

## **Recent trends in AOD use and harms in Australia**

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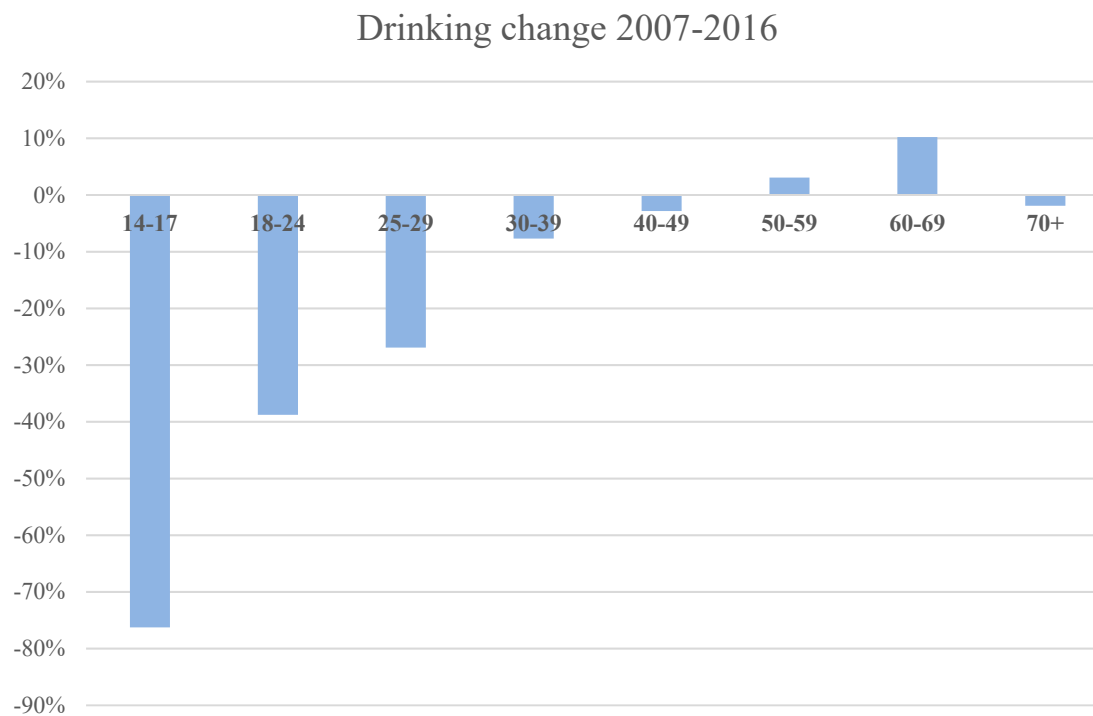
# Recent alcohol and drug trends in Australia

## Alcohol and drugs contribute to substantial health and social harms in Australia

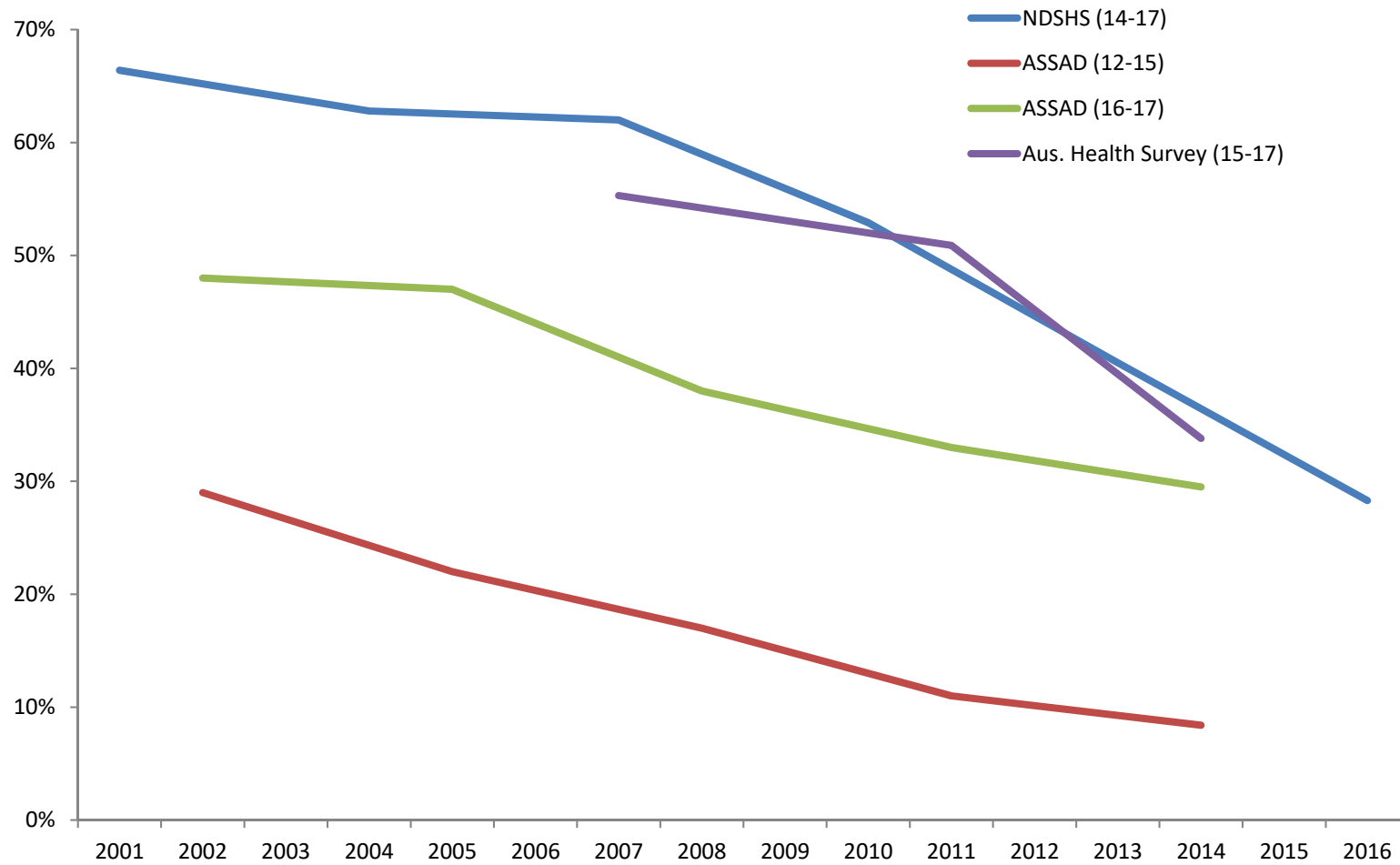
- Consumption patterns are changing in important ways
- Changing patterns of use are likely to have important implications for policing, as well as for policy more broadly
- This presentation will be a brief survey of recent trends and patterns

