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centre for alcohol
policy research

DRY AND WET GENERATIONS: What happens when a population turns around on drinking?

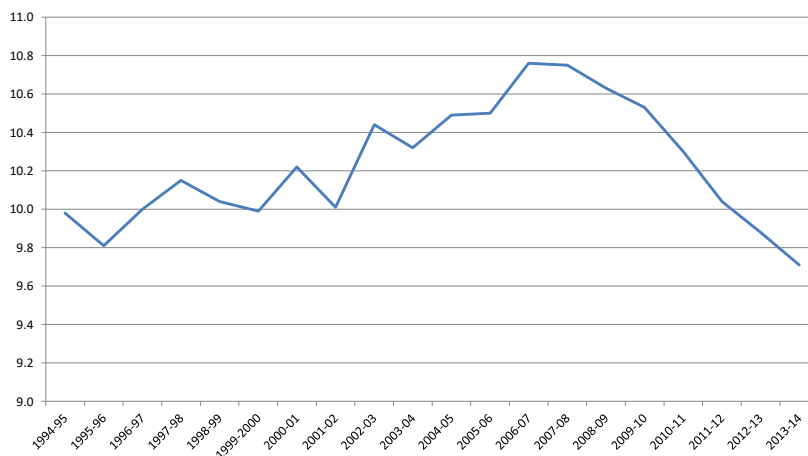
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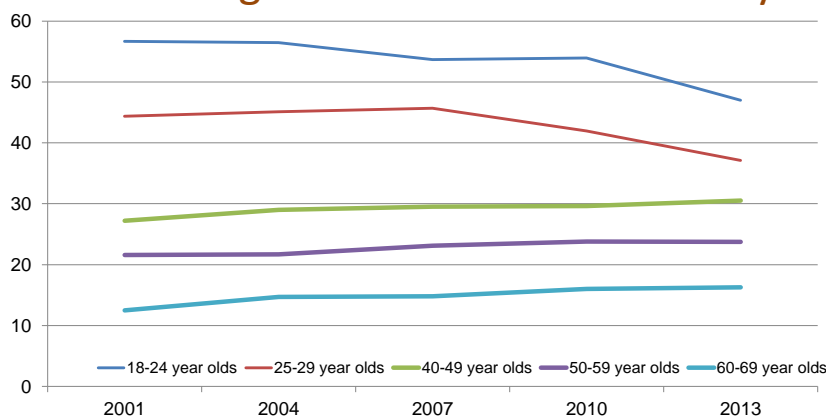
Presentation at the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol & Drugs (APSAD) conference, Sydney, 31 October, 2016

In Australia, per capita alcohol consumption
has turned down since 2008



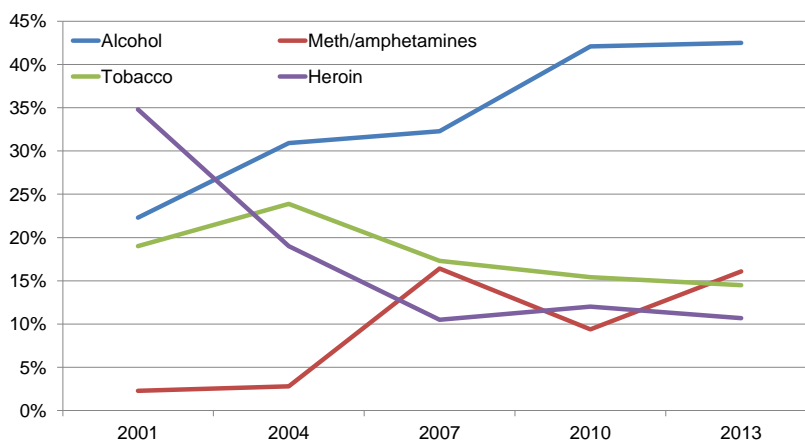
The downturn seems to be strongest
among younger age-cohorts:

