

**March 2025**

***Here's to Change: an overview of positive shifts in drinking behaviours and attitudes among adults in Ireland***

## **Introduction**

The Barometer has now been conducted by Ipsos B&A on behalf of Drinkaware on nine different occasions over the last eight years, namely January 2017, June 2017, January 2018, April 2019, April 2020, May 2021, June 2022, July 2023 and July 2024. 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 multi-dimensional 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. This study, therefore, also examines the 'wider picture' in which adults experience 2024, e.g., stress/tension, mental health, household dynamics, as well as the behaviour of other adults.

Following the planning phase and decisions regarding specific questioning, in June 2024, 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 2024. 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 2024 e.g., post COVID-19 pandemic, current 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 2024.

A quantitative research design was employed. A quota-controlled sampling procedure was utilised to deliver a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18+ (n = 1,045).

Online surveys were conducted between July and August 2024. 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 <45, single 45+, pre-family, family pre-school, family pre-teen, 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. Questionnaire design incorporated internationally recognised question models including:

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

The focus of this paper is to provide an outline of the specific findings relating to how adults' relationship with alcohol is changing in Ireland. The Barometer series has identified several positive patterns - both attitude and behaviour shifts, with momentum building in recent years. This paper will therefore document who and why but also what barriers remain i.e. those not wanting to drink less. We recently published a [summary research paper](#) focused on public knowledge regarding the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines. Last year, we published a comprehensive paper that provided a detailed overview of the findings from the [2023 Barometer](#) as well as summary paper focusing specifically on [Wellbeing](#). We are looking forward to continuing to share more findings from our 2024 Barometer in future research papers over the coming months.

## Findings:

- 37% of adults now agree they would like to drink alcohol less often, the highest such incidence in the Drinkaware Barometer to date. The 2024 figure represents a 13-point rise from 2020 (24%) (36% in 2023, 30% in 2022 and 2021 respectively). There are several statistically significant peaks when we look more closely at the data among the following, who agree they would like to drink less often:
  - 42% of weekly+ drinkers
  - 44% of those who reported any binge drinking in past 30 days
  - 53% of those with increased consumption
  - 45% of those with an AUDIT-C<sup>1</sup> +5 score

Across all age cohorts surveyed, those aged 65+ years are *less likely* to report that they would like to drink alcohol less often.

- 37% of adults state that they have made small positive changes to their drinking habits in the past 30 days (i.e. drinking less) in 2024. This peaks at just over half of 18-24-year-olds who drink alcohol, with 51% reporting that they have made small positive changes in 2024. 62% of adults that would like to drink less often in 2024 agree that they have also made small positive changes. In terms of changes over the past few years, the 2024 figure represents a 6-point increase from 2020 (31%), while it is a slight dip on 2023 (41%), 35% of adults previously reported having made small positive changes in 2022 and 37% in 2021. Further details on the changes between 2024-2020 are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Attitudes to current alcohol consumption (n=940 in 2024, ever drank alcohol)**

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
I would like to drink alcohol less often	37%	36%	30%	30%	24%
I have made small positive changes to my drinking habits in the past 30 days	37%	41%	35%	37%	31%

<sup>1</sup> 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 2024 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.

- In total, 52% of adults (n=560 participants) reported having reduced their alcohol consumption in either the past 30 days and/or past 12 months in the 2024 Barometer. These participants were provided with a number of options and asked which of the following strongly influenced them to drink less - physical health /fitness, personal finances, mental health, impact on family/relationships, my job/career and other. This question was first asked in the Barometer in 2002, with 54.6% of adults reporting reduced consumption at that time, rising to 57.1% of adults in 2023.
- Among those that have reduced their consumption in 2024, 63% of adults' motivation to drink less is to improve their physical health followed by 38% for personal finances and 37% to improve their mental health. The same top three motivations were reported in 2023. Full details on the breakdown of influences to drink less as well as a year-by-year comparison between 2024 and 2023 are provided in Table 2 below.
- Participants who reported reducing consumption were also provided with a list of more detailed options (first added to the Barometer in 2023) and again asked which of the following strongly influenced them to drink less (a full list is provided in Table 2 below). Just over half of those who had reduced consumption highlighted that they are more conscious now about the health harms associated with alcohol (53%) and/or would rather spend their money on other things (e.g. food/ travel/ clothes/entertainment) (51%). A quarter of those who reduced consumption noted that the behaviour of others as a consequence of excessive drinking (25%) was an influence on drinking less.