## Australian alcohol consumption trends

- Between 2007 and 2016, per-capita alcohol consumption declined by 10%
- This decline is largely due to changes in young people's drinking

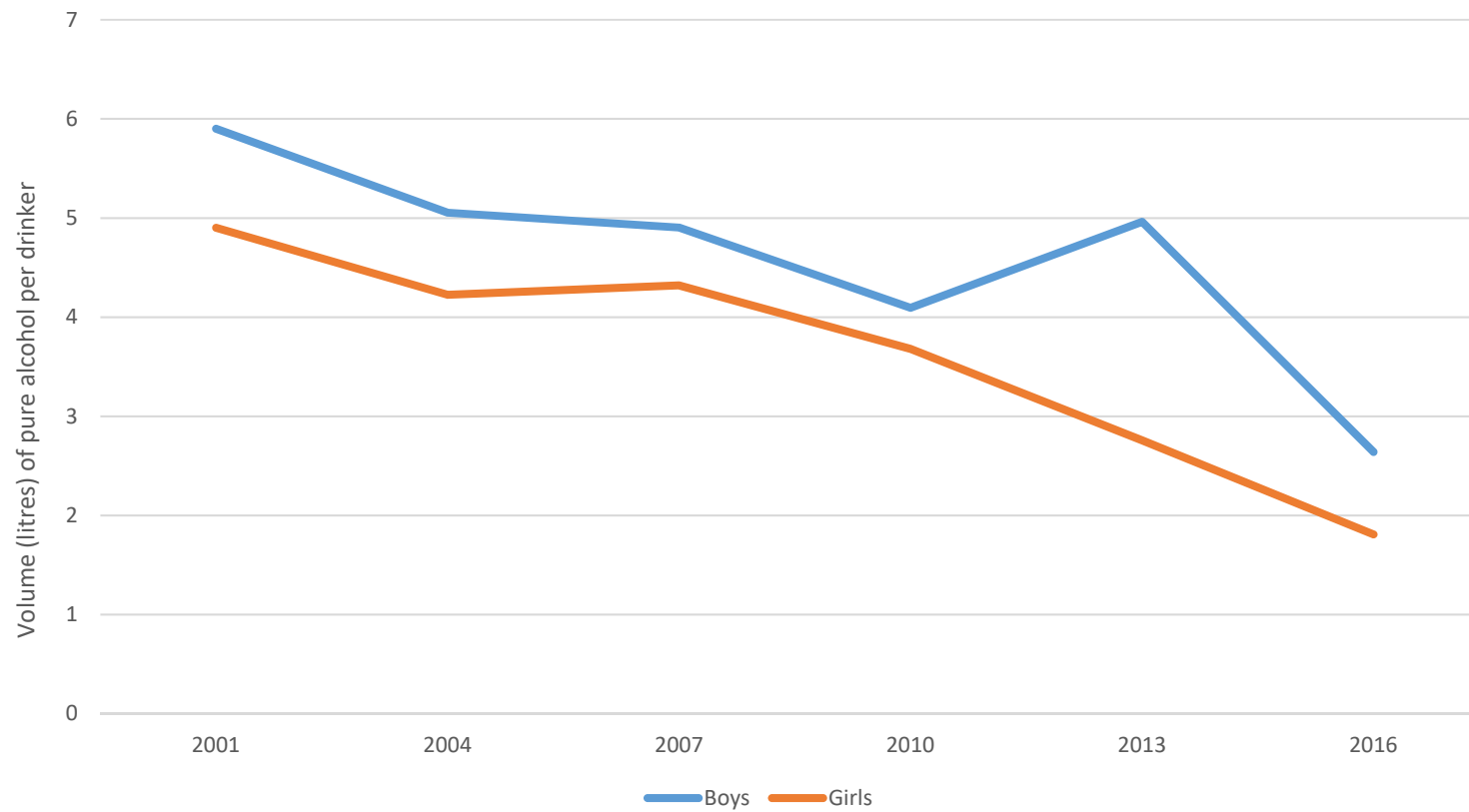


