April 2026

Trends, shifts and emerging patterns of alcohol consumption among adults in Ireland 2020-2025

Introduction

The Barometer has now been conducted by Ipsos B&A on behalf of Drinkaware on ten different occasions over the last nine years, namely twice in 2017 and once in each year subsequent to that. We also conducted a Drinkaware Index in conjunction with Ipsos B&A in 2018 that comprehensively analysed hazardous drinking in Ireland, this was published in May 2019. Pre-COVID-19 data is important in highlighting factors that precede changes in drinking patterns. Collectively, extensive data gathered since the commencement of the Barometer series in 2017 allows for an annual examination of drinking practices over time and how they relate to other practices in daily life. However, we cannot examine alcohol in isolation as there is a multidimensional aspect to both society's and/or people's relationship with alcohol. There are multiple powerful social, economic, and environmental determinants of alcohol usage/experience. Following the planning phase and decisions regarding specific questioning, in June 2025, Drinkaware commissioned Ipsos B&A to undertake its latest in the series of national surveys - Barometers - examining Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol.

The objective of this specific study was to examine Irish adults' behaviour and attitudes towards alcohol in the unique context of 2025. This study also sought to examine some of the key determinants of the public's attitudes and behaviours regarding alcohol, and the 'wider picture' of adults' experiences in Ireland in 2025 e.g., post COVID-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis, stress/tension, mental health, economic impact, household dynamics as well as the behaviour of other adults. Ultimately, the main objectives of the research were to understand the who, what, where, when, how and why of drinking among adults in Ireland in 2025. Each year a quantitative research design was employed. Every annual study consisted of a quota-controlled sampling procedure utilising a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18+ (n = 1,062). Over 10,000 adults aged 18+ have participated in the Barometer series to date. For Barometer 2025, online surveys were conducted between July and August 2025. Information gathered was broken down further by both age cohort (18-24 years, 25-34 years, 35-49 years, 50-64 years, 65+years) and life stage (single <34, single 45+, pre-family, family pre-school, family preteen, family teen, empty nester) allowing for further examination of the impacts for different age and household types in the unique context of post COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis (See Table 1 for 2025 sample breakdown). Questionnaire design incorporated internationally recognised question models including:

- AUDIT-C (Babor et al. 2001)
- Drinking Motive Questionnaire: Revised Short Form (Kuntsche & Kuntsche, 2009)
- Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Stewert-Brown et al. 2009)

Table 1: Analysis of Sample 2025, all adults aged 18+ n=1062

Gender	Male	49%
	Female	51%
Age	18-24 yrs	11%
	25-34 yrs	16%
	35-44 yrs	20%
	45-54 yrs	18%
	55-65 yrs	15%
	65+ yrs	19%
Social Class	ABC1	52%
	C2DE	48%

Region	Dublin	29%
	RoL	27%
	Munster	27%
	Conn/Uls	18%
Area	Urban	66%
	Rural	34%
Lifestage	Single -45	19%
	Single 45+	14%
	Pre Family	9%
	Family Pre School	12%
	Family Pre Teen	13%
	Family Teen	7%
	Family Any	*33%*
	Empty Nester	25%

Latest alcohol consumption data available shows that per capita alcohol use in Ireland in 2024 was 9.5 (9.49) litres of pure alcohol per person aged 15 years and over, a 4% decrease from 2023 (based on 2024 population estimates) (Foley 2025). Total consumption in Ireland fell by 2.4% in 2024 to 41.5m litres which results in an overall 4.5% drop in alcohol intake per person when the 2023 2.3% increase in population is considered (Foley 2025). 2025 figures were not available at the time of writing this paper. Overall per capita consumption is crucial to assess long-term trends and provide comparative levels of alcohol consumption in a country. However, to quote the Health Research Board (2021) "surveys of alcohol consumption are also essential to estimate the level of harmful drinking patterns in a country, as well as demographic variations in consumption. This information is important to estimate the extent of alcohol-related harm in a country and identify groups of people who may be at higher risk of alcohol-related harm due to their patterns of consumption". The Drinkaware Barometer does just that by bringing to life the social picture behind such annual statistics. In the Drinkaware Barometer, you will not find per capita litre consumption levels of alcohol in Ireland, as there is a plethora of valuable data available from organisations (such as the HRB) that directly record such metrics. The Barometer, however, has become the "go-to" resource for capturing and tapping into the lived experiences of adults in Ireland, providing insights into the who, why, where, what, when, and how of the Irish public's behaviour and attitudes in relation to alcohol. It also identifies unhealthy patterns of consumption as well as positives such as the intent to drink less, which cannot be identified by consumption figures alone.