% drinking 5+ drinks at least monthly



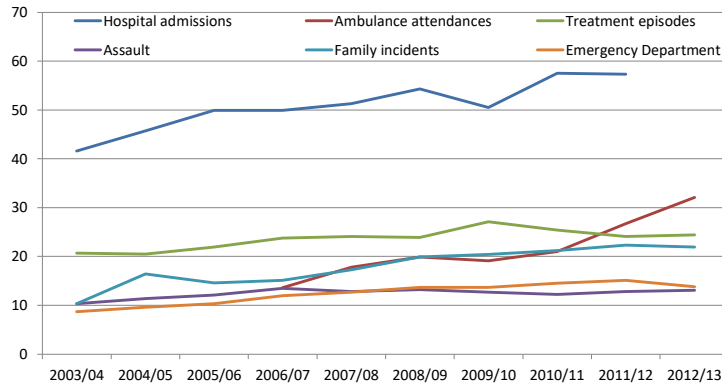
National Drug Strategy Household Surveys. Livingston, M. "Understanding recent trends in Australian alcohol consumption", 2015. <http://www.fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Understanding-recent-trends-in-Australian-alcohol-consumption.pdf>

Concerns about alcohol have risen –
drug “of most concern” for Australians



Responses on National Drug Strategy Household Surveys

But rates of alcohol problems are mostly up
(though not road injuries and deaths)
alcohol-related episodes in Victoria, 2003-2013

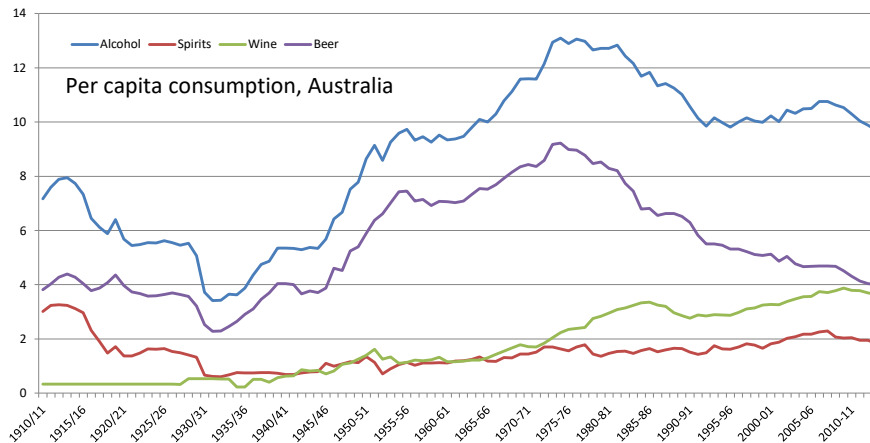


(see: <http://www.aodstats.org.au/>)

What's going on? Have we been here before? What can we expect?

- Turn-arounds in alcohol consumption levels have happened recurrently in societies like Australia
- Changes happen in both directions
- They can be relatively short-lived, or the effects can persist much longer
- Often they are led by a “dry generation” or a “wet generation”
- Changes can be reactive to other trends
 - Including one cohort reacting against the trend of the next-oldest cohort

Societies like Australia, with a strong Temperance history, seem to have had a long-term periodicity of ~60-80 years



What happens at points of inflection? Some examples ...

U.S. college students 1900-1930:

- Strong downward trend after 1900:
 - College student opinion turned against drinking: “a strong and increased questioning of the place and value of alcoholic liquors in the community and in personal use, because of their many unfortunate social consequences” -- Harry Warner, “Alcohol in college life: historical perspectives” in Maddox, ed., *The Domesticated Drug* (1970)
- Reversal in the 1920s:
 - The age of “flappers” and the “roaring Twenties”

For those born after ~1900 were the “wet generations” in the U.S.

- “The present trend (1938) is a reversal of the trend of 100 years. It is toward a wider diffusion of drink practices and greater regularity among larger numbers. For a comparable situation one must turn back ... more than a century ago”. (Warner, 1938)
- A new “subterranean ethic began to jell” by the mid-1920s:... “one drank to become drunk, or, failing that, to appear drunk.... In addition, one drank in the company of and together with women”.

-- P. Fass, *The Damned & the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s*. (1977)

The dynamics of generational change: some hypotheses

- The high-tide mark of drinking styles and patterns tends to be set in young adulthood (~18-26), at least in Anglophone societies
- The cultural politics of drinking at the time of young adulthood for an age-cohort tends to set the frame for their drinking later in life
 - People whose youth did not coincide with the '20s never had our reverence for strong drink.... For us it was a self-righteous pleasure.... Drinking, we proved to ourselves our freedom as individuals and flouted Congress.... It was the only period during which a fellow could be smug and slopped concurrently.