# Recent cohorts of teenagers less likely to drink

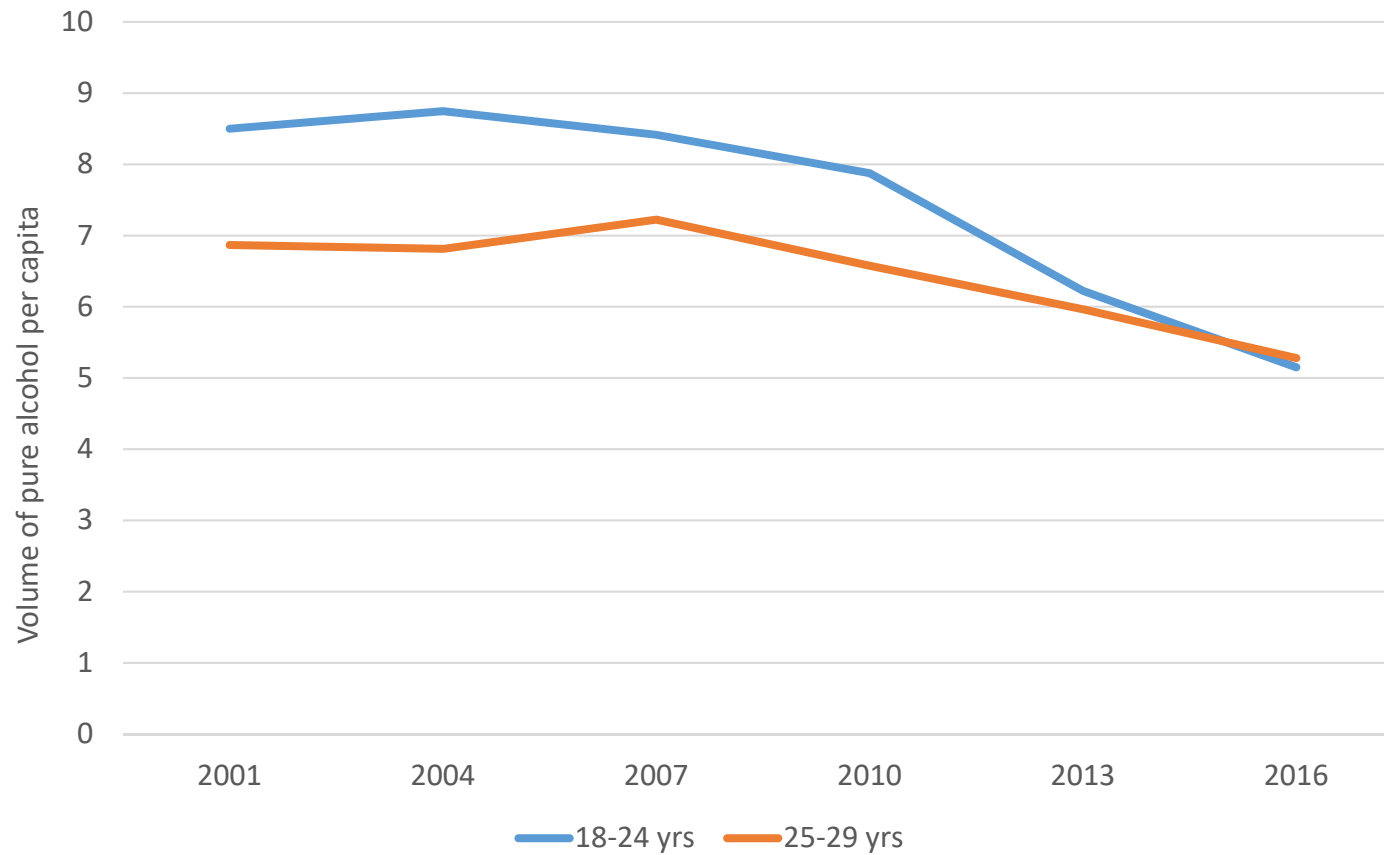


# Those that do drink, are drinking less

Drinking volume amongst current drinkers aged 14=17 (NDSHS)