The Barometer identifies sub-populations at risk from harmful drinking patterns, and this understanding of their behaviour, attitudes, and motivations are key to Drinkaware's mission to prevent and reduce the misuse of alcohol. A core strength of our Barometer lies in the fact that it is a consistent year on year snapshot of data, on a like for like basis. This rich and growing repository of research provides a snapshot of the socio-cultural behaviour and landscape of Ireland in relation to alcohol which ultimately serves Drinkaware in fulfilment of its vision and mission.

The focus of this paper is to provide an outline of the specific findings relating to patterns of consumption identified over six time points in the Barometer between 2020-2025. This paper will document both the who and how much alcohol adults in Ireland drink over the course of several years namely the prevalence of overall current drinkers, weekly drinking rates, prevalence of binge and hazardous drinking and changes in drinking levels reported among adults. In so doing, this paper will provide an insight into any shifts in patterns or if sustained, as well as noteworthy peaks identified over the six-year period. This paper will add to several summary papers focused on specific areas that have been published to date from the Barometer series, all of which can be freely accessed here: https://drinkaware.ie/research/drinkaware-research-reports/

COVID-19 brought about a sudden and dramatic change to the daily routines of billions of people across the world. In March 2020, we experienced fundamental changes to our everyday lives due to the global pandemic, coupled with physical and social distancing measures as well as a series of lockdown phases. This in turn led to a radical reorganisation of social, economic and cultural relations, leaving us to grapple with the terms of a 'new normal' in an anything but normal life experience specifically between 2020-2022. While the onset of COVID-19 posed a major challenge to the Barometer in 2020, the wealth of data generated since provides insight into the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic and specifically patterns of alcohol consumption among adults in Ireland pre, during and post pandemic. The acute phase of the pandemic was followed by a cost-of-living crisis, with a sharp rise in inflation. Since 2022, Ireland has experienced a range of significant pressures, including rising cost-of-living challenges, heightened perceptions of social insecurity, and the broader impacts of international conflict and ongoing geopolitical change.

Findings:
Patterns of Consumption 2020-2025

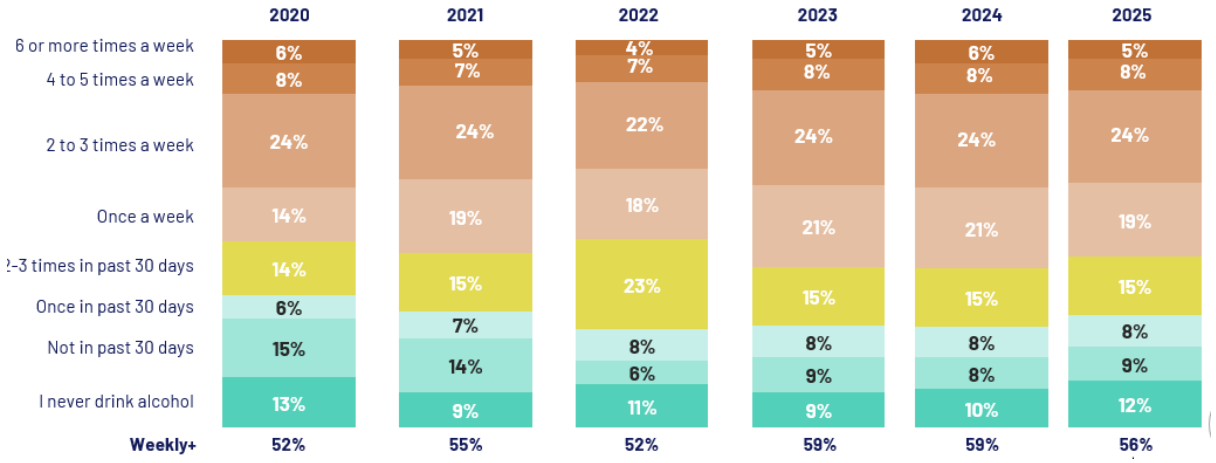
1. **Overall, current drinkers:**

- 79% of adults report consuming alcohol in the past 30 days in 2025. This is lower than both 2024 and 2023 when 82% of adults reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days (which was also in line with 2022 - 83%).
- The lower percentage of current drinkers reported in both 2020 (72%) and 2021 (77%) may therefore reflect the social distancing measures associated with periods of lockdown during these two time points and the closure of licensed premises on public health grounds.

