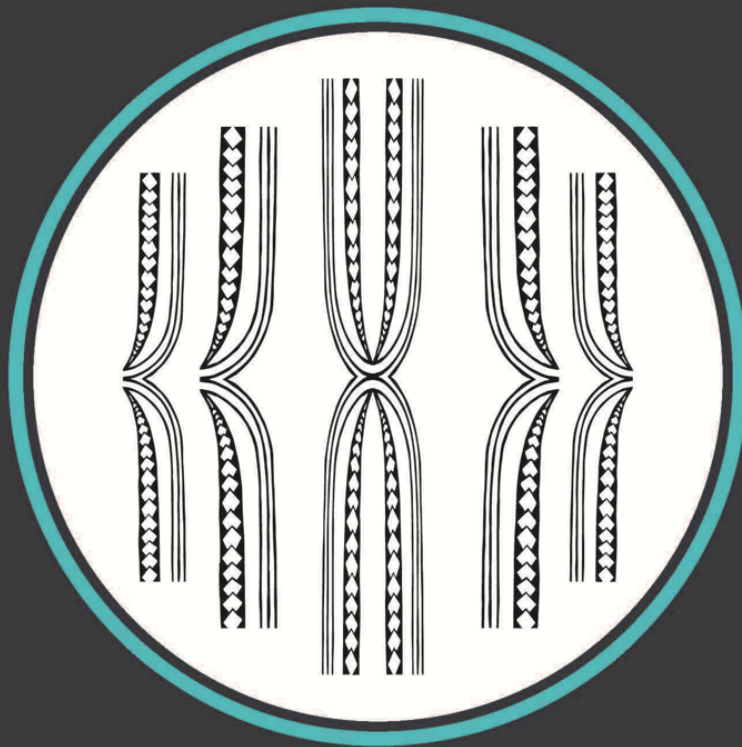




# A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

A parental perspective of young people's  
alcohol use in Wanaka

2019 Update



Prepared for the Wanaka Alcohol Group by  
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*Artwork courtesy of Cholena Perry*

## Acknowledgements

All 211 parents who completed this year's survey are thanked for giving their time to grow our knowledge of alcohol and youth in Wanaka. We are indebted Jo O'Connor, Tracey Whitehouse, Bronwyn Coers and Brittany Beavis, the creators of the 2017 survey from which this research is based. Thanks also to Jo McArthur for her help in survey revision. We are hugely grateful to Mount Aspiring College for their continued support and facilitation of the Wanaka Alcohol Group's longitudinal research programme. A Lotteries Community Sector Research Grant funded this research.

## Summary

The Wanaka Alcohol Group (WAG) is a collaboration of community stakeholders from the Upper Clutha region. The group was formed in 2013 and has been conducting local alcohol-related research annually since 2016. So far, students have been surveyed twice, in 2016 and 2018, and parents twice, in 2017 and 2019. This report describes the 2019 parents' survey results.

In July 2019, parents or caregivers of teenagers in year 9–13 at Mount Aspiring College, Wanaka, were invited to take part in a survey exploring alcohol-related behaviors and attitudes. There were 211 participants, a response rate of 37% and margin of error of 5%.

Recent parental supply of alcohol to their teenager(s) was uncommon. Most parents (81%–84%) hadn't done it at all in the past four weeks. A very small minority of parents (2%–6%) reported supplying more than two drinks to their teenager(s) on a typical occasion in the past four weeks. Compared with 2017, parents supplied alcohol less frequently and in lesser amounts for consumption with their supervision. However, there were no significant supply changes for unsupervised occasions. In both 2017 and 2019 there was a tendency for parents to supply more alcohol for unsupervised than supervised occasions. Although the actual numbers involved are very small, this is a trend to watch in future surveys.

In 2018, students reported that their friends were a significant source of alcohol. Yet few of the 2019 parents identified this source for their teenager(s), or that their own teenager(s) were supplying their friends. Although perfect between-survey comparisons cannot be made, these findings suggest that local teenagers could be drinking greater quantities than their parents realise.

A minority of parents (27%) was comfortable with their teenager(s) drinking with friends without their supervision while underage. However, this minority has significantly grown since the 17% reported in 2017. This attitudinal shift did not occur alongside increased parental supply for unsupervised occasions, but it will need to be monitored carefully in future surveys.

Most parents didn't feel pressure to supply their teenager(s) alcohol. However, where pressure was felt, it was more from 'society in general' than from particular adult groups such as friends or other parents. Some felt pressured by their own teenager(s).