**Table 2: Influences to drink less, 2024 (n=560) and 2023 (n=578)**

In detail	2024	2023	In general	2024	2023
I'm more conscious now about the health harms associated with alcohol	53%	48%	Physical health/ fitness	63%	63%
I'd rather spend my money on other things (e.g. Food/travel/clothes/entertainment)	51%	52%	Personal finances	38%	45%
I can't afford to drink as much as I used to	25%	32%	Mental health	37%	31%

Behaviour of others as a consequence of excessive drinking	25%	24%	Impact on family/relationships	20%	19%
I've had a bad experience when drunk that I don't want to repeat	18%	14%	My job/career	14%	12%
Other	5%	6%	Other	8%	8%

- About 1 in 4 adults (24%) feel they will likely increase their health problems in the future if they continue their current pattern of drinking<sup>2</sup>; this rises to 35% among those who have binge drank in the past 30 days and 48% among those who have increased drinking in the past 12 months.
- Further data on awareness of health effects of excessive drinking is available in our other [summary paper](#) that we recently published in January 2025.
- Among those who would like to drink less often, data gathered as part of 2024 Barometer found that clear information on what is meant by a standard drink and HSE low-risk weekly guidelines<sup>3</sup> (33%) as well as a device to monitor blood alcohol levels (30%) are considered the most helpful tools and techniques to be more aware of/improve how you manage the amount of alcohol you drink. Further data on tools and techniques is also available in our other [summary paper](#) that we recently published in January 2025.
- Latest Barometer data reveals that 39% of adults who drink are interested in monitoring and adapting their relationship with alcohol (new question for 2024 hence no year-by-year comparison available). This peaks at almost two thirds (64%) among those who also state that they would like to drink alcohol less often. However, over half of adults (53%) that report increased alcohol consumption in the past 12 months would also be interested in monitoring and adapting their relationship with alcohol. Similarly, 46% of those that have binge drank in the past 30 days state that they would be interested.

<sup>2</sup> This was a new question for 2024, hence there is no year-by-year comparison figure/s available.

<sup>3</sup> Drinking within the HSE Low Risk Weekly Alcohol Guidelines reduces your risk of alcohol-related health issues. These guidelines are for adults. There is no safe amount of alcohol for children and young people under age 18. The HSE Low-Risk Weekly Guidelines for adults are:

- Women: Less than 11 standard drinks (110g pure alcohol) spread out over the week, with at least two alcohol-free days
- Men: Less than 17 standard drinks (170g pure alcohol) spread out over the week, with at least two alcohol-free days per week
- Common examples of a standard drink are, half a pint of beer, 100ml glass of wine and 35.5ml of spirits.

- In trying to gauge information both on what adults do and don't do to moderate their drinking, participants were provided with a number of options in 2024 and asked to what extent they had tried any of these<sup>4</sup>. Avoiding alcohol on a 'school/work night' is the most common behaviour cited to moderate drinking with 61% of adults reporting that they are doing this (either for a while or recently i.e. in the last 2 or 3 months). Women are more likely to report doing so than men (65% vs 56%). There is also a peak among families with teens at 80%.
- 48% of adults who drink alcohol would embrace a sober night out as part of their efforts to moderate drinking. Women are more likely to report doing so than men (54% vs 43%). In addition, adults that report drinking less are also more likely to report embracing a sober night out, for example 59% of those that have decreased their consumption in the past 12 months, 59% of those that did not binge drink in the past month and 58% of those with AUDIT-C -5 scores.
- 68% of adults have either already have a sober night out *or* would be willing to consider doing so to moderate drinking.
- Encouragingly, the Barometer also shows that 64% of individuals have either already avoided alcohol for a fixed period of time *or* would consider doing so to moderate drinking.
- Looking at what adults are *not* doing, but would be willing to do, the most common behaviour is 'choose to go to alcohol-free spaces to socialise (32%)'.
- Only 16% of adults in 2024 believe that not drinking would have a negative impact on their friendships or connections (the same as reported when asked in 2023) thus challenging outdated perceptions. Peaks in younger adult age cohorts are reported with 25% of 18-24-year-olds agreeing this statement and 23% of 25-34-year-olds also in agreement in 2024. Peaks are also reported among those that have increased their alcohol consumption (32%) as well as adults that have binge drank in the past 30 days (21%). However, women are more likely to men to *disagree* with just over two thirds