Non-drinkers:

- 21% of adults report not drinking in 2025 (this encompasses 9% not in the past 30 days, 12% never drink alcohol). This rises to over 1/4 of adults aged under 35 years with 27% of adults in this age cohort not drinking in 2025.
- There has been a steady rise in the overall rate of non-drinkers since 2022 (17% in 2022, 18% in 2023 and 2024), with the 2025 figure representing a 3-point rise compared with the previous two years. Higher rates of non-drinkers were reported in both 2020 and 2021 (28% and 23% respectively) – this may also be associated with the closure of licensed premises during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Table 2: Current drinkers and non-drinkers adult population, 2020-2025



2. **Weekly+ consumption**

- 56% of adults self-classify as weekly drinkers in 2025, this is below the levels of the last two years while also matching the average of the Barometer series to date.
- Weekly drinking peaked post-COVID-19 pandemic in 2023 and again in 2024 - 59% of adults previously stated that they drank alcohol on at least a weekly basis in the past 30 days on both occasions. This was the highest national incidence since inception of the Barometer with a 7-point increase from 2022 (52%), 2021 (55%) and 2020 (52%).
- The weekly incidence of alcohol consumption continues to be much higher among males in 2025 with nearly 2/3 of men that drink alcohol reporting they do so on at least weekly+ basis (64%). The 2025 figure for male weekly+ drinking represents a slight drop from 2024 when a peak of 67% of men who drink reported doing so at that

time, however, male weekly+ drinking rates rose consistently between 2020-2024 with a 10-point increase overall (57% in 2020). This contrasts with female weekly+ drinking where the level reported in 2025 has returned to what was previously reported in 2020 (48%), following increases in 2021 and 2023.

- In 2025, significantly *lower* levels of weekly+ drinking are reported among women (48%) and 18-24-year-olds who drink (40%). This is the first time significantly lower levels have been reported for both cohorts across the six time points (2025-2020).
- The weekly incidence of alcohol consumption also continues to be largely consistent from 35 years onwards (with significantly lower % of under 35-year-olds doing so 47% vs 60% for all adults over 35 when combined).
- Across all adult age cohorts, the 50+ years age cohorts consistently report higher levels of weekly+ drinking (61% of 50-64-year-olds and 59% of 65+ year olds in 2025).

2025 peaks:

- Across households/life stages, statistically significant peak is reported among empty nesters with nearly 2/3 (63%) reporting drinking on weekly+ basis in past 30 days. Empty nesters weekly+ consumption has consistently peaked since 2021.
- 4-point difference in urban and rural weekly+ drinking with 58% of adults in urban areas and 52% of adults in rural areas drinking on at least weekly basis.
- Weekly+ drinking is 12-points higher among higher social economic status groups ABC1F (60%), vs those from lower social economic status groups C2DE (52%).

Table 3: Weekly+ Drinking 2025 - 2020

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE					PEAK
	N= 1062 (2025)	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	53-49	50-64	65+	
2025	56%	64%	48%[1]	40%	51%	60%	61%	59%	Empty Nester 63%
2024	59%	67%	52%	46%	58%	55%	67%	65%	Empty Nester 68%
2023	59%	63%	55%	59%	54%	56%	62%	61%	Empty Nester 66%
2022	52%	59%	45%	33%	50%	51%	54%	63%	Empty Nester 61%
2021	55%	59%	50%	51%	49%	54%	52%	66%	Empty Nester 62%
2020	52%	57%	48%	38%	51%	56%	51%	57%	Pre-family 58%

3. Prevalence of Binge and hazardous drinking

Binge Drinking – According to the World Health Organisation, Heavy episodic drinking is defined as the proportion of adult drinkers (aged 15 and older) who have had at least 60 grams or more of pure alcohol on at least one occasion in the past 30 days. An intake of 60 grams of pure alcohol is approximately equal to 6 standard alcoholic drinks. Consuming six or more standard drinks of alcohol in one sitting is classified as binge drinking or excessive drinking.

3.1 Typical binge

- Participants were asked *'How many standard drinks did you drink on a typical day when you drank in the past 30 days?'*

[1] Figures highlighted in red are when the % is significantly high, while figures highlighted in yellow are when the % is significantly low