Most parents felt able to stop or limit their teenager(s) drinking, and that they could talk to other adults about how to discourage their teenager(s) from drinking. However, not all parents recognized that their own drinking behaviour impacts that of their teenager(s).

The top three concerns for parents were their teenager(s) experiencing a motor vehicle accident, impacted brain development or sexual risk taking.

It is recommended that WAG share these survey results demonstrating the infrequency of parental supply to empower parents feeling pressured by their teenager(s) and to moderate teenager supply expectations. Further, it is recommended that WAG consider highlighting the potential for teenager(s) to be topping up their alcohol supply via their friends and drinking more on a typical occasion than their parents realise.

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## Introduction

The Wanaka Alcohol Group, with the support of Mount Aspiring College, is conducting a longitudinal research project examining changes in alcohol-related behaviour and attitudes among local parents and students. The most recent survey of year 9–11 students identified a 31% current drinking prevalence.<sup>1</sup> Among those current drinkers, 35% reported binge drinking at least once in the past four weeks. Although drinking and binge drinking prevalence did not change between 2016 and 2018, the 2018 students drank less frequently than their 2016 counterparts.

In New Zealand, youth under 18 years old (the minimum purchase age) are commonly supplied alcohol by social sources such as parents and friends.<sup>2</sup> Parents are thought to be a major alcohol source for Wanaka youth. In both student surveys, most current drinkers reported being supplied alcohol by their parents. But this supply may be infrequent. When asked in 2017, only 31% of parents said that their teenager(s) had been given alcohol in the past four weeks with their supervision. Without supervision, this figure dropped to 15%. Most commonly supplied were beers, RTDs and cider.

The 2018 student survey recorded a significant jump in social supply from friends relative to 2016. It is unclear whether parents are aware of this supply channel, or whether it has been driven by a decrease in parental supply. If parents are unaware of this alcohol source, then their teenager(s) may be drinking more than they think.

Concerns about parental alcohol supply stem from the wealth of New Zealand research documenting how supply relates to drinking behaviour and associated harms.<sup>3</sup> To help further understand parental alcohol supply to Wanaka students and how it has changed since 2017, parents of year 9–13 Mount Aspiring College students were surveyed in July 2019.

This research aimed to:

1. Determine the prevalence, frequency and quantity of parental alcohol supply
2. Explore changes in alcohol-related attitudes and behaviour between survey years

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<sup>1</sup> Hammond, V. (2018). *Harming me, Harming you: Health & wellbeing survey update 2018*. Wanaka: Wanaka Alcohol Group.

<sup>2</sup> Huckle, T., & Romeo, P. (2018). *Patterns of social supply of alcohol over time in New Zealand*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Methods

This survey followed the methodology of its predecessor.<sup>4</sup> Some modifications were made to the original survey to improve the user experience and analytical potential, and to align the questions with national surveys. A link to the 28-item online survey was emailed to parents of year 9–13 students on 1 July 2019 via Mount Aspiring College. The survey remained open until 1 August 2019. Reminder messages were published in the school newsletter, the local ‘Messenger’ (a free community paper) and broadcast on Radio Wanaka during July.

The survey had 28 questions and took an average of 9 minutes to complete.

### Analysis

Percentages were calculated to describe distributions based on the number of parents who answered that particular question as the denominator, unless otherwise stated. Equality of proportions was tested using z-tests in Stata (StataCorp, Texas) with a 5% significance level.

## Results and Discussion

### Response rate and demographics

There were 211 survey participants, a response rate of 37% and margin of error of 5%. The majority of participants were female (80%), European (93%), and aged 45–54 years (66%). The teenagers in their care were fairly balanced in terms of age, with slightly fewer participants reporting having 18 year olds. This year’s response rate is an improvement on the 29% achieved in 2017. The age and ethnicity distributions were similar between surveys, but a greater proportion of this year’s participants were males (20% in 2019 relative to 12% in 2017).

**Table 1 Participant demographics**

Characteristic	#	%
Participant age (years)		
25-34	3	1
35-44	45	21
45-54	139	66
55-64	21	10
65-74	2	1

<sup>4</sup> Beavis, B. (2018). A Parent’s Perspective: A parental perspective on young peoples’ alcohol use in Wanaka. Wanaka: Wanaka Alcohol Group.