# Declining drinking starting to flow into adulthood



# Big question: why?

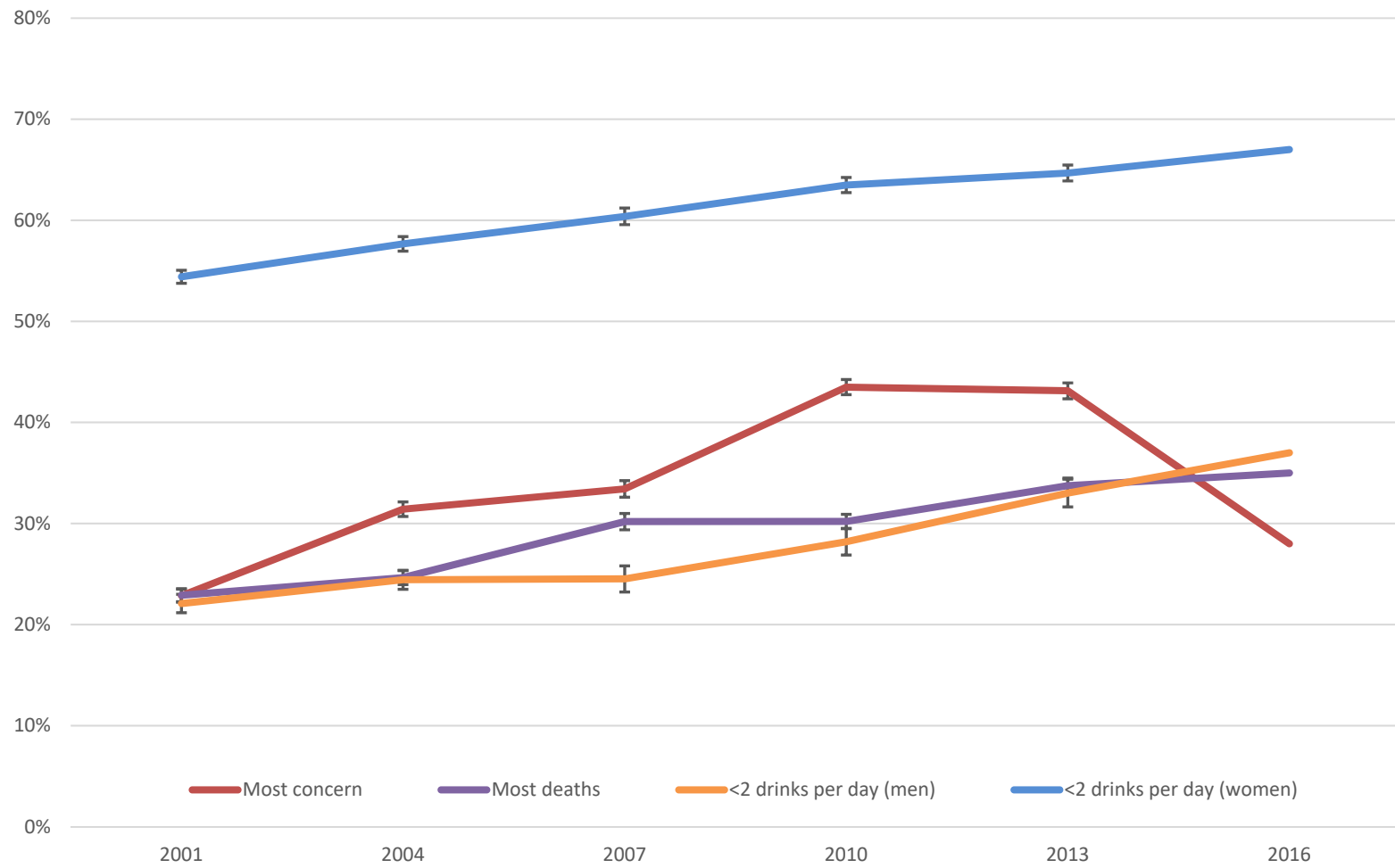
## Little research into drivers of these trends

- Unlikely to be policy, given global patterns and timing of main policy interventions (e.g. alcopops tax in Australia)
- Unless policies have shifted definitively across many countries at roughly the same time?

## Potential factors

- Biased surveys or changing patterns of response (without changing behaviour)
- Changing tastes (illicit/other drugs?)
- Policies
- Changing family dynamics ('helicopter parents', small generation gap)
- Shifts in attitudes to alcohol (parents and/or kids – potential reaction against previous heavy drinking cohorts)
- Increasing focus on health and fitness
- Changing patterns of leisure (e.g. online socialising)
- Something else?