-- AJ Liebling, *Liebling Abroad* (1981), p. 667.

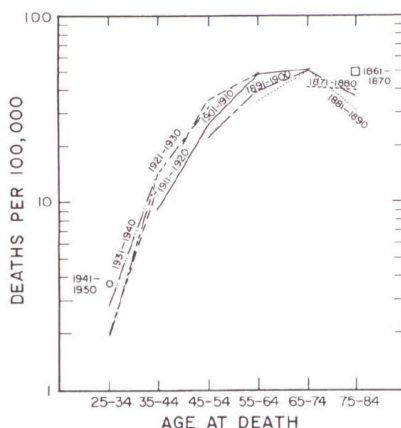
Some hypotheses (cont'd)

- A generation may use alcohol as a marker to distinguish itself from older cohorts (Bourdieu, *Distinction*); this can be drinking heavily, as in the US in the '20s – or not at all.
 - Red wine was to be avoided; just a drink for alcoholics, or alternatively of their parents -- according to French students in their 20s in the 1990s (Freyssinet-Dominjon, J., Wagner, A.C. *L'alcool en fête: manières de boire de la nouvelle jeunesse étudiante*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003)
- In such circumstances, transmission down (from older siblings, and older cohorts, etc.) breaks down

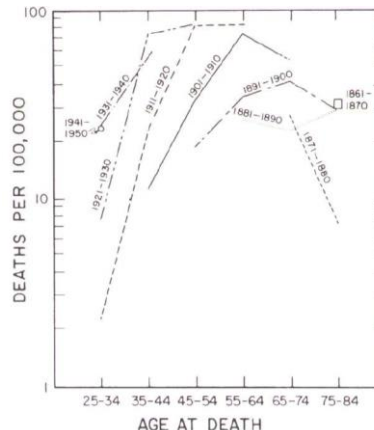
• Some hypotheses (continued):

The change can be in specific populations, and a long trend:
Black vs. White American male cohorts – cirrhosis deaths

Death rates for liver cirrhosis by age for white birth cohorts, Midatlantic Region, 1861–1950



Death rates for liver cirrhosis by age for nonwhite (mostly Black) birth cohorts, same region & dates



Mainstream US Temperance shifted from New England Abolitionists to Southern racists. At the same time there was Black migration to the cities, and the “wet” Harlem Renaissance. (Herd, *Brit. J. Addic.* 80:397-410, 1987.)

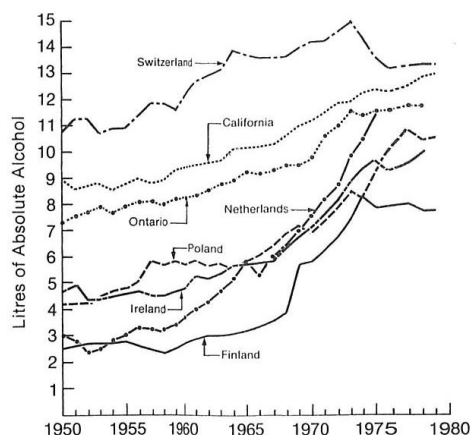
Some hypotheses (cont'd)

- A turnaround at the population level in amounts of drinking may be led by particular cohorts
 - e.g., middle-aged cohorts seem to have led the downturn in US drinking after 1980 (see: Kerr WC et al., Age-period-cohort modelling ...Divergence in younger and older adult trends. *Addiction* 104:27037, 2009)
 - “drying” social movements of the middle-aged in the early 1980s:
 - Rise of an alcoholism treatment establishment & “experience counselors”, consulted as experts
 - Mothers Against Drunk Driving movement
 - Adult Children of Alcoholics and other 12-step movements

(Room, R. Changes in the cultural position of alcohol in the US: The contribution of alcohol-oriented movements, working paper, 1987.)