75 +	0	0
Participant sex		
Female	168	80
Male	42	20
Participant ethnicity		
European	194	93
Māori	12	6
Pacific Peoples	0	0
Asian	2	1
Middle Eastern / Latin American / African	2	1
Other	15	7
Age of teenager(s) in participant's care (years)		
13	70	33
14	55	26
15	47	22
16	59	28
17	41	19
18	22	10

### Alcohol supply and consumption

Almost a third (31%) of parents surveyed said their teenager(s) had never drunk any alcohol. Those with teenager(s) who had (n = 142) were asked further questions about its supply.

Most parents (68%) had previously supplied alcohol to their oldest teenager, but 9% of them commented that it was just a sip or a taste of their own drink. Beer (31%), RTDs (27%) and cider (18%) were the most commonly supplied. These were also the most commonly supplied drinks in 2017, at 35%, 28% and 24%, respectively.

### Recent supervised supply

It was uncommon for participants to have recently supplied their oldest teenager alcohol to drink in their presence. In the past four weeks, most (81%) hadn't done it at all, 17% had done it once or twice, and 2% three or more times. Among those who had supplied it, 81% reported typically providing 1–2 drinks, 12% 3–4 drinks and 8% 5–6 drinks.



### Recent unsupervised supply

It was equally uncommon for participants to have recently supplied their oldest teenager alcohol to drink *outside* of their presence. In the past four weeks, 84% hadn't done it at all, 15% had done it once or twice, and only 1% had done it three or more times. Among the few who had supplied alcohol in this context, 43% typically provided 1–2 drinks, 30% reported supplying 3–4 drinks and 26% 5–6 drinks.

It is important to note that in the context of *all 211 survey participants*, recent parental supply of more than 2 drinks was very uncommon. Only 2% and 6% reported supplying more than 2 drinks to consume inside and outside of their presence, respectively.

### Supply from others

When asked in 2018, 66% of year 9–11 students who drank reported getting alcohol from their friends. Yet in 2019, few parents identified that source for their own teenager(s). Only 22% said their teenager(s) got alcohol from any another source (most commonly friends). Further, only 8% said that their teenager(s) supplied their friends. The students surveyed in 2018 represent a younger age group (year 9–11) than that reflected in the Parent's Survey (year 9–13), making it difficult to explain these inconsistent findings. They could be explained by age differences in the teenager(s) represented, that the parents were not necessarily reporting on the same teenagers who took the student survey, or by students getting alcohol from friends who weren't at MAC (and therefore not being picked up by parents in this survey). But it could also be that parents are unaware of the true nature of alcohol supply to or by their teenager(s). Four parents said that they knew their teenager(s) were drinking, but they didn't know where they were getting it. Only three said that their teenager(s) got alcohol from other parents.

It is important to understand, monitor and talk within families about social supply from friends as this source is associated with riskier drinking than parental supply.<sup>5</sup> Further, young suppliers (age 18–22 years) have been shown in a New Zealand study to supply high quantities of alcohol. In that study, the 18–22 year olds who supplied alcohol to

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<sup>5</sup> Health Promotion Agency. (2017). *Supply of Alcohol to Young People Aged Under 18 Years*. Wellington. [https://www.hpa.org.nz/sites/default/files/712022\\_1\\_supply-of-alcohol-to-U18s-report.pdf](https://www.hpa.org.nz/sites/default/files/712022_1_supply-of-alcohol-to-U18s-report.pdf)

underage drinkers reported providing, on average, the equivalent of 8-10 cans of ready-to-drink beverages.<sup>6</sup>

### Changes in supply prevalence

Although the 2019 survey used slightly different questions around supply, there is some indication that recent parental supply rates and quantities are dropping. With supervision, parental alcohol supply once or twice in the past four weeks dropped from 29% in 2017 to 17% in 2019 ( $p = 0.02$ ). However supply without supervision once or twice in the past four weeks remained the same, at 15%. The number of parents supplying alcohol more than twice, supervised or unsupervised, was too low to make meaningful between-survey comparisons.

There is also some indication that parents are supplying less alcohol, at least for consumption with their supervision. The proportion of parents typically supplying one or two drinks on a supervised occasion rose from 69% in 2017 to 81% in 2019 ( $p < 0.01$ ). In contrast, the prevalence of typically supplying 3 or more drinks dropped from 31% in 2017 to 19% in 2019. Please note that the actual number of parents supplying 3 or more drinks in a supervised occasion is very low, at 19 in 2017 and only 5 in 2019.