- The mean (average) number of standard drinks reported in 2025 was 3.7 (there has been a small fall in average quantity reported over the past few years - 3.8 in 2024, 3.9 in 2023, 4 in 2020-2022).
- Typical binge drinking levels remain persistent with an established pattern that has emerged since COVID-19 as demonstrated from 2020 onwards. Almost one quarter (24%) of drinkers engage in binge drinking when they drink (i.e. drink 6 or more standard drinks) on a typical day when drinking in 2025 – this is a very slight decline on 2024 figure (25%). Lower % rates for typical binge drinking were reported during the COVID-19 pandemic with 20% of drinkers in 2020 and 22% in 2021 citing they typically drank 6 or more standard drinks in past 30 days. This represented 1 in 5 adult drinkers at that time and since rose to 1/4 over the course of the 3 following years – 27% in 2022, 26% in 2023 and 25% in 2024. Overall, binge drinking has risen from 20% in 2020 to an average of 25% over the past 3 years (26% in 2023,25% in 2024 and 24% in 2025).
- Binge drinking as a typical pattern again continues to peak among men, with 29% reporting doing so in 2025 (vs 18% of women who drink). However, the 2025 figure is a drop on what was reported previously, when 1 in 3 (33%) men who drank reported that they also typically binge drank in 2024 (32% in 2023, 35% in 2022, 31% in 2021, 27% in 2020). At the start of the COVD-19 pandemic, 13% of women who drink reported typically binge drinking and rose again in 2021 to 14%. Typical binge rates for women peaked at 1 in 5 (20%) in 2022, with slight declines on that figure since (19% in 2023, 17% in 2024).
- Across different age groups, highest rates of typical binge drinking are reported among 18–24-year-old adult drinkers in 2025 with 27% doing so. The last time this cohort reported the highest rate was in 2021 when 31% of 18–24-year-olds reported that they typically binge drank when drinking in past 30 days.

Table 4 Levels of Binge Drinking 2025 (Base drink alcohol in past 30 days n=850)

	Total	**Gender**		**Age**				
	%	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Binge on typical day in past 30 days	24%	29%	18%	27%	24%	24%	25%	19%
Any binge drinking in past 30 days	55%	64%	46%	72%	70%	56%	50%	37%
Binge @least once a week in past 30 days	13%	18%	9%	2%	10%	17%	18%	11%

3.2 Frequency of binge

- Participants were also asked *'How often did you have 6 or more standard drinks in a single occasion in past 30 days?'*
- 55% of adults who drink have engaged in binge drinking in the past 30 days in 2025, peaking among male drinkers (64%) and under 35-year-olds who drink (72% 18–24-year-olds and 70% of 25–34-year-olds).
- The 2025 overall rate is a decline on the frequency of binge drinking reported in the two previous years (58% in 2024 and 56% in 2023), as well as the overall increase reported among adult drinkers in previous years (55% in 2022, 49% in 2021, 46% in 2020). However, since the 2022, over half of current adult drinkers report having engaged in 'any' binge drinking in the past 30 days.
- Significantly lower rates are reported among women who drink (46%), 65+ year olds (37%) as well as those living in rural areas (47%) in 2025.

- In terms of binge drinking at least once a week in the past 30 days, 13% of drinkers report doing so in 2025, with highest rates reported among 18% of male drinkers as well as 50–64-year-olds. Significantly lower rates are reported among women (9%) and 18–24-year-olds (2%).

Table 5 Levels of Binge Drinking among adult drinkers over six Time-Points 2025-2020

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
BINGE ON TYPICAL DAY IN PAST 30 DAYS	24%	25%	26%	27%	22%	20%
ANY BINGE DRINKING IN PAST 30 DAYS	55%	58%	56%	55%	49%	46%
BINGE @LEAST ONCE A WEEK IN PAST 30 DAYS	13%	16%	16%	17%	14%	15%

3.3 AUDIT-C

Hazardous drinking may also occur where consumption exceeds the HSE recommended Low-Risk Weekly Guidelines (17 standard drinks for men or 11 standard drinks for women across the week with at least 2 alcohol-free days) but harm may not yet have been experienced. In other words, drinking in a hazardous manner means that although they have not yet experienced harm, the person is likely to in the future. Note that it is also possible to drink hazardously by binge drinking (six or more standard drinks in one sitting), even if the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines are adhered to.

- The AUDIT tool, developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Babor et al 2001), is used to measure an individual's level of risk and/or harm in relation to their alcohol consumption patterns.
- The AUDIT-C was completed in the Barometer series based on consumption in the last 30 days. It is a modified, three question version of the AUDIT instrument used to provide a measure of consumption only. A score of less than 5 indicates lower risk drinking and scores of 5+ AUDIT-C positive, a classification that indicates a propensity to increasing, or hazardous, drinking[2].
- Table 6 below outlines the AUDIT-C scores in our study based on those that consumed alcohol in past 30 days in Barometer 2025 – 2020.
- Across the six time points, AUDIT C 5- scores peak in 2020 and 2021 at 58% and 56% respectively (note that this was during the Pandemic and coincided with a series of lockdown phases alongside physical and social distancing measures).
- 53% of Irish adults that consumed alcohol in the last 30 days scored less than 5 on AUDIT-C in 2025 (lower risk drinking). However, 47% had scores of 5+ AUDIT-C positive in 2025, a classification that indicates a propensity to increasing, or hazardous, drinking.
- The 2025 incidence of AUDIT C 5+ score peaks among male drinkers (58%), weekly+ drinkers (60%) and adults that report any binge drinking (79%).