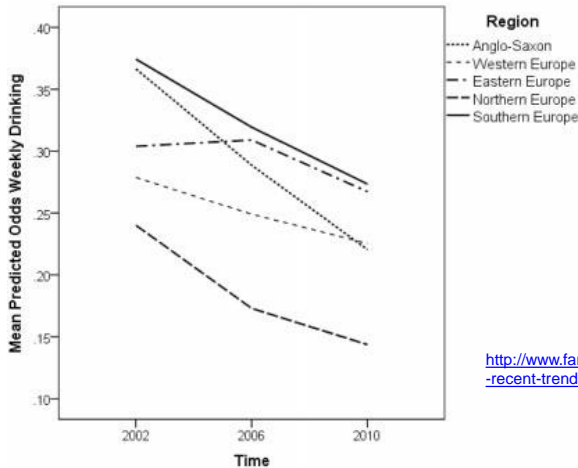
- **Some hypotheses (cont'd):** sometimes changes seem to be linked across societies, within a particular horizon
 - e.g., the rise in consumption 1950-1980 in “Temperance cultures” (where there was a strong temperance history)

-- <http://www.soc.qc.edu/Staff/levine/temp-cult.htm>



Mäkelä, K. et al, eds., (1981)
*Alcohol, Society & the State:
 A Comparative Study of
 Alcohol Control*, p. 9.

Now: the drop in drinking among teenagers across Europe and in Anglophone countries



Australians aged 14-17:
5+ drinks in last year

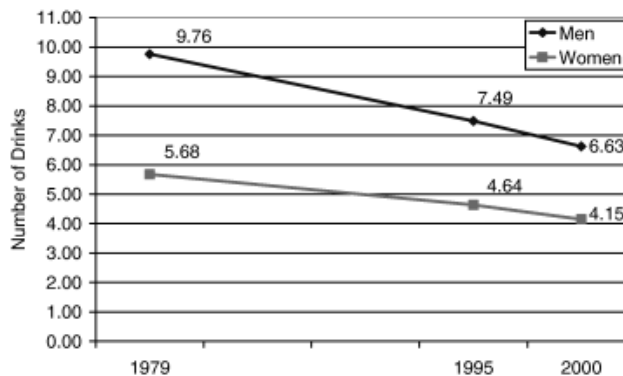
2001: 42%
2004: 33%
2007: 32%
2010: 28%
2013: 20%

-- Livingston M, 2015, p. 12

<http://www.fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Understanding-recent-trends-in-Australian-alcohol-consumption.pdf>

Weekly drinking among 11-15 year olds
de Looze M et al. (2015) *Eur J Pub H* 25 (Sup.2) 69-75

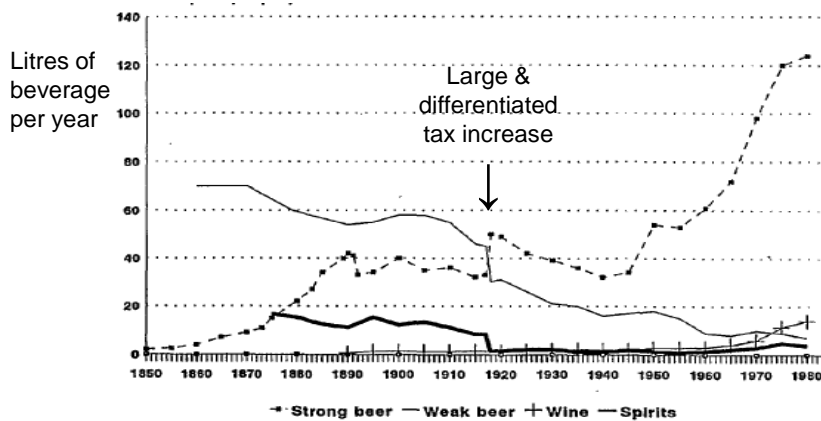
Some hypotheses (cont'd): As attitudes get “drier”, what is defined as problematic may expand – part of what is going on if problem rates rise?
e.g., how many drinks to feel drunk? (among those saying they were drunk in last year, US national surveys, 1979-2000)



-- Kerr WC et al., *Addiction* 101(10):1428-1437, 2006.