Typical supply of 1 or 2 drinks for an unsupervised occasion rose slightly from 39% in 2017 to 43% in 2019. Typical supply of 3 or more drinks for an unsupervised occasion decreased slightly from 61% in 2017 to 57% in 2019. These changes were not statistically significant. In both years parents supplied more alcohol for unsupervised occasions than they did for those that are supervised.

### Supply behaviour by other New Zealand parents

In another New Zealand study, 28% of parents/caregivers of young people aged 10–16 years reported allowing their child to drink under the supervision of either themselves or another parent or caregiver. Almost half of parents with children aged 15 or 16 years reported allowing their child to drink under supervision.<sup>7</sup> When asked in 2013, parents reported supplying their underage youth alcohol an average of four times in the past six months. In 2015, this dropped to 3.1 times in past six months. The average usual

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<sup>6</sup> SHORE & Whariki. (2012). *Social Supply of Alcohol to Young People in Taranaki and Mangere*, December. Auckland: Shore and Whariki Research Centre, School of Public Health, Massey University.

<sup>7</sup> Health Promotion Agency. (2017). *Supply of Alcohol to Young People Aged Under 18 Years*. Wellington. [https://www.hpa.org.nz/sites/default/files/712022\\_1\\_supply-of-alcohol-to-U18s-report.pdf](https://www.hpa.org.nz/sites/default/files/712022_1_supply-of-alcohol-to-U18s-report.pdf)

quantity supplied was 4 drinks in 2013 and 6 drinks in 2016. On average, Wanaka parents are supplying fewer drinks on a typical occasion than their New Zealand counterparts (at 1–2 drinks for a supervised occasion, and 3–4 drinks for an unsupervised occasion). We don't know for certain if there are differences in frequency of supply, due to the different time periods investigated (six months versus four weeks), but there is no strong indication that Wanaka parents are supplying more often, as most hadn't done it at all in the past four weeks. Like Wanaka parents, those elsewhere in New Zealand most commonly supplied beer (49% in 2013 and 44% in 2015), followed by RTDs (23% in 2013 and 28% in 2015). The proportion usually supplying cider to sons/daughters was 6% in 2013 and 16% in 2015.

### Alcohol-related beliefs and attitudes

All parents were asked about the pressure they felt under to supply their teenager(s) alcohol. In general, most parents didn't feel pressured to at all (light blue colour in Figure 1). Less than 10% felt pressured by their friends or their teenager's friends. Slightly more (12%) felt pressured by other parents. The most pressure was felt from society in general (29%) followed by the parents' own teenager(s) (24%). A couple of parents noted that they felt pressured to supply their teenager(s) alcohol for events such as the after ball party.

In 2017, 43% of parents reported feeling at least a little pressured to *allow* their teenager(s) to drink alcohol. Although this is not ideal, it is encouraging that few of the 2019 parents felt pressured by the people around them to supply it.<sup>8</sup> That 'society in general' exerts the most pressure is a curious finding. It isn't clear whether it is society at national or local level that has influence. It may be difficult to create a localised culture around social supply when parents feel more pressured by national norms.

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<sup>8</sup> In 2019, parents were asked about pressure to *supply* alcohol, rather than pressure to *allow* alcohol consumption in order to better understand the drivers of supply.

How pressured do you feel by the following groups to supply your teenager(s) alcohol?

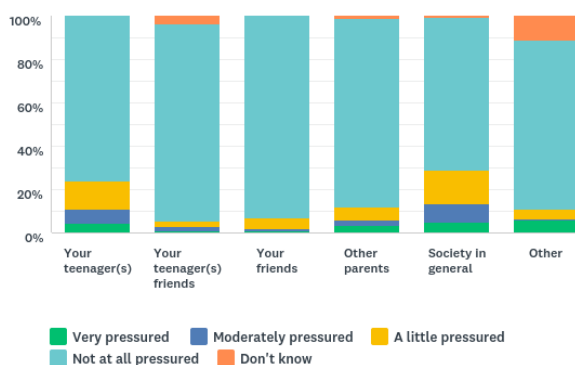


Figure 1 Pressure to supply teenager(s) alcohol, by source (n =210)

All parents were asked questions relating to their beliefs about teenager(s) and alcohol. Generally, the age at which parents felt comfortable with their teenager(s) drinking alcohol with their friends depended on whether or not the drinking was done in their presence. Overall, 65% of parents in 2019 were comfortable with underage drinking in their presence (Figure 2). This proportion dropped to 27% for underage drinking outside of their presence (Figure 3). In 2017, the respective proportions were 69% and 17%. The 2019 parents were significantly more permissive of underage drinking outside their presence ( $p = 0.03$ ).