[2] Further details on the AUDIT and AUDIT-C are available here: https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/18727/

- Across all age groups, young adult drinkers aged 18-24 years had higher levels of scoring 5+ with 52% doing so in 2025.

Table 6 AUDIT-C scores based on those that consumed alcohol in last 30 days, 2025 (n=850)

AUDIT-C SCORE	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
5-	53%	50%	53%	53%	56%	58%
5+	47%	50%	47%	47%	44%	42%

4. Changes in drinking levels reported

Past 12 Months:

- Participants were asked about their perceived changes in levels of drinking in the past 12 months[3] in 2023-2025 in terms of both amount i.e. the size or number of drinks and frequency i.e. the number of days per week you drink.
- 5% of adults believe they have increased the amount they drink, and 34% believe they have decreased the amount when asked in 2025.
- Similarly, 5% of adults believe they have increased the frequency at which they drink, and 35% believe they have decreased the frequency when asked in 2025.
- 7% of adults believe that the have increased *either* the amount or frequency in the past 12 months; the self-declared increase is higher amongst women than men in 2025 (at 9% and 4% respectively).
- Adults aged 18-24 years, weekly+ drinkers, any binge as well as those who score 5+ on AUDIT-C are all more likely to report having increased the amount or frequency of alcohol consumed in the past 12 months (with 14% of adults 18-24 years, 10% of weekly drinkers, 10% of any binge and 11% of those with 5+ score all doing so).
- In addition, adults who agree with the statement 'I would like to drink alcohol less often' are also more likely to report having increased the amount or frequency of alcohol consumed in the past 12 months, with 10% doing so in 2025.
- 61% of drinkers state that the amount of alcohol consumed in the past 12 months has stayed the same/no change, while 60% state that the frequency has stayed the same/no change in 2025.
- Table 7 below demonstrates that adults' perceived changes in levels of drinking in past 12 months has remained largely constant over the past three years (2025-2023).

Table 7 Personal drinking review of past 12 months, 2025 (Base n= 1062)

	PERSONAL DRINKING	2025	2024	2023
AMOUNT	Decreased	34%	31%	31%
	Stayed same	61%	63%	61%
	Increased	5%	6%	7%
FREQUENCY	Decreased	35%	32%	32%
	Stayed same	60%	62%	61%
	Increased	5%	6%	7%
BOTH	Decreased	38%	35%	37%
	Increased	7%	8%	10%

[3] Note the specific question was changed in 2023 – previously between 2020-2022 the range referred to since COVID-19/March 2020, therefore unable to compare directly, hence 2023-2025 is only covered in this section.

Past 30 Days:

- Participants were also asked about perceived changes in the past 30 days i.e. 'Is the number of 'standard' drinks you have had in the past 30 days, more, less or about the same as before?'
- 14% of adults report consuming more standard drinks in the past 30 days when asked in 2025, while 19% report consuming less. 19% report that either they or someone in their household has increased their consumption of standard drinks in the past 30 days.
- Adults aged 35-49 years are statistically significantly more likely to state that they have drank more in the past 30 days than any other age group with 19% doing so in 2025 (vs 14% total).
- While 2021 changes in self-reported consumption in past 30 days were lower, it is vital to highlight increase in drinking reported in 2020 (that coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic): 2020 – 25% drinking more in past 30 days > 2021 – 8% drinking more (19% drinking less). Therefore, percentages of those that reported their drinking had 'stayed the same' since are also important (73% of adults cite drinking levels stayed the same in past 30 days in 2021).

Table 8 Drinking more, less, about the same in past 30 days, 2025 – 2020

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
ANY MORE PERSONAL	14%	12%	12%	12%	8%	25%
ANY MORE OTHERS IN HOUSEHOLD	10%	9%	12%	9%	11%	19%
ANY LESS PERSONAL	19%	16%	17%	14%	19%	25%
ANY LESS OTHERS IN HOUSEHOLD	24%	21%	22%	25%	25%	25%
ABOUT THE SAME PERSONAL	67%	71%	71%	75%	73%	50%
ABOUT THE SAME OTHERS IN HOUSEHOLD	65%	70%	66%	68%	64%	56%

Discussion:

Using findings from the Barometer series (2020–2025), this paper explores evolving patterns of alcohol consumption among adults in Ireland, including emerging trends, sustained changes, and notable peaks.

