

Is there a scientific rationale for raising the drinking age to 21?

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Building a case for minimum drinking age reform

- ◆ the problem is sufficient to warrant “politically led” cultural change
- ◆ legislative change has evidence that it would significantly impact the problem
- ◆ legislative change would address underlying influences that are driving harmful youth alcohol use

Is youth alcohol use a
problem?

Australia currently has high rates of youth alcohol use and a trend for use at younger ages

- ◆ Australian school survey
- ◆ National Drug Strategy Household Survey
- ◆ Premier's Drug Prevention Council

Alcohol use has a large net cost to Australian society. The burden of acute harms falls mainly on young people

◆ Collins & Lapsley

Australian harm
minimisation policies
have reduced youth
deaths related to alcohol

Victoria

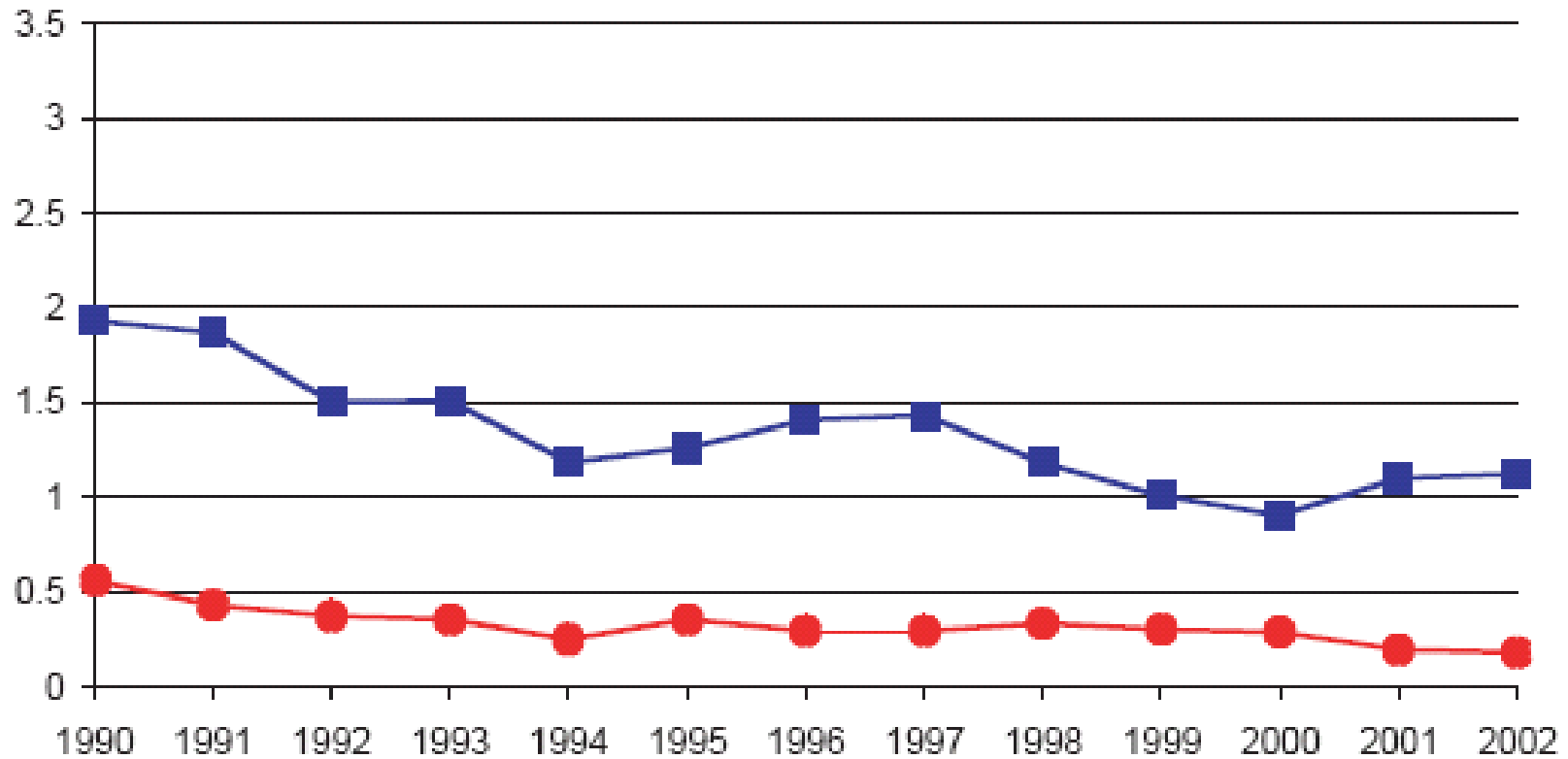


Figure 1: Alcohol-attributable deaths for 15–24 year olds, males and females, 1990–2002
Legend: ■ males; ● females. Y Axis: Alcohol-attributable death rate per 10,000 15–24 yr olds.

