



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health and Ageing**

Guidelines for the  
**Treatment of Alcohol Problems**

Guidelines for the  
Treatment of Alcohol Problems

Prepared for the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing  
by Paul Haber, Nicholas Lintzeris, Elizabeth Proude and Olga Lopatko

SYDNEY SOUTH WEST  
AREA HEALTH SERVICE  
NSW HEALTH



**The University of Sydney**

June 2009

*Guidelines for the Treatment of Alcohol Problems*

ISBN: 1-74186-976-5

Online ISBN: 1-74186-977-3

Publications Number: P3 -5625

Copyright Statements:

**Paper-based publications**

© Commonwealth of Australia 2009

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>

**Internet sites**

© Commonwealth of Australia 2009

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Summary of recommendations</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Purpose of the guidelines	1
Structure of the guidelines	1
Evidence-based health care	3
Community and population approaches to alcohol problems	4
A note on terminology	4
<b>2. Prevalence of alcohol consumption and related harms in Australia</b>	<b>7</b>
Prevalence of alcohol use	7
Alcohol-related harm	8
<b>3. Screening, assessment and treatment planning</b>	<b>13</b>
Screening	13
Comprehensive clinical assessment	21
Treatment planning	32
<b>4. Brief interventions</b>	<b>41</b>
Who to target for brief interventions	41
How to deliver brief interventions	42
Who can deliver brief interventions?	43
Where should brief interventions be delivered?	43
Limitations of brief intervention	45
<b>5. Alcohol withdrawal management</b>	<b>49</b>
Alcohol withdrawal syndrome: Clinical presentation	49
Assessment and treatment matching	51
Supportive care	57
Medications for managing alcohol withdrawal	61
Treating severe withdrawal complications	68
Wernicke–Korsakoff's syndrome	76
<b>6. Psychosocial interventions for alcohol use disorders</b>	<b>81</b>
Overview of psychosocial interventions	81
When to use psychosocial interventions	82
Choosing psychosocial interventions: a stepped care approach	82
Motivational interviewing	85
Cognitive behavioural interventions	86
Relapse prevention strategies	89
Residential rehabilitation programs	89
<b>7. Pharmacotherapies for alcohol dependence</b>	<b>93</b>
Naltrexone	93
Acamprosate	96
Combined acamprosate and naltrexone	98
Disulfiram	98
Other medications	101
Integration with psychosocial treatments	102
Increasing medication adherence	102
Selecting medications for individual patients	103
<b>8. Self-help programs</b>	<b>107</b>
Alcoholics Anonymous	107
SMART Recovery®	110
Self-help for families	111

<b>9. Specific populations</b>	<b>115</b>
Adolescents and young people	115
Pregnant and breastfeeding women	121
Indigenous Australians and people from other cultures	130
Older people	135
Cognitively impaired patients	138
<b>10. Comorbidities</b>	<b>145</b>
Physical comorbidity	145
Co-occurring mental and alcohol-use disorders	147
Polydrug use and dependence	153
<b>11. Aftercare and long-term follow-up</b>	<b>161</b>
Aftercare	161
Working with the persistent problem drinker	161
<b>Appendixes</b>	<b>165</b>
Appendix 1 Screening and diagnostic instruments	167
Appendix 2 Diagnostic criteria for alcohol use disorders	195
Appendix 3 Withdrawal scales	197
Appendix 4 Alcohol and drug interactions	202
Appendix 5 Getting through alcohol withdrawal: A guide for patients and carers	205
Appendix 6 A guide for people with alcohol-related problems	208
Appendix 7 Disulfiram Agreement	213
Appendix 8 Treatment guidelines for mental disorders	214
Appendix 9 Standard drinks	215
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>229</b>

## Tables and Figures

Table 1.1: Categories of evidence and strength of recommendations	3
Table 3.1: AUDIT-C	17
Table 3.2: Matters to be covered in a comprehensive assessment	22
Table 3.3: How dependent on alcohol is your patient?	26
Table 3.4: Mental health assessment scales	29
Table 4.1: FLAGS brief intervention structure	42
Table 5.1: Signs and symptoms of alcohol withdrawal	49
Table 5.2: Characteristics of ambulatory, residential and inpatient hospital withdrawal settings	53
Table 5.3: Admission criteria for different withdrawal settings	54
Table 5.4: Example of symptom-triggered regimen	63
Table 5.5: Example of fixed-schedule regimen	64
Table 5.6: Post-ictal signs and symptoms: comparing epilepsy and alcohol withdrawal seizures	70
Table 5.7: DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria for substance withdrawal delirium	73
Table 8.1: The SMART Recovery® 4-Point Program™	111
Table 10.1: Alcohol use and physical complications	146
Table 10.2: Clinical profile and treatment plans for withdrawal from alcohol and other drugs	158
Figure 2.1: Lifetime risk of death from alcohol-related injury per 100 male drinkers, by number of standard drinks per occasion and frequency of occasions	9
Figure 2.2: Lifetime risk of death from alcohol-related injury per 100 female drinkers, by number of standard drinks per occasion and frequency of occasions	9
Figure 3.1: Screening	20
Figure 3.2: Stepped care approach for delivering health care services	36
Figure 3.3: Assessment and treatment planning	38
Figure 5.1: Alcohol withdrawal syndrome progression	50
Figure 5.2: Selecting benzodiazepine regimens for alcohol withdrawal	65
Figure 6.1: Stepped care approach for delivering health care services	83
Figure 10.1: Level of care quadrants	148