# Attitudes have clearly shifted



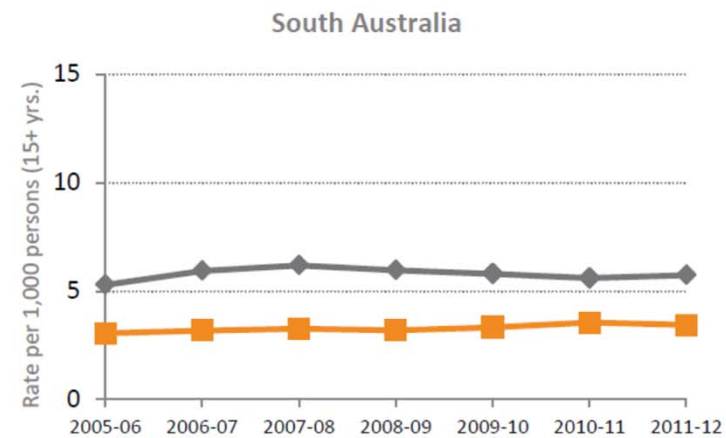
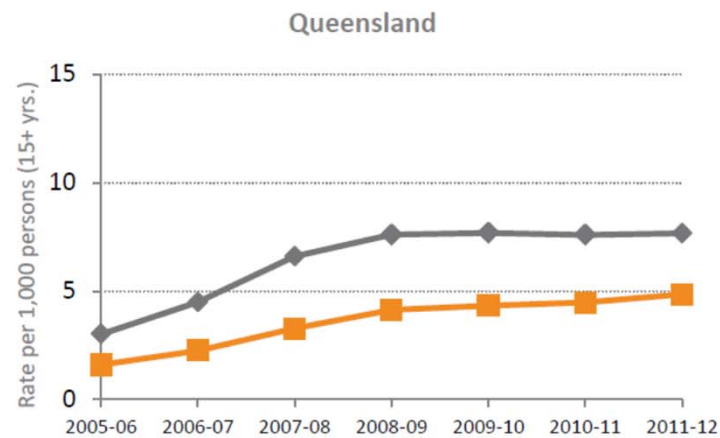
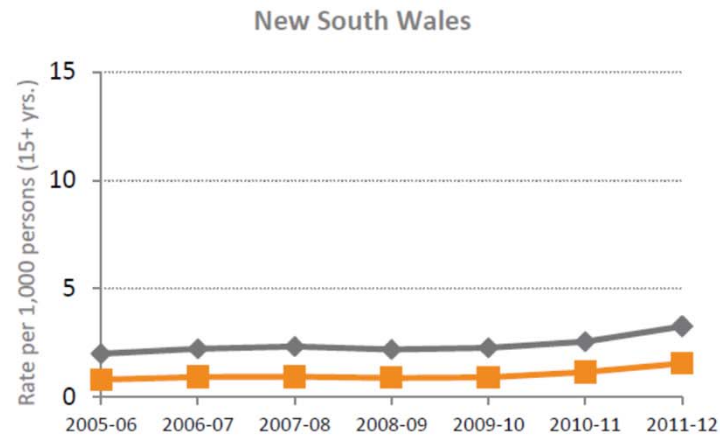


