

# Young Australians and COVID-19: Increased depression, anxiety, but reduced alcohol-related harm

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There was a significant increase in depression and anxiety symptoms for young Australians during COVID-19, but no greater help-seeking from

mental health professionals, says a new report. There was however, a decrease in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms.

Using survey data from 1,927 young people as part of the Australian Parental Supply of Alcohol Longitudinal Study (APSALS) cohort led by The National Drug and Alcohol Research Center (NDARC), UNSW Sydney, researchers found that half the cohort rated their [mental health](#) as having worsened.

Ms Emily Upton, Research Officer at NDARC and Clinical Psychologist, said, "Young people may disproportionately experience certain stressors associated with the pandemic, such as reduced casual working hours and disruption to other structured activities like tertiary education."

The report found that despite increases in generalized anxiety and depression, there was no increased uptake of young people seeking out support with their mental health from health professionals.

"Young people generally have low engagement with mental health treatment and rely more on self-reliance strategies to cope with mental health problems," said Ms Upton.

The report found that although the Australian Government introduced initiatives to increase access to mental health support during the pandemic, there may be a lag in young Australians accessing this support.

"Cost is a key barrier to treatment access for young people. Reduction in income during the pandemic may be a factor in continued low rates of help-seeking and while government rebates are available, these do not cover the entire cost of psychological treatment," said Ms Upton.

In another report using the same APSALS [survey data](#), it was found that [alcohol use](#) among young people during the COVID-19 pandemic decreased.

Dr. Philip Clare, Biostatistician at The Prevention Research Collaboration, University of Sydney, said, "Overall alcohol consumption among young people during the restrictions declined by 17 percent compared to February 2020, and there was a 34 percent decline in the rate of alcohol-related harms."

The report found that changes in consumption appear to be driven by the COVID-19 restrictions.

"Young people generally consume more alcohol outside of the home, so we would expect [alcohol consumption](#) to decline during COVID-19 restrictions. However, we saw an increase in drinking alone and drinking 'virtually' with others," said Dr. Clare.

"Similarly, the decline in alcohol-related harms may be driven by the fact that drinking was more likely to occur alone or 'virtually' with others due to the need to isolate, which reduces the risk of harms such as fighting with strangers, and traffic accidents."

The report stresses that alcohol-related trends in [young people](#) are also important to understand so the relevant harm reduction strategies can be implemented.

"Although drinking and harms decreased, we could see an increase in future due to loss in tolerance," said Dr. Clare.

**More information:** Emily Upton et al, Changes in mental health and help-seeking among young Australian adults during the COVID-19 pandemic: a prospective cohort study, *Psychological Medicine* (2021).

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