It is encouraging to see slight dips in several key measures in the patterns of consumption recently in the Barometer series. For instance, with the rate of adults who report consuming alcohol in the past 30 days a slight dip is reported in 2025, following several years of sustained percentages. This is backed up further by Healthy Ireland 2025 which found 71% of people aged 15 or older report consuming alcohol during the past 12 months. This is a 2-point decrease from 2024 (73%) and 5-points down since 2015 (76%) (Government of Ireland 2025). While a slight dip in weekly drinking (3-points) is reported in the 2025 Barometer[4] (it is important to monitor if this decrease continues), a consistent trend is identified in this

[4] Healthy Ireland 2025 found 35% of respondents drinking at least once per week, a decrease since the 2024 Healthy Ireland Survey (38%) (note question in this research in past 12 months and not in past 30 days as per Barometer series so unable to directly compare).

paper since 2020 with over half adults that drink, doing so on at least weekly basis and peaking at 59% in 2024.

The 50+ years age cohorts consistently report the highest levels of weekly+ drinking and, across life stage, empty nesters standout with significantly higher rates of weekly+ drinking reported in the Barometer series 2020-2025. According to the HSE (2025) as you get older, your body is less able to break down alcohol. You are also more vulnerable to the harmful effects of alcohol. The impact of alcohol consumption among older people is often overlooked as older adults tend to drink less than younger drinkers (HRB 2021). For instance, other data from Healthy Ireland 2025 research found that while people aged 75 are the least likely to say they drank alcohol in the past 12 months (57%), the proportion of people aged 75 and older who drank in the past 12 months has increased by 4 points when compared with 10 years previously (2015: 53%). In other Irish research as part of analysis of TILDA data pre-COVID-19, a decline in average weekly consumption and heavy episodic drinking over time was reported and with increasing age for both men and women. However, this research also found frequency of drinking increased over time for both men and women, with a higher proportion of men reporting daily or almost daily consumption at wave 3 (Holton et al, 2019). As the proportion of older people in Ireland continues to grow, alcohol consumption among older people should be an area of priority when aiming to reduce alcohol consumption and related harm in Ireland (HRB 2021).

Why and where drinking is taking place are both crucial in helping to tell the story of patterns of alcohol consumption. In terms of *why,* motivations have shifted with the prevalence of multiple motivations reducing across time - most particularly those related to 'fun', 'parties', 'celebrations' and 'fitting in'. This may reflect a shift towards more individual and less social drinking patterns – latest Barometer data reveals that enhancement (61%), and social (51%) reasons remain strongest in 2025, while drivers tied to fun, parties and fitting-in have receded. Coping (56%) and conformity (44%) reasons are notably higher among 18–24-year-olds in 2025, signalling emotional and peer pressures and the need to address stress and mental health. For instance, low mental wellbeing remains prominent at roughly 1 in 3 since 2020 (32% overall in 2025, peak of 37% in 2020), with adults under 35 years significantly more likely to have low mental well-being. While this paper focuses on the period from 2020 to 2025, it is important to contextualise these findings against comparable pre-pandemic data. In 2018, when the Mental Wellbeing scale was first included as part of the Drinkaware Index, only 11% of adults reported low mental wellbeing. This presents a stark contrast to the substantially higher levels recorded throughout six time points during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The comparison highlights a clear structural shift in national mental wellbeing. Prior to the pandemic, the data reflected an adult population that was, overall, more mentally positive and resilient. However, the consistently higher prevalence of low mental wellbeing observed between 2020 and 2025 suggests that this decline was not temporary. Instead, it points to a sustained deterioration in mental wellbeing at a population level, indicating that mental health outcomes have not returned to their pre-COVID baseline.

In terms of *where*, in 2025 more than half of adults that drink (55%) are most likely to report that they drink at home when they do so. In addition, almost one in three adults who drink (31%) now drink at home alone at least once a week, making it the most common drinking occasion in Ireland, followed by a small number of drinks outside of mealtimes/dinner (30%). While at-home drinking among adults was always present (Drinkaware 2020), COVID-19 dramatically enforced the drinking at home experience and changed practices associated with it. Drinking alcohol at home took on a whole different meaning and where it became normal to drink ultimately changed, and who we drink with became more solitary - a pattern we see maintained again in 2025. Emerging routines of increased consumption in the home that developed during the pandemic may since have become normalised and hidden as well

as being potentially hazardous to public health (Drinkaware 2025). Because the majority of alcohol use now takes place in the home, it is increasingly difficult for drinkers to monitor their alcohol use (HRB 2024).