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<sup>4</sup> Participants in 2024 Barometer were asked to answer the following: Here are some things people have suggested they do to moderate their drinking - Avoid drinking on a school/work night; Drink within the weekly low-risk guidelines; Have a sober night out; Avoid being in a round of drinks' Alternate alcohol drinks with soft drinks or water; Set myself a drinking limit e.g. just one glass/bottle; Stay off alcohol for a fixed time period; Drink a low-alcohol or non-alcoholic beer/cider/wine (e.g. <0.5% ABV); Avoid always having alcohol in the house; Drink smaller glasses of wine or smaller bottles of beer; Drink an alcoholic drink of lower strength (but not less than <0.5% ABV); Choose to go to alcohol free spaces to socialize; Record how much I am drinking. To what extent have you tried any of these? This is the first time this question was asked hence there is no year-by-year comparison/figures available.

doing so (67%), compared with 53% of men (overall, 60% of adults who drink disagree).

- 44% of adults who drink in 2024 state they are buying less alcohol than they did a year ago (vs 41% in 2023). This peaks at 75% for those that have decreased their consumption in the past 12 months. Across all age cohorts, adults aged 35-49 years are the most likely to agree that they are buying less alcohol than they did a year ago with 51% doing so.
- There is a clear interest and appetite growing towards healthier drinking behaviour in 2024 as 45% of those adults who have drunk in the past 30 days (48% in 2023, 46% in 2022, 40% in 2021) say they would follow the guidelines if they were aware of them. In addition, just over 1/3 of adults (34%) who binge drank in the past 30 days in 2024 say that they would follow the guidelines if aware of them (39% in 2023, 34% in 2022, 28% in 2021). Yet only 45% of those who said they would like to drink less often said they would follow the guidelines if aware (51% in 2023, 46% in both 2022 and 2021).

## Discussion

Data gathered in the Barometer 2024 study and presented in this paper provides insight into positive shifts in drinking behaviours and attitudes among adults in Ireland identified in the Drinkaware Barometer series that has now been collected over the course of several years.

The Drinkaware Barometer has been tracking alcohol consumption and attitudes in Ireland for eight years now, and each annual iteration provides us with valuable insights into how Irish adults are engaging with alcohol. By repeating this research year after year, we can identify important shifts in behaviours and attitudes over time. The Drinkaware Barometer gives us a clear picture of both the progress being made and the areas where more work is needed. This paper demonstrates that Ireland's relationship with alcohol is changing and momentum is building with significant peaks among certain adult demographics documented.

It is very encouraging to see an overall growing desire to drink less - with 37% of adults indicating they want to cut back and the same number of adults making small positive changes to their drinking habits in the past 30 days. Social habits are also evolving, with nearly half of adults in Barometer 2024 stating they would embrace a sober night out as part of their efforts to moderate drinking. Almost two thirds of adults have avoided alcohol for a fixed period or would consider doing so demonstrating a widespread willingness to explore the benefits of moderation, even beyond Dry January. Such shifts reflect a broader cultural change toward mindful drinking, making prioritising health while maintaining social connections easier than ever. For those concerned about how abstaining from alcohol might affect relationships, only 16% of people believe that not drinking would have a negative impact on friendships or connections thus challenging outdated perceptions and underscoring the increasing acceptance of alcohol-free lifestyles. Stereotypes are most certainly being broken down; however, we still face challenges, particularly around binge drinking patterns.

It must be highlighted that data on alcohol is complex and nuanced. For instance, while Barometer 2024 identified that 37% wanted to drink less, 25% (n=265) stated that they did *not* want to drink less. These individuals were provided with a number of options and asked to



answer which had influenced their decision<sup>5</sup>. For instance, 44% of those that did not want to drink less stated ‘I’m only a social drinker’. These adults may be drinking within the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines and indeed self-understanding of terms such as binge drinking was found to be high in Barometer 2024. However, high rates of binge drinking were identified and this is concerning. One in four drinkers identified in Barometer 2024 typically engaged in binge drinking when they drink (drink 6 or more standard drinks) on a typical day in the past 30 days. Similarly, Healthy Ireland 2024 identified a quarter (28%) of the population aged 15+ are considered binge drinkers, i.e. they drank 6 or more standard drinks on a typical drinking occasion in the past 12 months (Department of Health 2024). Recent Healthy Ireland data found that there has also been an increase in the numbers who are considered binge drinkers (drinking six or more standard drinks on a typical drinking occasion), rising to 28% from 24% in 2023. At the same time alcohol consumption, within the previous 12 months, has risen from 70% to 73% but remains lower than the 75% reported in 2018 (Department of Health 2024).

