



OH, WHAT A SWILL PARTY IT IS IN WA

Take-home grog spend tops nation

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WEST Australians spend almost \$65 at the bottle shop every month – more than drinkers in any other state.

An analysis of figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics has revealed adults in WA spend more on takeaway alcohol than they do on clothes.

The monthly \$64.20 spend for every West Australian over 18 is almost double the outlay of South Australians, 54 per cent more than Victorians and \$13 more than the national average.

WA drinkers spent \$1.3 billion on take-home liquor in the 12 months to March this year – a 71 per cent rise from 10 years ago. In March alone they spent just under \$110 million.

Health advocates condemn the drinking spend, saying alcohol is the biggest contributor to medical problems.

They called for tougher restrictions to limit the the number of bottle shops.

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Sleven labelled the figures “disturbing” and begged people to rethink how much alcohol they bought and consumed.

“We’re at the top of a league table WA doesn’t want to be at,” he said. “It’s disturbing. The simple fact is, if it’s accessible, if there’s a liquor outlet just

around the corner and it’s cheap, people are going to consume more.

“And the more West Australians spend at the bottle shop, the more they increase their risk of cancer.”

Mr Sleven blamed the booze spend on high disposable incomes and “extraordinary and relentless” alcohol promotion in an “unchecked and extremely aggressive campaign” by liquor chains.

Australian Medical Association state president Richard Choong also said the high number of liquor stores was distributing.

The latest report on liquor retail by analysts from IBIS-World found WA had 15.2 per cent of the country’s liquor stores despite accounting for just 10 per cent of the population. There are 536 liquor stores across the state, on top of the 273 hotels that can also sell takeaway alcohol.

“If you increase your access to alcohol you increase your alcohol consumption,” Dr Choong said.

And with major chains planning more stores, he warned that greater competition would drive prices down and consumption up.

The new figures come as the Government reviews the state’s liquor laws.

A submission to the review by Police Commissioner Karl O’Callaghan said the link between liquor store density and alcohol-related harm was clear and must be considered before granting liquor store licences.

Police figures show almost 50 per cent of WA drivers caught with a blood-alcohol level above the legal limit have consumed their last drink at a private location.

Cancer Council WA has also made a submission for curbs on alcohol marketing and a “desperately needed” review of tax on alcohol.

While a study by the University of WA also found levels of harmful drinking increased with the density of liquor outlets, Woolworths Liquor spokesman Andrew Wilmshire said the theory was “questionable”.

He said that in Victoria, where there was a deregulated market, there were more Woolworths-owned Dan Murphy’s outlets a person (per head of population) yet alcohol consumption was lower than in WA.

Liquor Barons general manager Chris O’Brien said a rise in small bars meant consumers had become more discerning and were buying more expensive alcohol rather than bigger quantities.