the trends are not so
positive for other
harms

Victoria

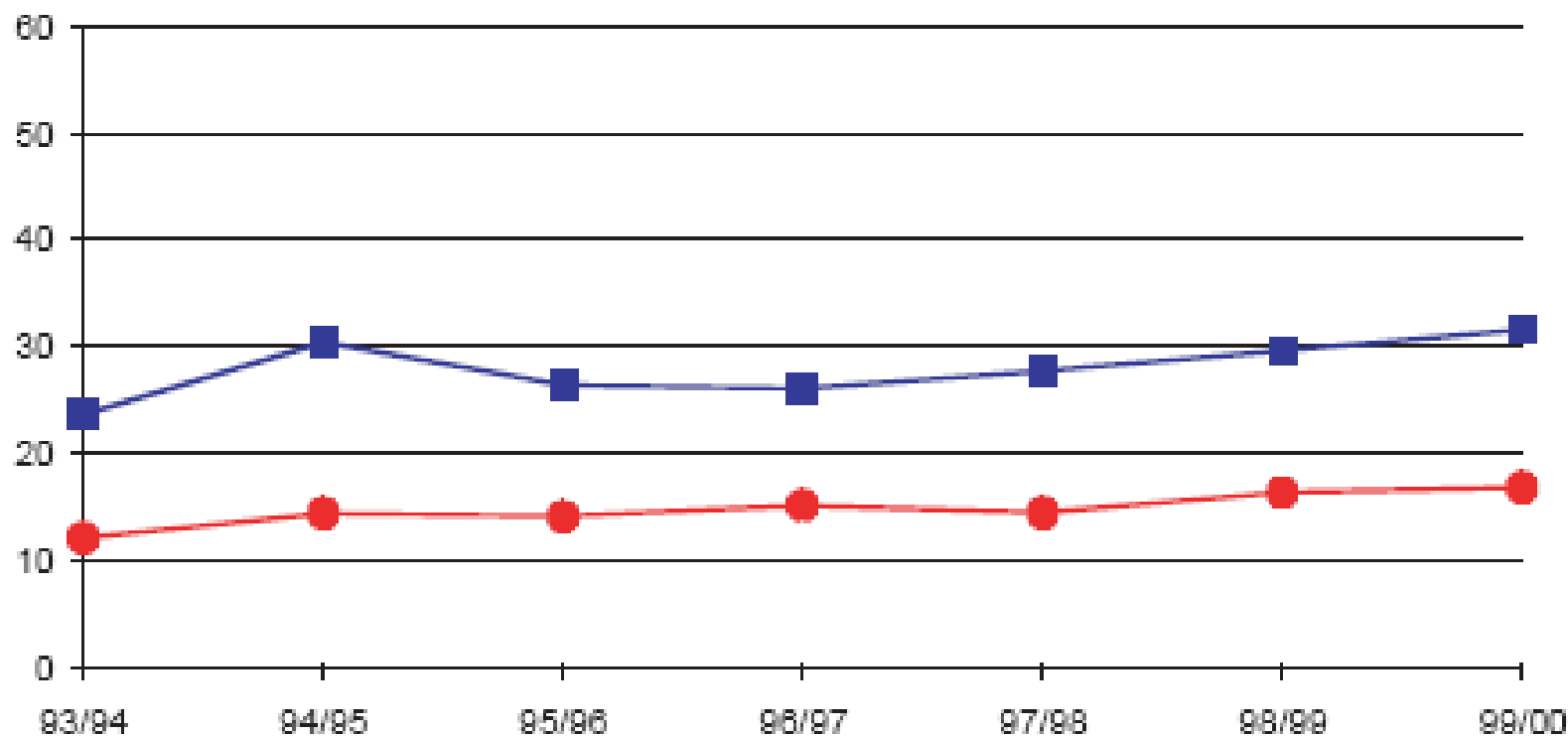


Figure 5: Alcohol-attributable hospitalisations for 14–17 year olds, males and females, 1993/94–1999/00
Legend: ■ males; ● females. Y Axis: Alcohol-attributable hospitalisation rate per 10,000 14–17 yr olds.

We are not monitoring developmental harm

- ? Female heavy alcohol use contributing to problems with infants & children
- ? Early use increasing levels of dependence
- ? Mental health impacts (eg., self-harm)
- ? Brain impacts

Is there evidence
supporting a rise in
the drinking age?

Influence

- national & international
- states & regions
- communities
- organisations
 - schools
 - health care settings
- groups
 - families
 - peers
- individuals
 - attitudes & behaviours