## Harm trends

### Much less consistent

- Many measures showing stability or even increases in harm

# Emergency department presentations – total rates

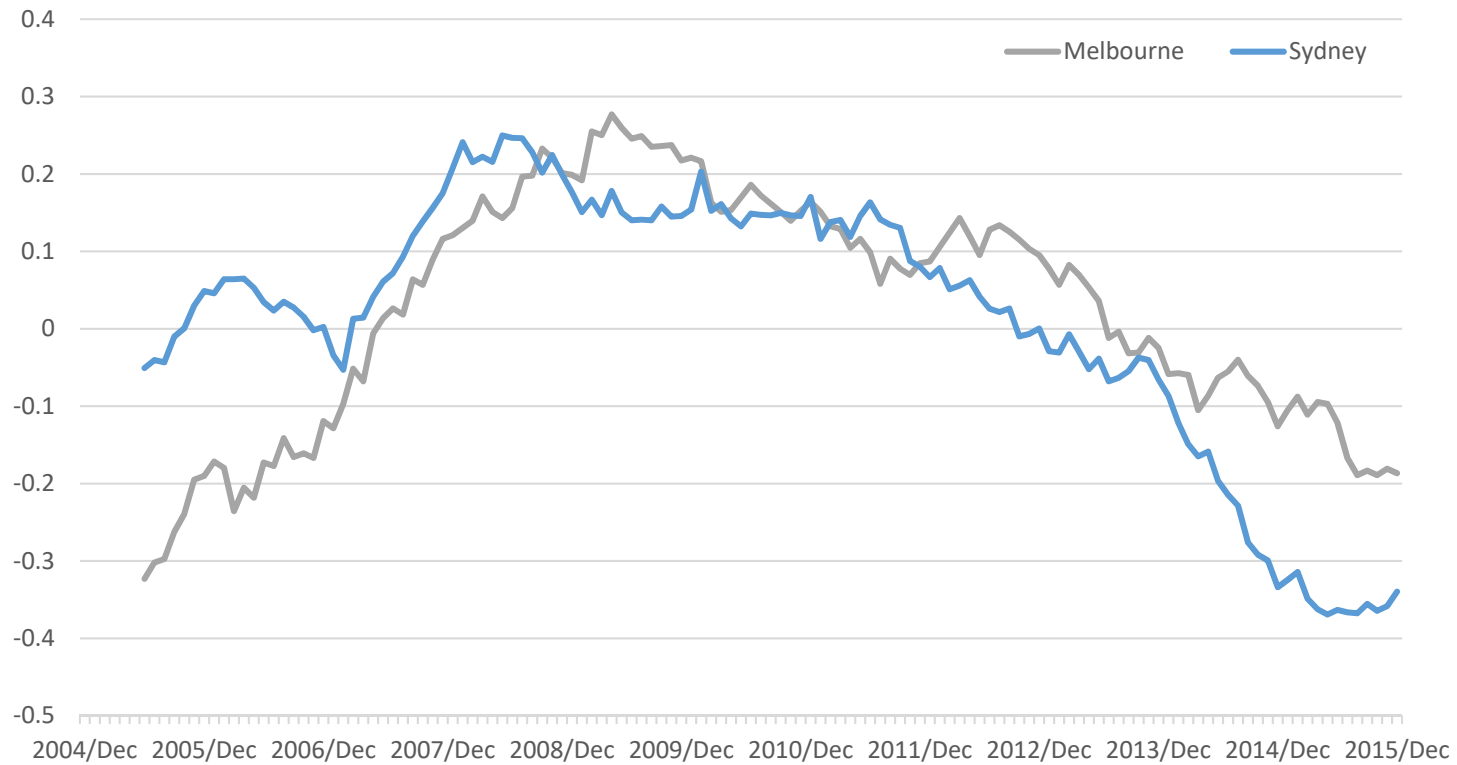


## Harm trends

### Much less consistent

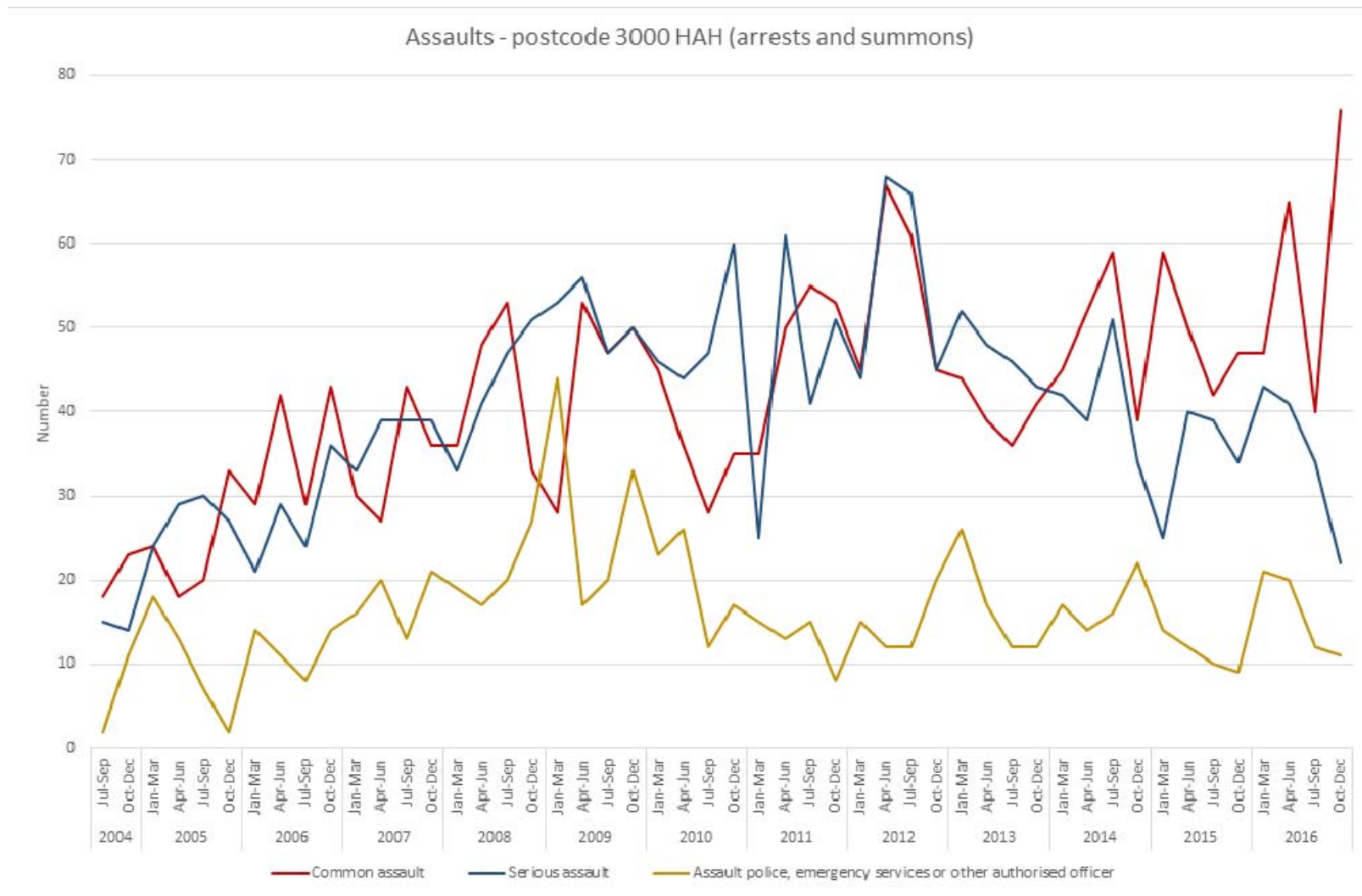
- Many measures showing stability or even increases in harm
- Police data from Vic and NSW point to declines, at least through 2015 (although trends vary based on definitions – what is an ‘alcohol-related assault’?)

