health and Medical Research Centre cover alcohol consumption during pregnancy and when breastfeeding. The guidelines are available at www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ds10-alcohol.pdf

Want to know more?

Data related to pregnancy and birth

The National Perinatal Epidemiology and Statistics Unit website is available at www.aihw.gov.au/mothers-and-babies

Research, reports and articles

The National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Australia has a range of information, resources and links, available at www.nofasd.org.au/

The Australian Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Action Plan, Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education is available at www.fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/FARE-FASD-Plan.pdf

Alcohol and Pregnancy Resources for Health Professionals, Telethon Kids Institute are available at <http://alcoholpregnancy.telethonkids.org.au/resources/health-professionals/>

The *A picture of Australia's Children 2012* report is available at www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737423343

The Intergovernmental Committee of Drugs Working Party on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders report on Fetal Alcohol Disorders in Australia is available at [www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/55FEF3DF7E89405FCA257BB0007DF141/\\$File/FASD-2012-Monograph.pdf](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/55FEF3DF7E89405FCA257BB0007DF141/$File/FASD-2012-Monograph.pdf)

Information on the Alcohol and Pregnancy and FASD Research Group, Telethon Kids Institute is available at <http://alcoholpregnancy.telethonkids.org.au/our-research/research-projects.aspx>