In a national survey, respondents believed that on average people should be 17.4 years old before they were allowed to drink at home or in a restaurant under parental supervision.<sup>9</sup> For Wanaka parents, the average acceptable age under supervision was 16.9 years.

Most parents felt that they could stop or limit their teenager(s) drinking (73%), and that they could talk to other adults about how to discourage their teenager from drinking (77%). Sixty percent recognized that their own drinking impacts their teenager(s) drinking behaviour, either now or in the future (25% believe that their own drinking has no impact on that of their teenager[s]). The top three concerns for parents were their teenager(s) experiencing a motor vehicle accident, impacted brain development and sexual risk taking (Figure 4). In 2017, the top three concerns were non-consensual

<sup>9</sup> Huckle, T., & Romeo, P. (2018). Patterns of social supply of alcohol over time in New Zealand. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.

sexual activity, drink driving, and unprotected sex. The rise in concern about brain development may reflect an impact of WAG's Brainwave Trust Seminars.

At what age do you feel comfortable with your teenager(s) drinking alcohol with their friends IN your presence?

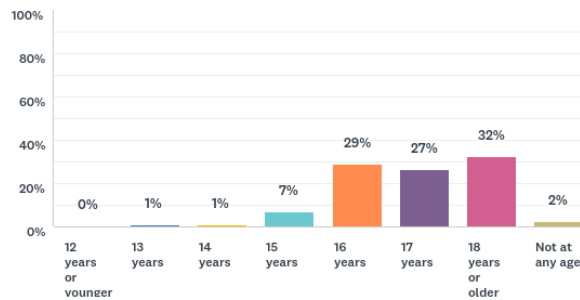


Figure 2 Proportion of parents identifying age at which they were comfortable with their teenager(s) drinking with friends in their presence (n = 210)

At what age do you feel comfortable with your teenager(s) drinking alcohol with their friends OUTSIDE of your presence?

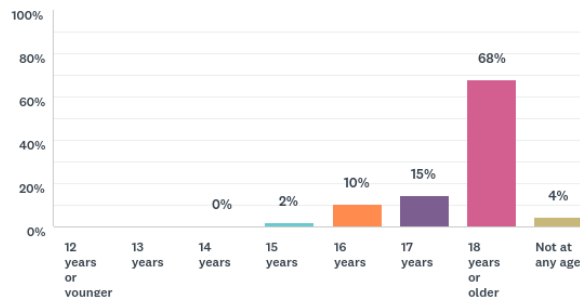


Figure 3 Proportion of parents identifying age at which they were comfortable with their teenager(s) drinking with friends outside of their presence (n = 211)

Please indicate your level of concern about your teenager(s) experiencing the following outcomes, either now or in the future:

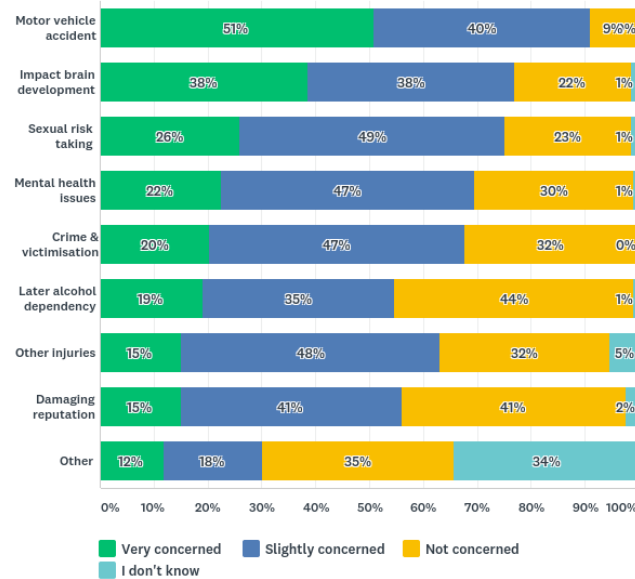


Figure 4 Proportion of parents indicating level of concern, by outcome (n = 209)

### Parents own drinking

Own drinking behaviour varied widely across parents (Figure 6). About a third hadn't drunk alcohol on more than one occasion in the past four weeks. Another third had drunk no more than once a week. The final third had drunk several times a week or most days. Most parents (80%) had no more than two drinks on a typical occasion. Some (17%) typically had 3–4 drinks. It was very uncommon (3%) to typically have five or more drinks. There were no significant changes in parent's own drinking frequency between surveys. However, the 2019 parents drank less on a typical occasion. In 2017, 70% of parents typically had no more than two drinks, 28% had 3–4 drinks and 2% had 5 or more.