Time series

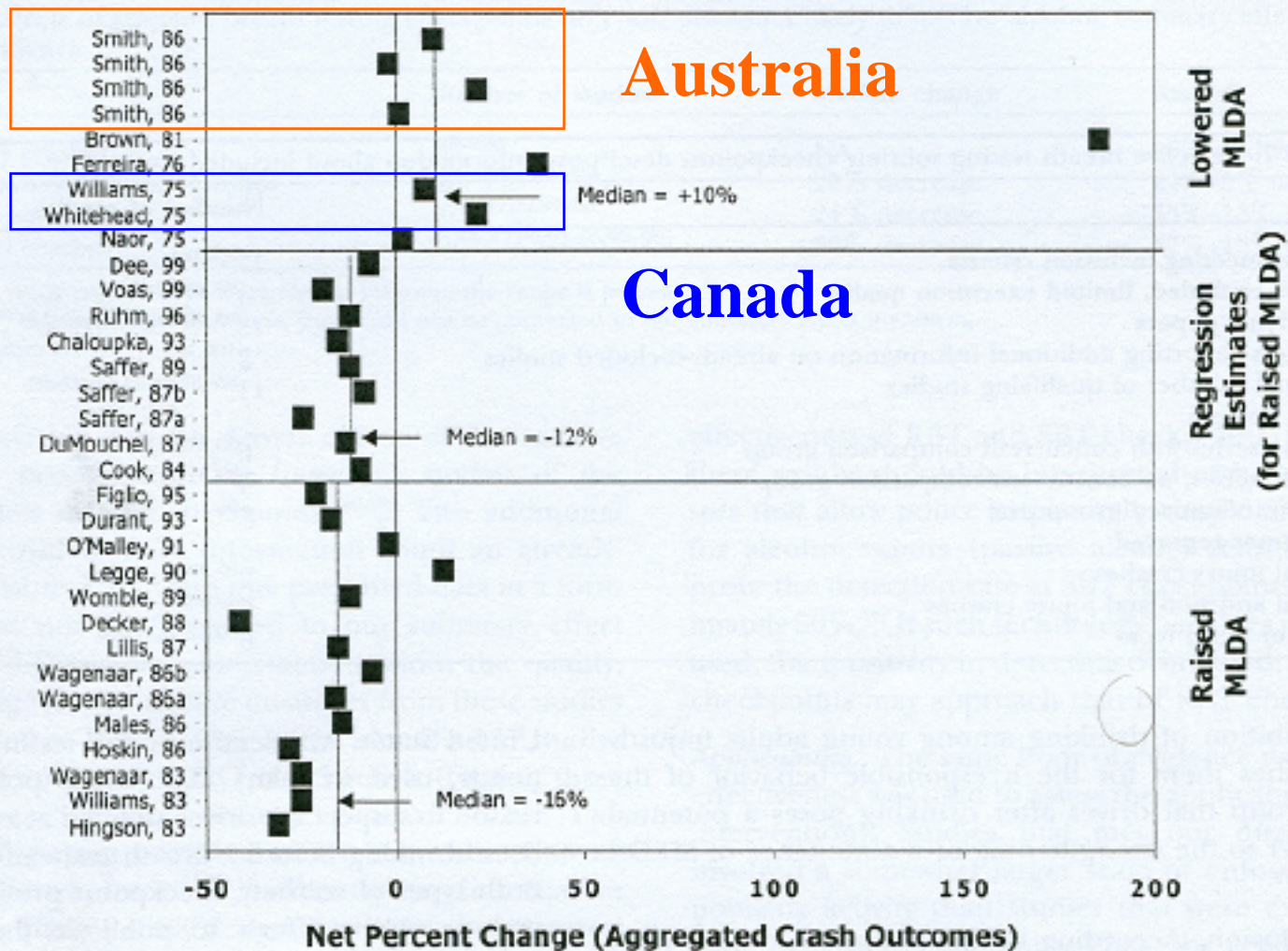


Follow-up studies



Interventions

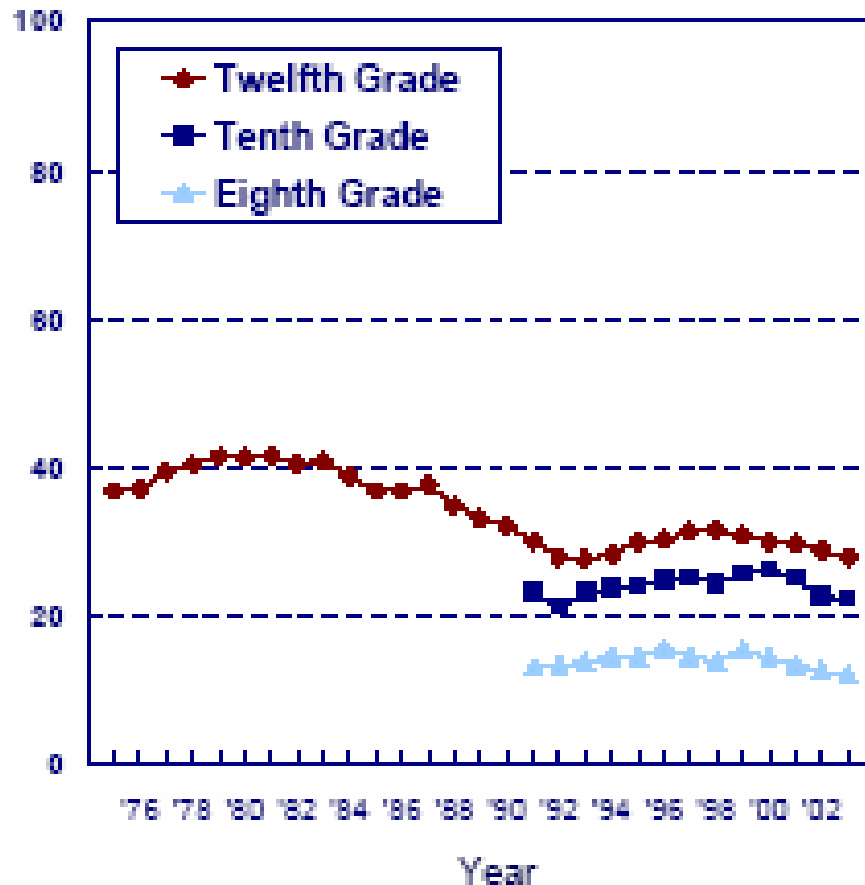
Evidence



Shults R. A, Elder R. W., Sleet DA, et al., 2001, American Journal of Preventive Medicine. Figure 3.