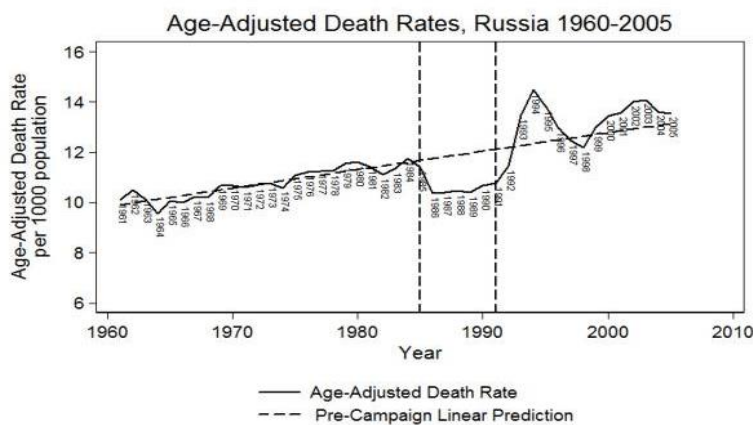
How do changes happen? 1. **Big changes from above** – they are rare

- a. Denmark 1918: 12-fold increase in spirits prices, 60% increase in beer
 -- total consumption drops from 6.7 litres to 1.6 litres of absolute alcohol
 -- previous cultural preparation in terms of beer as Danish national drink



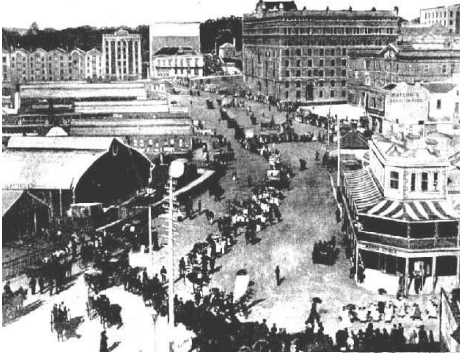
Eriksen S, The making of the Danish liberal drinking style, *Contemp. Drug Probs* 20:1-31, 1993.

1. **Big changes from above** (cont'd):
 b. Soviet Union 1985-1991: the effects of the Gorbachev-era anti-alcohol campaign



Bhattacharya, J. et al., The Gorbachev anti-alcohol campaign and Russia's mortality crisis, *Am Econ J Appl Econ* 5:232-260, 2013.

2. Big changes from below: Temperance



Children's temperance demonstration,
Circular Quay, Sydney 1894

'Women's Whisky War
in Ohio', 1874

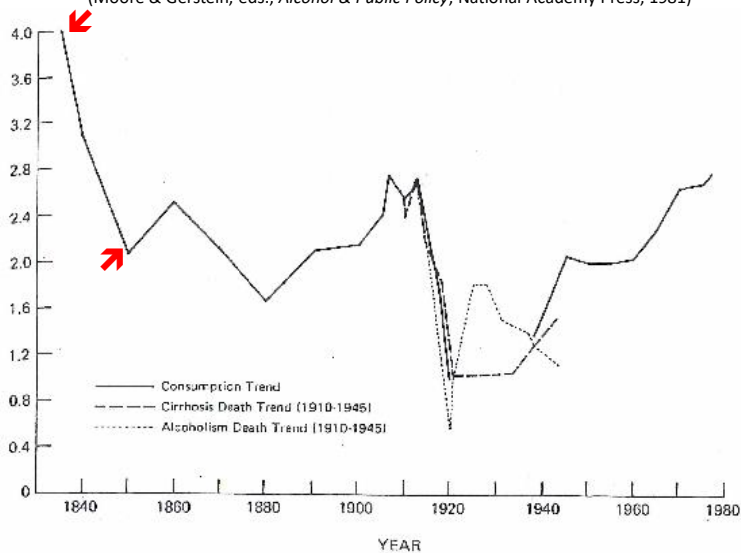


Biggest change in U.S. drinking was <1850

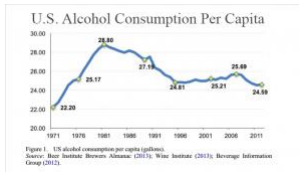
– in the “persuasion” era of temperance, prior to the state “control” era

Alcohol consumption in the US 1830s-1970s

(Moore & Gerstein, eds., *Alcohol & Public Policy*, National Academy Press, 1981)



3. Changes are often more subtle



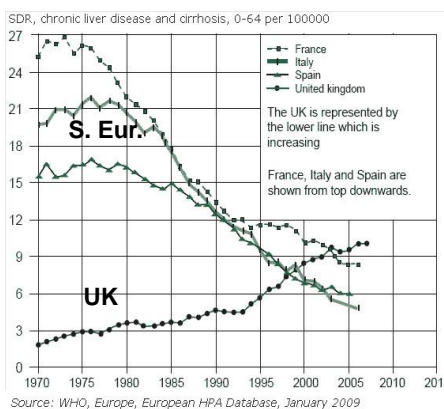
U.S.: 1981 -1996 – alcohol consumption falls by 14%, after rising 30% in 1971-1981