Across the six-time points, 1 in 5 adults reported typically binge drinking when drinking alcohol during past 30 days in 2020 and since then rose to 1/4 over the course of the 3 following years, remaining at this level since. There has been a very slight decline to this figure in both 2024 and again in 2025 (1 point on each occasion), therefore it will be important to see if this is sustained and/or further decline takes place in 2026. A similar typical binge figure was found in Healthy Ireland 2025, showing 26% of the Irish population are binge drinkers on a typical drinking occasion in the past 12 months (note the sample for Healthy Ireland is aged 15+). Peaks among men and young adults were reported in Healthy Ireland 2025 too - 38% of 18–24-year-olds and 40% of men (vs 12% of women) report binge drinking on a typical drinking occasion in the past 12 months (note Barometer asks typical binge drinking in past 30 days). In terms of frequency, since 2022, over half of current adult drinkers report having engaged in 'any' binge drinking in the past 30 days in the Barometer.

While several overall dips in patterns of consumption are identified in Barometer 2025 - this paper also highlights how a worrying 5-point increase in AUDIT-C scores – with 47% of drinkers in past 30 days aged 18 scoring 5+ in 2025 vs 42% in 2020. A peak of 50% is reported in 2024. Scores of 5+ AUDIT-C positive denotes a classification that indicates a propensity to increasing, or hazardous, drinking. Similarly Healthy Ireland 2025 found that 51% of drinkers (36% of people aged 15+) drink alcohol at a harmful level (i.e. have an AUDIT-C score of 5 or higher) and men (47%) are more likely than women (25%) to drink at a harmful level (Government of Ireland 2025). AUDIT C 5+ scores peak among male drinkers aged 18+ (58%) in Barometer 2025.

Ultimately, looking across consumption patterns is fundamental in helping to identify potential cohorts at risk of alcohol harm. This is evident in the 2025 Barometer findings with younger adults (18–24-year-olds) found less likely to be weekly drinkers (40%) but more likely to engage in binge drinking (72%). This in turn highlights the importance of targeted interventions for this age group. Last year, we undertook a qualitative body of work to help understand of how young adults experience alcohol in their everyday lives in Ireland. As documented in the 25 self-video diaries from this research project, type of occasion influenced young adults' consumption, appearing to increase across impromptu drinking, planned drinking, and big events respectively (Drinkaware 2025). Alcohol was viewed as a requirement for social acceptance and belonging among young adults in this qualitative study, therefore younger adult specific interventions may need to confront the social pressures and stigma associated with drinking. Results from this study will be crucial to informing the development and roll out of focused information campaigns during 2026 to assist with reducing alcohol misuse. Ultimately understanding the aetiology of young adults' drinking is important to facilitate development of prevention inventions.

For instance, in January 2026 we undertook a series of digital information videos specifically focused on helping young adults to navigate during Dry January. Content focused on issues highlighted during the qualitative study and included the following: Encouraging adults to go out and make plans with friends outside of a pub/bar environment so that they don't isolate themselves when undertaking a period of alcohol moderation; Encouraging adults to replace alcohol with a new hobby, such as fitness, which would help young adults expand their social circle in a sober context. We utilised Call-to-Action functions on our social media platforms, encouraging users to "follow the page", "comment below" or "click the link in our bio" to drive engagement and, in so doing, promote community building in young adults through social connection with others in an online space. In so doing, this encouraged young adults to further cultivate and expand their support system offline, through letting friends

and family know about their plans to do Dry January. Temporarily abstaining from alcohol as part of campaigns such as Dry January has previously found to be associated with ongoing benefits including reductions to alcohol upon resuming drinking following the end of the campaign (Butters et al. 2023).

We also launched the second series of our Podcast Series *Here's to Change* in February 2026 and focused specifically on real life experiences relating to sober curiosity. Continuing on from our first season in Autumn 2025, which featured spoken word artist Nealo (who appeals to the 18-24 cohort) in articulating his journey in terms in navigating the world of music, a vibrant alcohol centred social scene to living alcohol free. Our second podcast season launched with fashion and lifestyle influencer, Sam Kelly. Sam enjoyed socialising and alcohol during college, but when sporadic nights out became longer instances of heavy drinking, he had to cut alcohol from his life allowing him to benefit from the successful life he is thriving in now. In our second episode, we spoke with alcohol-free mentor and coach, Olivia Farrelly. The focus of this conversation was on grey area drinkers – someone whose drinking doesn't appear problematic on surface but can be affecting their wellbeing and health. This episode is framed by Olivia's own experiences with alcohol – alcohol became inextricable from connection, excitement and social belonging, and the challenge of relearning her identity without it. Platforming relatable, real-life stories like these presents moderation as a flexible, unrestrictive way of living to key at risk cohorts of the population.