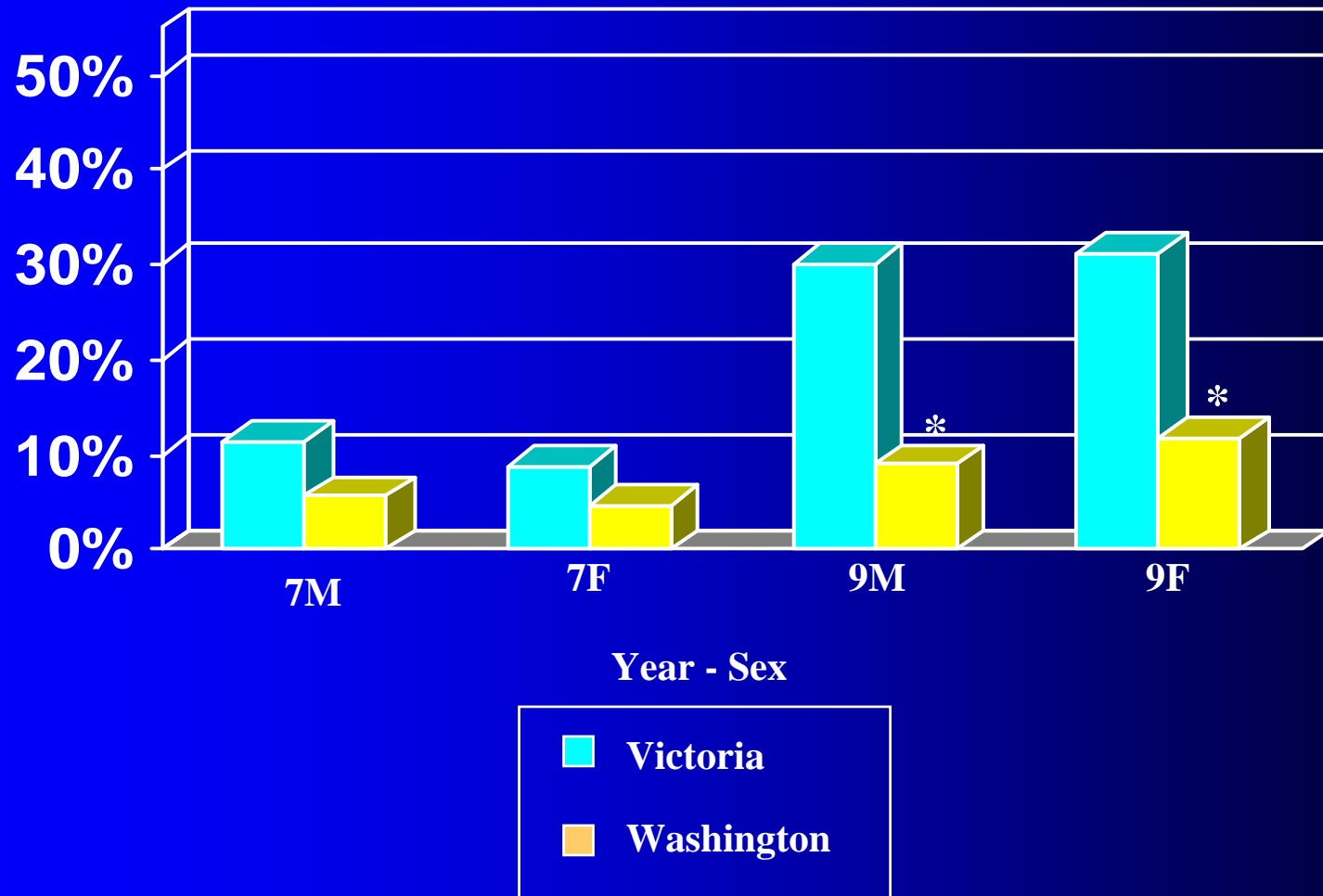
Binge Drinking

% who had 5+ drinks in a row
in previous two weeks

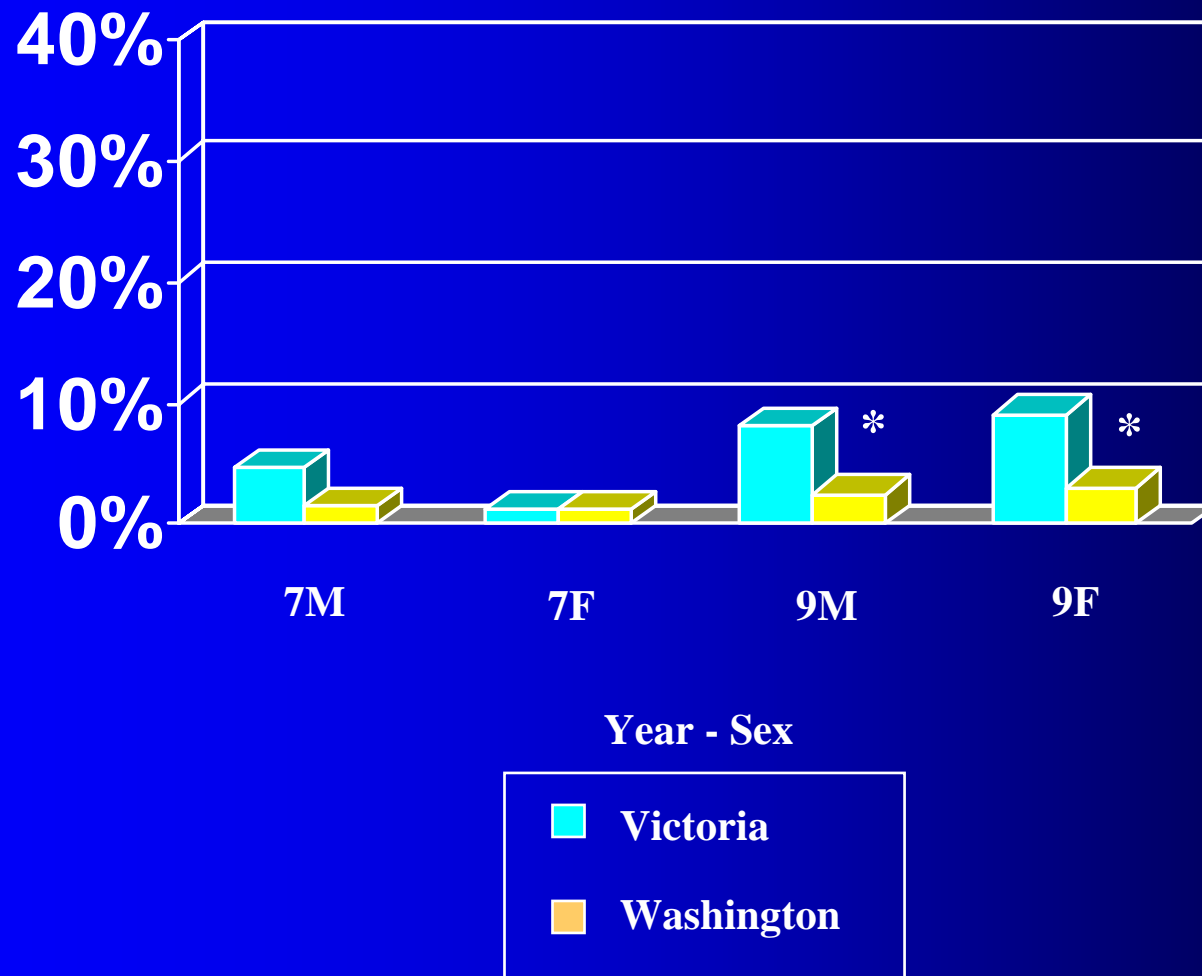


From the early 1980s age 21 was introduced in all US states. Binge drinking declined ten percentage points (down 25%). During this same period binge drinking increased in Australia, UK, and Nth Europe, moving down into younger ages.

Binge Drinking



Alcohol harm: Accident/Injury



Could legislative change
influence the underlying
causes of harmful youth
alcohol use?

