

Study shows alcohol delivery services used to extend drinking sessions

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

A survey of Australian adults who use popular alcohol delivery sites found one in five utilized a service to continue a home drinking session.

Services that deliver [alcohol](#) directly to the doorstep in as little as 30 minutes can prolong drinking sessions that would have otherwise ended,

according to new research published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Review*.

A team led by UNSW Sydney surveyed 1,158 Australian adults who used online alcohol [delivery](#) services to investigate purchasing patterns, consumer motivations and age verification practices. Participants were recruited through [social media](#), and sampling was used to roughly reflect the age and gender proportions of the wider population.

They found one in five survey participants had used an online delivery service to extend a home drinking session because they had run out of alcohol, with a third indicating they would have stopped if the option wasn't available. Furthermore, those who had used a fast same-day service to continue drinking were six times more likely to drink at hazardous levels than those who had never used a service this way.

"Increased access to rapid delivery of low-cost liquor from the comfort of the home could be impacting purchasing and drinking behaviors," says Stephanie Colbert, lead author of the study and Ph.D. candidate from the School of Population Health at UNSW Medicine & Health.

"As we saw in this study, some would drink less if the service wasn't available."

Expansion in the home delivery sector

While alcohol home delivery services have been around for a while, sales have risen significantly in recent years. Now, more online retailers are offering to bring alcohol direct-to-door in under two hours than ever before to meet the demand.

"More than a quarter of survey participants had never purchased alcohol online for delivery before the pandemic. Of the remaining who had,

44% had increased their use in that time," Ms. Colbert says.

Convenience, followed by cost, were the most common reasons for purchasing alcohol online for delivery. Most participants also used an online promotion, such a multi-buy deal, which was associated with buying more alcohol.

"Over half of those surveyed said they had participated in an online promotion in their latest purchase, and they bought, on average, 22 more [standard drinks](#) than those who did not participate, which is a substantial amount," Ms. Colbert says.

Some countries, such as Scotland and Ireland, have moved to restrict promotions encouraging people to buy more alcohol than they otherwise would have. Similar restrictions in Australia may reduce the incentive for increased alcohol purchasing, Ms. Colbert says.

"The concern is that increased availability of alcohol in the community, which these services enable, may lead to increases in [alcohol consumption](#) and harm without having strong regulations in place and enforced."

Consistent regulations are needed

The study also found poorer age verification practices for home delivery amongst adults under 25. They were significantly more likely to report never having their ID checked when receiving an alcohol delivery at the door compared to in-person at a bottle shop.

"Given the harms associated with the early consumption of alcohol, such as an increased risk of developing an [alcohol use disorder](#) in adulthood, it is important that appropriate age verification controls are in place for home delivery," Ms. Colbert says. "Having identity verification by

accredited identity service providers at the point of sale, which is set to be introduced for all same-day delivery services soon in NSW, would help to address this."

In general, alcohol delivery regulations in most Australian jurisdictions have weaker standards than physical liquor stores across the board. For example, delivery drivers in many states aren't required to hold a Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) certification, despite being mandatory for bottle shop servers.

"An RSA clearly outlines the legal obligations of selling and serving alcohol, such as underage drinking laws, checking photo identification and recognizing the signs of intoxication," Ms. Colbert says. "It's something all delivery drivers should have at a minimum to bring these services up to the same standards we have for brick-and-mortar stores."

In NSW, same-day delivery drivers are required by law to have an RSA and check identification for any same-day delivery, though not for next-day delivery, which can be left unattended.

"Strong policy is the lever we have to help manage the risks posed by these services while enabling consumer access," Ms. Colbert says.

"If we have a two-tiered system of regulation that can be exploited, there's a chance it will be."

More information: Stephanie Colbert et al, Cross-sectional survey of a convenience sample of Australians who use alcohol home delivery services, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/dar.13627](https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13627)

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