## Acknowledgements

A competitive tender from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing funded this project. The authors are grateful to Professor Richard Mattick for permission for unrestricted use of material from previous editions of these guidelines.

## Authors

Chapter 1	Introduction	Prof Paul Haber, A/Prof Nicholas Lintzeris
Chapter 2	Prevalence of alcohol consumption and related harms in Australia	Dr Elizabeth Proude
Chapter 3	Screening, assessment and treatment planning	Prof Paul Haber, A/Prof Nicholas Lintzeris
Chapter 4	Brief interventions	Dr Elizabeth Proude
Chapter 5	Alcohol withdrawal management	A/Prof Nicholas Lintzeris
Chapter 6	Psychological interventions for alcohol use disorders	Dr Claudia Sannibale, A/Prof Nicholas Lintzeris
Chapter 7	Pharmacotherapies for alcohol dependence	Dr Kirsten Morley, Prof Paul Haber, A/Prof Nicholas Lintzeris
Chapter 8	Self-help programs	Ms Genevieve Bajjan
Chapter 9	Specific populations	
	Adolescents and young people	Dr Yvonne Bonomo
	Pregnant and breastfeeding women	Prof Charlotte de Crespigny
	Indigenous Australians and people from other cultures	A/Prof Kate Conigrave, A/Prof Sawitri Assanangkornchai
	Older people	Dr Celia Wilkinson, A/Prof Nicholas Lintzeris, Prof Paul Haber
	Cognitively impaired patients	Dr Glenys Dore, A/Prof Stephen Bowden
Chapter 10	Comorbidities	
	Physical comorbidity	Prof Bob Batey
	Co-occurring mental disorders	Dr Andrew Baillie
	Polydrug use and dependence	Dr Adam Winstock, A/Prof Nicholas Lintzeris
Chapter 11	Aftercare and long-term follow-up	A/Prof Nicholas Lintzeris, Prof Bob Batey

**Project Advisory Committee** members who gave advice on the overall project, were consulted throughout, and reviewed the Guidelines: Professor Steven Allsop, Curtin University WA; Associate Professor Robert Ali, University of Adelaide; Professor Robert Batey, New South Wales Health; Dr Andrew Baillie, Macquarie University; Professor Margaret Hamilton, University of Melbourne; Dr Anthony Shakeshaft, NDARC, University of New South Wales; Associate Professor Kate Conigrave, Sydney South West Area Health Service; Professor John Saunders, University of Queensland; Ms Andrea Stone, RN, Sydney South West Area Health Service; Professor Nick Zwar, University of New South Wales.

**Guidelines Group** members who provided advice on the content and format of the Guidelines, some of whom also reviewed chapters of both the Guidelines and the Review of the Evidence: Ms Genevieve Bajjan, Dept of Psychology, University of Sydney; Dr Roger Brough, General Practitioner, Warrambool, Victoria; Ms Rosalyn Bumett, Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australia; Mr Steve Childs, Area Drug and Alcohol Service, North Sydney Central Coast Area Health; Professor Charlotte de Crespigny, University of Adelaide; Dr John Furler, Dept of General Practice, University of Melbourne; Dr Michael McDonough, Western Health Victoria; Dr Bridin Mumion, Sydney South West Area Health; Dr Claudia Sannibale, NDARC, University of New South Wales; Dr Hester Wilson, General Practitioner, Newtown, Sydney.

Additional thanks to Dr Alan Gijssbers, Professor Jon Currie, Dr Phil Renner, Mr Paul Colwell, Dr Julie Erskine and all the other professionals who attended focus groups or took part in interviews, and to Annie Cooney for conducting the focus groups and interviews.

Notwithstanding the support from many colleagues, the lead authors (Paul Haber, Nicholas Lintzeris, Elizabeth Proude and Olga Lopatko) accept final responsibility for the accuracy and content of this document.