# Assault data (weekend, night-time assaults in public places within entertainment precincts)



Note that series represent variation from average assault rate

# Weekend night-time assaults in postcode 3000



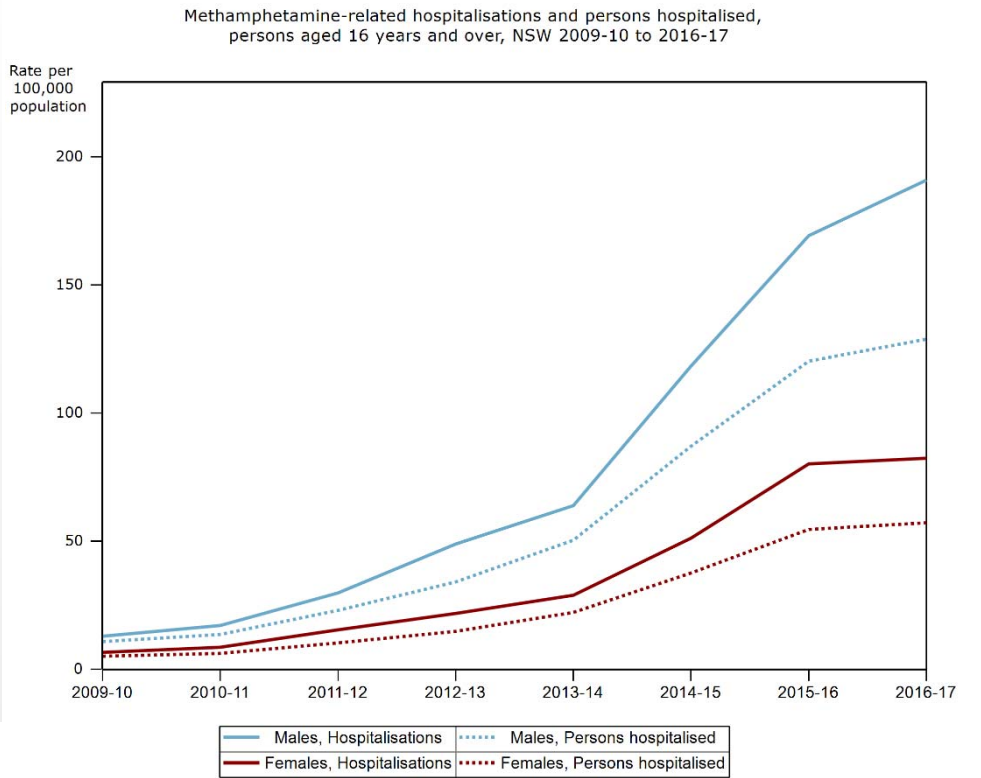
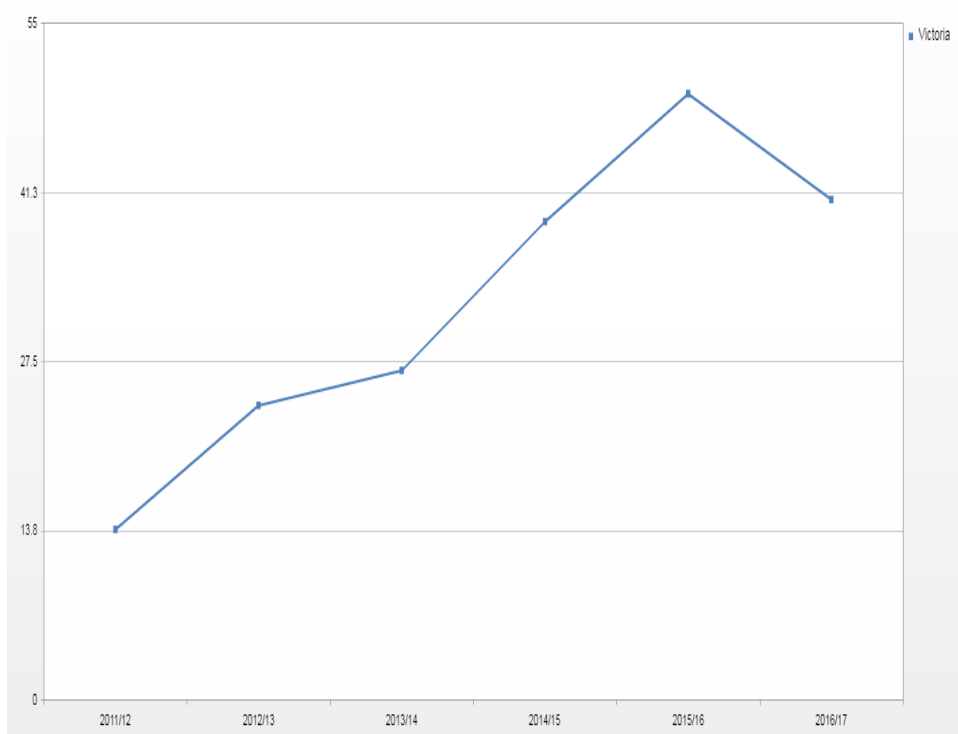
## Illicit drug trends

No evidence that teenagers are substituting illicit drugs for alcohol

- Steady declines in regular cannabis use among young people
- Prevalence of other illicit drugs tend to be very low among teenagers

More broadly, data suggests increases in harms from methamphetamine (not specifically for young people)