Major contributors to youth alcohol use in Australia

- ◆ youth alcohol industry
- ◆ parent practices
- ◆ peer culture

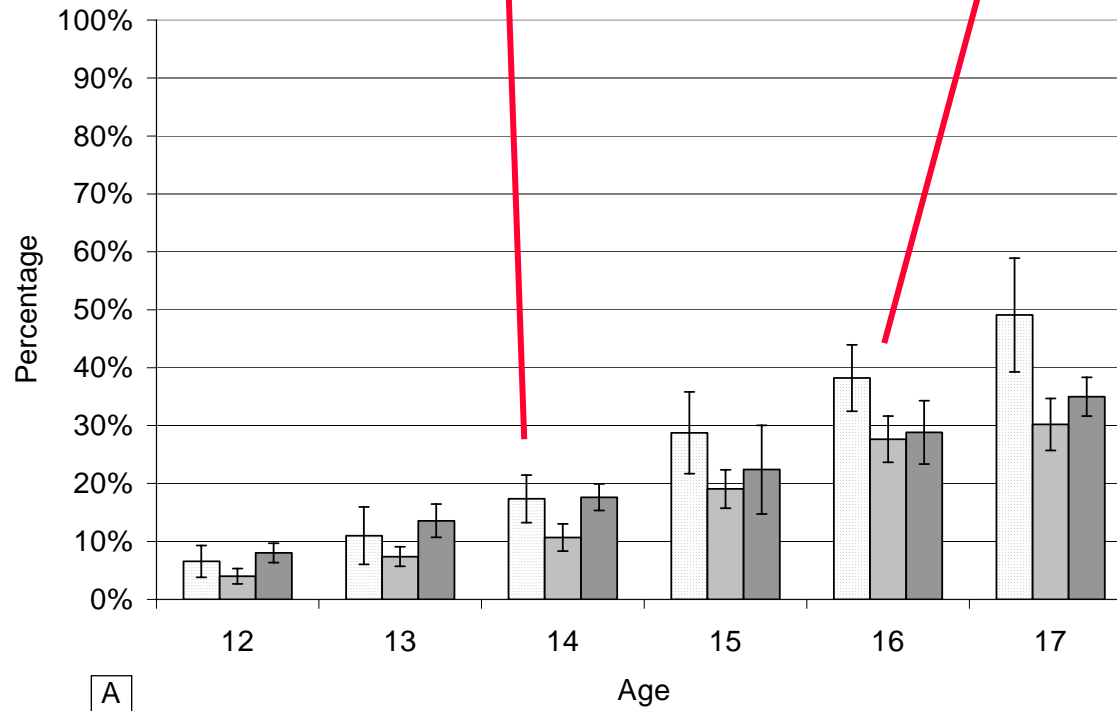
Age 21 legislation would directly reduce the youth alcohol industry

- ◆ an invigorated market for alcohol free entertainment would de-link recreation from intoxication at the “attractive” ages of 18 to 20
- ◆ while reducing access to alcohol at younger ages
- ◆ our institutions supporting adolescence and young adulthood are in vital need of reform



Parents the main source

Alcohol industry sources



Male binge drinking rates

Legislative change contributed to Australia's successful tobacco strategy

- ◆ age of purchase raised from 16 to 18
- ◆ youth confederates enforced compliance
- ◆ students report increasing difficulty obtaining tobacco