- “Drying” social movements of the middle-aged in the early 1980s:
 - Adult Children of Alcoholics and allied movements
 - Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) movement
 - Rise of an alcoholism treatment establishment & “experience counselors”, consulted as experts

(Room, R. Changes in the cultural position of alcohol in the US: The contribution of alcohol-oriented movements, working paper, 1987.)

4. Changes may reflect general social trends, not specific movements & policies: e.g., halving of consumption in Italy 1970-2000

- Factors included:
- * urbanisation
 - * industrialisation,
 - * change in women’s status,
 - * red wine as a demerit peasant food,
 - * EU agriculture policies → rise in minimum price



-- Allamani A & Prina, F, eds. (2007) Why the decrease in consumption of alcoholic beverages in Italy?... *Contemp Drug Probs* 34:187-378.

5. Change is often by interaction:

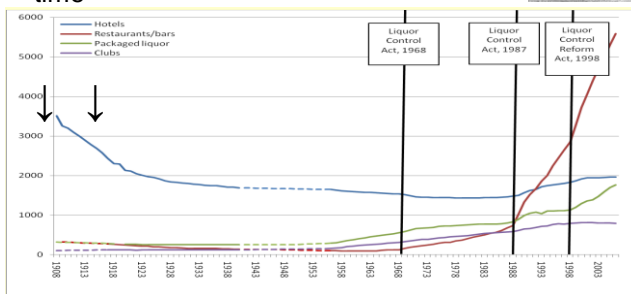
movements from below ↔ policies from above

– temperance movement &
the Vic. Licences Reduction

Board 1907-16:

1000 pubs closed

the
Board's
time



<http://www.access.prov.vic.gov.au/public/component/daPublicBaseContainer?component=daViewAgency&entityId=2906>

How do changes happen?

- From above: the state and its agencies, trade interests
 - Alcohol market controls – can be effective
 - Individual control or deterrence – potentially effective with those with something to lose
 - Education and persuasion – little effect, without other measures
 - Official service and casework agencies – affect population trends mostly through policy advocacy, not clinical work
 - Market actors and forces -- often block change; try to amplify cultural trends
- From below: social movements, cultural politics, fashion
 - Social movements aiming at political change – can be very effective
 - Cultural innovation movements – generational or otherwise
 - “New social movements” → mutual facilitation of change
 - Cultural and subcultural shift and drift
- From above and below in combination – often the most effective
 - e.g., drink driving, tobacco

Some tentative conclusions

- There are sometimes substantial changes on the level of drinking in a society
 - Typically the change is more about the number of occasions of drinking than about the style of drinking (Room, The impossible dream? Routes to reducing alcohol problems in a temperance culture. *J Subst Abuse* 4:91-106, 1992. <http://www.robinroom.net/imposs.pdf>)
 - The changes may be led by particular birth-cohorts (“wet” and “dry” generations) changing before others or where others do not change
 - So “alcohol through the life course” may differ by generation

Our challenge: to develop and test more nuanced theories of sociocultural change in drinking

- Paying attention to social & societal responses to drinking as well as to the development of drinking customs
 - “Long waves” of alcohol consumption (and shorter?)
 - But also, with a lag, waves of societal reaction to drinking problems
 - What works in curtailing a change adverse to public health (e.g., routinized late night openings)
 - What policies are more and less likely to evoke a reactive rebound in the population or a subpopulation?
 - How can policy and regulation enhance a favourable trend?

Seizing the present moment?

- Some signs of change in drinking in the society
 - NDSHS: (Alc. suppl. table 4.5, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129549469>)
 - Aged 12-17 abstainers: 56% in 2007, 72% in 2013
 - 18+, >2 drinks/day: 21.5% in 2007, 19.1% in 2013
 - Multiple bottom-up campaigns (FebFast, Dry July, Hello Sunday Morning) for time off from drinking and re-examining intoxication
- Such bottom-up changes can offer a supportive frame within which public health policies to reduce alcohol problems are more likely to be implemented and to succeed