In Barometer 2025, a minority of adults (5%) believe that they have increased the amount they drink, and 35% believe that they have decreased the amount. This is once again in contrast to the national totals reported, suggesting a potential underreporting or under perceptions of increased consumption. As previously documented last year in a Barometer Research paper that focused on at-home drinking, many adults have limited knowledge of how much they are actually drinking, this is potentially concerning especially when taking place at home. Therefore, we can assume that some adults may be drinking more than stated. We will be exploring this issue further in our next summary paper that will be due for publication later in Spring 2026.

The Barometer study's strengths include the large, representative sample and examining the series over several time points – in so doing this helps to identify sub-populations at risk from harmful drinking patterns. Ultimately the Barometer series 2020-2025 finds that men drink more and binge more. Younger adults are most likely to binge in past 30 days. Peaks in both cohorts suggest a demographic focus for related interventions are required. However, it is also important to understand why and what role alcohol plays in these adults' lives, this requires more than quantitative surveys and therefore we commenced specific bodies of qualitative research in late 2024 that aimed at understanding the role of alcohol in a sample of young adults aged 18-34 lives. We are delighted to have begun data collection for our next qualitative project in early 2026 that focuses on the views and experiences of drinking alcohol among men aged 40-55 years. The purpose of this new body of work is to help understand how men engage with alcohol and strategies that they use to reduce harmful drinking practices. Qualitative research is important as it give us an opportunity to listen and understand the 'why' and subsequently create bespoke support tools and messaging for a specific cohort. We look forward to sharing findings from this research project later this year once complete.

When examining change in drinking levels from year to year, exploring the 'stayed the same' figures is also important, and the question remains as to how much were these adults drinking? For instance, Barometer 2021 changes in self-reported consumption in past 30 days were lower, but this is deceptive and needs to be considered alongside increases in drinking previously reported in 2020 (that coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic). Therefore, percentages of adults that reported their drinking had 'stayed the same' since

are important, providing indications of stability among half of adult drinkers since the onset of COVID-19. It is crucial to continue to examine these changes in the context of post-COVID-19.

It appears from this paper and evidence gathered as part of the Barometer series 2020-2025 that the long-term effects of the pandemic are still unfolding. According to the CSO (2022): 'The impact of the pandemic on our society will be felt for years to come'. COVID-19 still remains an important part of telling the 2025 story and how we are feeling right now, set within a continued time of heightened turbulence such as the high cost-of-living at both national and international levels, and threats from global insecurity and war that is taking place. However, there is also evidence within the Barometer series of several positive shifts in drinking behaviours and attitudes among adults in Ireland that are gaining momentum since the Covid-19 Pandemic as we previously documented in a research paper that was published as part of the Here's to Change campaign in March 2025. Significantly, this paper also outlined collectively encouraging trends alongside worrying issues, such as the continuation of adults unsure as to how much they are actually consuming as well as the rise in drinking at home alone.

Conclusion

Patterns of consumption across six time points between 2020 -2025 as outlined in detail in this paper point to the need for ongoing education to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse and increased awareness of the broader health risks of excessive alcohol consumption. The Drinkaware Barometer series gives us a clear picture of both the progress being made and the areas where more work is needed. Overall consumption may be down but some consistent patterns since COVID-19 such as persistent binge drinking identified are concerning. These patterns are also evident in Healthy Ireland research. At Drinkaware, we are committed to empowering adults with the knowledge to make informed choices and to support positive changes in drinking habits. It is positive that our Drinks Calculator and Drink Driving in Ireland pages are among the most visited sections on our website, with over 294,264 Drinks Calculator uses and 64,828 visits to the Drink Driving in Ireland page in 2025, showing a strong desire for knowledge and a commitment to keeping communities safe.

As the national independent charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse in Ireland, Drinkaware's work is grounded in research, evidence and rigorous evaluation. The findings from our Barometer series will help underpin the design of evidence-informed tools and resources to support, build and sustain positive behaviour change regarding alcohol as momentum gathers pace. And in so doing prevent and reduce alcohol misuse and harm in Ireland in accordance with Drinkaware's stated mission. A national multi-media campaign entitled *Here's to Change* with Irish rapper and spoken word artist Nealo took place by Drinkaware in 2025. At the time of its launch in March 2025, the *Here's to Change* campaign had a reach of 3,516,775 with 10 pieces of coverage, across national and regional media. More needs to be done on an on-going, wider and collaborative basis tailored to benefit those at highest risk and will be incorporated into Drinkaware's work programmes in 2026 and throughout our current strategic cycle 2025-2028. We look forward to continuing to play a supporting and contributing role towards this positive change.

We also look forward to providing further evidence from our 2025 Barometer and the focus of our next paper will outline findings relating to adults' intention vs their behaviour regarding consumption of alcohol in Ireland. We envisage that this paper will be ready for publication once analysis is complete later in Spring 2026.

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