In addition, in our 2024 Barometer, 50% of Irish adults that consumed alcohol in the past 30 days had scores of 5+ AUDIT-C positive, a classification that indicates a propensity to increasing or hazardous drinking (Babor et al. 2001). Evidence gathered through the AUDIT-C offers a crucial warning system with several concerning peaks identified among males (61%), those who drink weekly+ (62%), 61% among those who agree they ‘would like to drink alcohol less often’, and 83% among those who have binge drank in the past 30 days.

In terms of young adults, recent data from Growing Up in Ireland found that at age 25, two in five (39%) of respondents reported a level of drinking that could be considered risky or hazardous according to the AUDIT scale. Men also (44.5%) recorded a risky or hazardous level of drinking more frequently than women (33.6%) (Central Statistics Office 2025). At the same time, young adults appear to be leading the way with positive shifts identified in our Barometer series, with just over half of 18-24-year-olds making positive changes to their drinking habits in 2024. We are currently undertaking a qualitative research study examining young adults’ relationship with alcohol in Ireland in collaboration with Ipsos B&A and look forward to sharing the findings from this innovative and pioneering study once available.

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<sup>5</sup> Participants in 2024 Barometer that stated that they did not want to drink less were asked to answer from the following what factors influenced their decision: I don’t need to because I drink less than most people I know; I’ve never experienced any harm from the amount I drink; I can handle it, I’ve a good tolerance; I’m only a social drinker; I’m not an alcoholic / dependent drinker; I’d be the odd one out in my group; My friends wouldn’t want to go out with me; I don’t need to now because I will drink less when I’m older; Other.

About 1 in 4 adults in Barometer 2024 feel they will likely increase their health problems in the future if they continue their current pattern of drinking; this dramatically rises to 48% among those who have increased drinking in the past 12 months. This is extremely concerning if they are unsure as to *how much* they are consuming in the first place, for instance we identified little to no awareness of the HSE low-risk weekly guidelines once again in our 2024 Barometer. Less than 5% of adults mention the correct number of drinks for men or women - 2% for men and 4% for women in 2024.

It is important to note that drinking at home alone is another concern identified in the Barometer series. It was the most common drinking occasion reported in 2024 with 32% of adults who drink reporting they have drunk at home alone at least once a week in the past 30 days. Its prominence will form part of the focus in our next summary paper that we are currently preparing and look forward to sharing in April 2025.

### **Conclusion:**

Collectively, both encouraging and worrying trends as outlined above 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. There is a lot done but most certainly a lot more to do for Ireland to be a place where alcohol is not misused. Overall consumption may be down but increases in binge drinking identified in both the Barometer series and Healthy Ireland that are in line with rates since pre-pandemic are concerning. At Drinkaware, we are committed to empowering individuals with the knowledge to make informed choices and to support positive changes in drinking habits. Drinking less, even for a short time, can have many benefits. Drinkaware is here to support anyone taking on the challenge of short-term abstinence or considering a long-term change in their 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 235,650 drinks calculator uses and 64,753 users to the Drink Driving in Ireland page in 2024, showing a strong desire for knowledge and a commitment to keeping communities safe.

Evidence gathered in the 2024 Barometer also provides important indicators of actions that adults' have both tried as well as what they have *not done* but are willing to do in order to moderate their drinking such as embrace sober activities. This in turn helps to inform

development of a new online resource in early 2025 - the [‘Dry Vibe Hub’](#) that highlights non-alcohol social events across Ireland.

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 on the HSE Low-Risk Weekly Guidelines took place by Drinkaware in 2024 ('Know the Low') with specific reference to binge drinking and at-home drinking. 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 2025 and throughout its new strategic cycle 2025-2028. We look forward to continuing to play a supporting and contributing role towards this positive change.

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