# Illicit drug trends



# Methamphetamine

## Survey data shows no real shift in prevalence of use

- Hard to know how well household surveys capture rare and stigmatised behaviour
- Survey shows big switches from powdered amphetamine to crystal methamphetamine
- Supported by data from IDRS (targeted surveillance of hard to reach drug-using populations)

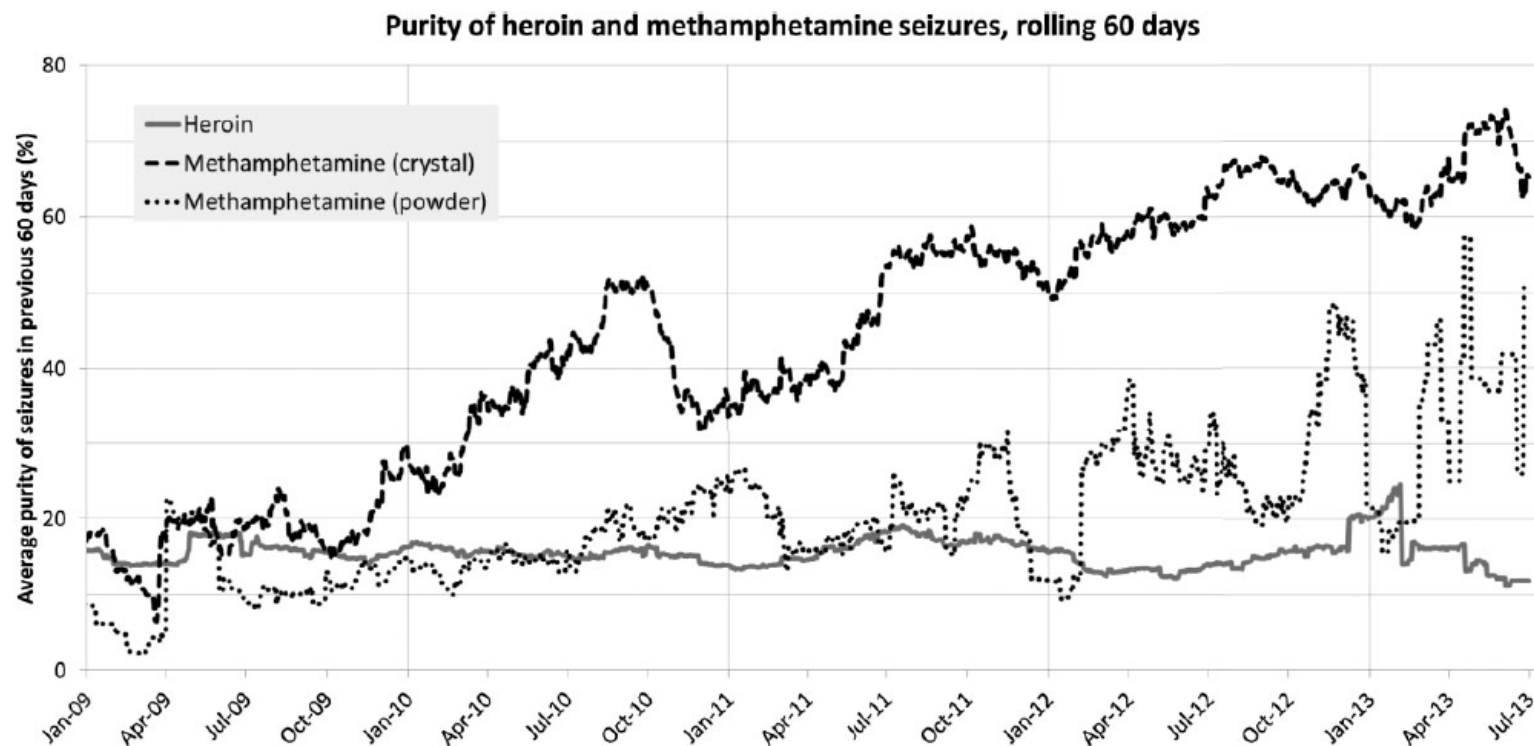
## Wastewater data suggest major increases in use, with significant geographic variation

- Increases in Qld, SA, stable trends in Melbourne (data are relatively new and hard to interpret)



# Methamphetamine

Clear evidence that purity has shifted markedly



**Figure 2** Average purity of Victoria Police Forensic Services Department (VPFSD) seizures, January 2009 to July 2013

– Source: Scott et al., 2014, *Addiction*

## Illicits

Methamphetamine harm increases may be driven by increases in purity even while prevalence and frequency of use remains fairly static

Some evidence of increases in cocaine use and harms (very geographically varied)

Harms from opioids increasing again after sharp decline in the early 2000s

- Pharmaceutical opioids a key contributor

## Summing up

Per-capita alcohol consumption has declined, largely due to declining youth drinking

- Attitudes have shifted such that alcohol is less normative
- Heavy drinking still highly prevalent – mean BAC in entertainment precincts after 1am between 0.06 and 0.11 (Miller et al)

Harm trends are much less clear

Illicit drug harms appear to be increasing, especially related to methamphetamine

- Not necessarily driven by changes in use patterns

AOD use constantly in flux – cannot afford to be complacent