Thinking about yourself over the last four weeks, how often did you drink alcohol?

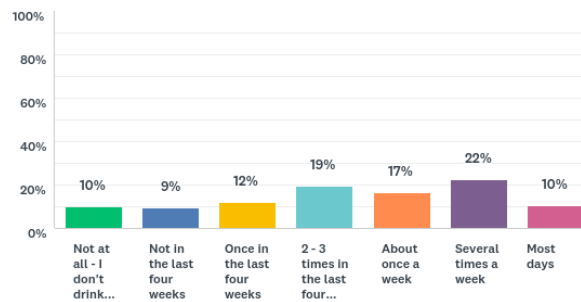


Figure 5 Proportion of parents reporting frequency of their own drinking (n = 211)

On a typical occasion, how many alcoholic drinks do you have?

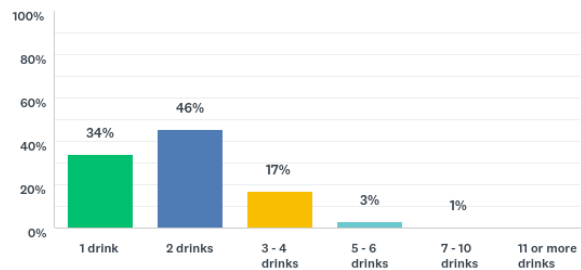


Figure 6 Proportion of parents reporting amount of alcoholic drinks typically consumed (n = 189)

## Conclusions

Parental alcohol supply does not appear to be a common practice. Only a minority of parents had recently supplied their oldest teenager, and when they had, it tended to be limited to 1–2 drinks. Although the numbers are small there is some indication that parents supply more alcohol to drink in unsupervised occasions. This is a trend worth monitoring. Those parents who are supplying more to drink outside their presence potentially do not know the effects of this increased supply on their teenager(s).

The disagreement between student reports of friend supply, and parental acknowledgment of this source suggests that parents may not realise the true amount their teenagers are drinking on a typical occasion.

One significant change between surveys was not positive. The 2019 parents had more permissive attitudes towards unsupervised underage drinking than their 2017 counterparts. However, this did not translate to increased unsupervised underage supply, which remained unchanged between surveys. The most common sources of pressure to supply alcohol were society in general and the parents' own teenager(s).

Although 37% is a healthy response rate, it is possible that those who didn't take the survey have different supply behaviors and attitudes than those who did. Parents who regularly supply their teenager(s) alcohol may be less inclined to take part, leading to an underestimation of supply prevalence and frequency. It is also possible that social desirability affected parent's reports of their supply behaviour. We also know from other New Zealand research that males are more likely to be suppliers than females.<sup>10</sup> Males were underrepresented among our respondents. Different supply patterns may have emerged had more males taken the survey.

Another caveat must be considered when comparing the prevalence of recent parental alcohol supply between the 2017 and 2019 surveys. The 2017 survey was carried out in Nov-Dec. The 2019 survey was conducted in July. It is possible that drinking behaviour is different between seasons, and that different results may have been obtained had we surveyed in Nov-Dec 2019. It is imperative that the Wanaka Alcohol Group and Mount Aspiring College work together to establish consistency around survey periods, for both student and parent surveys. Despite these limitations, we have established, for winter at least, that alcohol supply by survey respondents is not a common practice.

## Recommendations

This research is part of an evaluation. The evaluation report (published separately) offers detailed recommendations for the Wanaka Alcohol Group. However, two recommendations for community messaging arise from the 2019 survey findings:

1. *"Parental supply is not as common as you might think"*  
Sharing the finding that parental supply is uncommon, infrequent and limited to small amounts may work against societal norms around supply. Parents may feel less inclined to supply their teenager(s) if they know it is not the norm to do so. They can also use this information as a counter narrative when being pressured by their own teenager. Teenagers may develop more realistic expectations around parental supply when shown evidence of its infrequency.
2. *"Your teenager(s) may be drinking more than you think"*  
Given the discordant survey findings around supply sources and their acknowledgement, it seems plausible that some parents don't realise how much alcohol their teenager(s) may be acquiring from other sources. Teenager(s) may be topping up their supplies via their friends. Parents need to be alerted to this possibility.

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<sup>10</sup> Huckle, T., & Romeo, P. (2018). Patterns of social supply of alcohol over time in New Zealand. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.