Legislative change can lead to less favourable parental attitudes

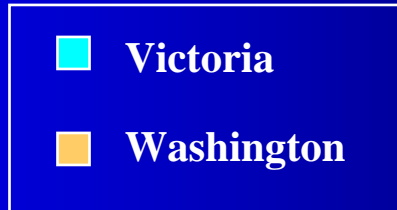
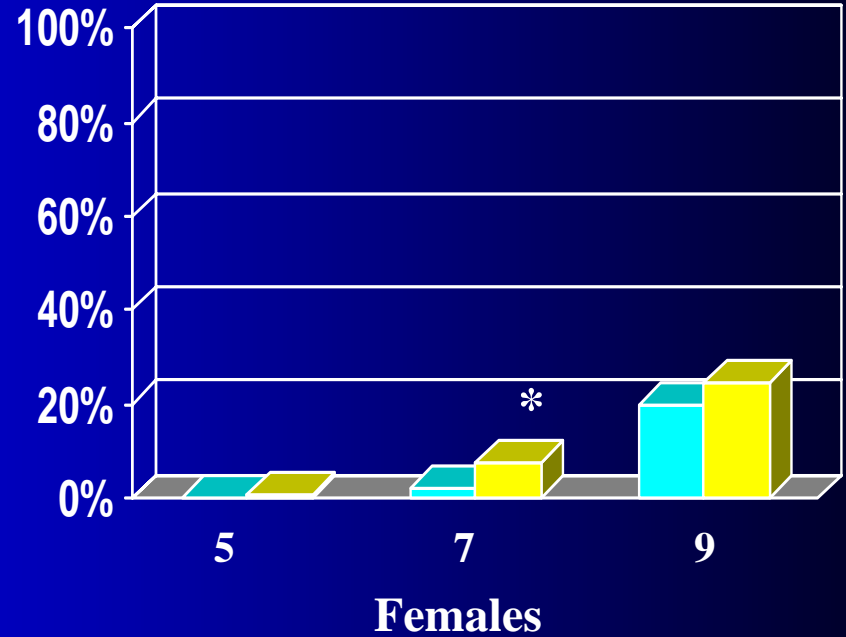
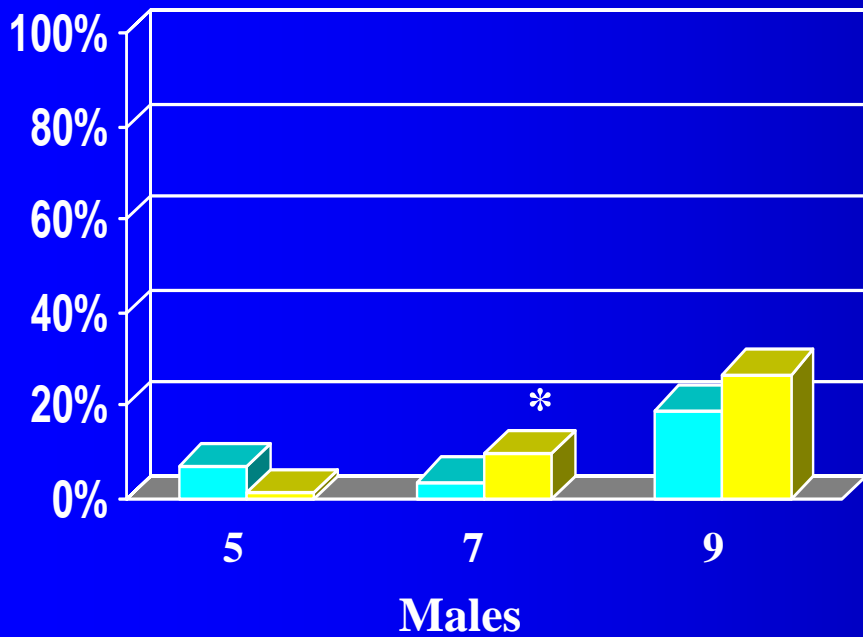
- ◆ parents are currently the major source of alcohol for young drinkers (Aus school study)
- ◆ in New York State the age 21 law led to less favourable parental attitudes (Yu)

*Are there dangers with
legislative change?*

Minimising the dangers of legislative change

- ◆ combine harm minimisation with developmental prevention strategies (Loxley et al, 2004)
- ◆ phase change gradually maximising opportunities for public education
- ◆ enforcement should use civil rather than criminal penalties and include diversion practices

Lifetime Marijuana Use



common objections

- ◆ young adults have a right to drink
 - BUT society has a responsibility to enact strategies known to reduce suffering and net costs
- ◆ better to encourage a Southern European drinking culture
 - BUT their open approach is challenged by high youth tobacco & inhalant use & Aus culture is more like Nth Europe where early age alcohol use increases the risk of alcohol disorders (genetic?)
- ◆ age 21 may push binge drinking into older ages
 - BUT is this likely to be less harmful

Options for amending state liquor control legislation to reduce harmful youth alcohol use

- ◆ State a minimum age for introduction to alcohol
 - ◆ Age 16
- ◆ Do not permit use of alcohol on licensed premises under age 18 (as in NSW)
- ◆ Prohibit non-family residential supply of alcohol
- ◆ Withhold full rights to enter venues or purchase until 21
 - ◆ List alcohol-related offences for which rights may be withheld or withdrawn
 - ◆ A license to use alcohol - extended “Proof of Age Card”
 - ◆ UK - Antisocial behaviour order (ASBO)

Educational options for reducing harmful youth alcohol use

- ◆ social marketing providing information regarding developmental harms
 - ◆ Age of first use, frequency of use in adolescence is linked to heavy use in adulthood. Brain impacts.
- ◆ parent education - effective strategies to delay age of first use and reduce frequency of use
- ◆ the school harm reduction alcohol education curriculum (NDRI) can reduce use and harms

