

Effects of Alcohol Policy on Alcohol related harm in Alice Springs, 2015 to 2024



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Key Findings (see below and graphs for details)²

Alcohol regulations introduced in Alice Springs in 2023² are associated with:

- a considerable reduction in alcohol sales / consumption, down 26% compared to previous period, and the lowest ever recorded for the same period of the year (April – June)
- major reductions in presentations at Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department (ASH ED) with alcohol-related presentations down 25%
- a considerable reduction in domestic and family violence (alcohol-related Domestic Violence Assaults fell by 41% in the months after the regulations were introduced, and a further 5% since then)

Reduced Police Auxiliary Liquor Inspector (PALI) coverage in Alice Springs in March 2024³ saw increased alcohol-related presentations at ASH ED (up 10%) and Domestic Violence assaults (up 22%). The reintroduction of the PALIs along with the deployment of extra police and a youth curfew (27 March – 16 April)⁴ was associated with a 21% decrease in alcohol-related presentations at ASH ED and a 31% decrease in Domestic Violence assaults.

The Minimum Unit Price (MUP) of \$1.30 per standard drink was significantly associated with Territory-wide declines in alcohol-related assaults; protective custody episodes; alcohol-related ambulance attendances; alcohol-related ED presentations; alcohol-related road accidents; and child protection notifications.

Effects of regulations on alcohol consumption (Graph 1 and 2)

1. Quarterly alcohol wholesale data⁵ provides an estimate of alcohol consumption in Alice Springs. The latest data shows that alcohol consumption was 26% lower after the regulations were introduced, compared to the previous period after the removal of the Stronger Futures 'dry area' provisions.
2. The latest consumption figures (72,339 litres of pure alcohol in the 2nd Quarter of 2024) reflect seasonally higher sales related to the numbers of tourists visiting the region at this time of the year. Despite this, consumption in 2024 is the lowest for the second quarter of any year on record⁶.

Alcohol-related Emergency Department presentations (Graph 3 and 4)

3. One of the strongest sources of evidence for alcohol-related harm is the number of alcohol-related ED presentations. The number of alcohol-related presentations at ASH ED fell by 25% after the introduction of the alcohol regulations.
4. The period of reduced PALI coverage in Alice Springs (March 2024) saw a 10% increase in alcohol-related presentations at the Alice Springs Hospital compared to the previous month.

5. The reintroduction of PALIs along with the deployment of extra police and a curfew for people under 18 years old (27 March – 16 April) was associated with a 21% decrease in alcohol-related presentations for the month of April 2024 compared to the previous month.

Effects of reforms on alcohol-related assaults (Graphs 5 and 6)

6. The effects of the 2023 regulations can also be tracked through the publicly available NT Police crime statistics⁷. These show that since the introduction of the regulations, compared to the period after the expiry of the Stronger Futures provisions:
 - a. the number of alcohol-related Domestic Violence Assaults fell by 41% between February 2023 and November 2023, and a further 5% from December 2023 to July 2024.
 - b. the period of reduced PALI coverage in Alice Springs (March 2024) saw a 23% increase in Domestic Violence assaults compared to the previous month.
 - c. the reintroduction of PALIs along with the deployment of extra police and a curfew for people under 18 years old (27 March – 16 April) was associated with a 32% decrease in DV assaults for the month of April 2024 compared to March 2024.

Effect of a Minimum Unit Price for alcohol

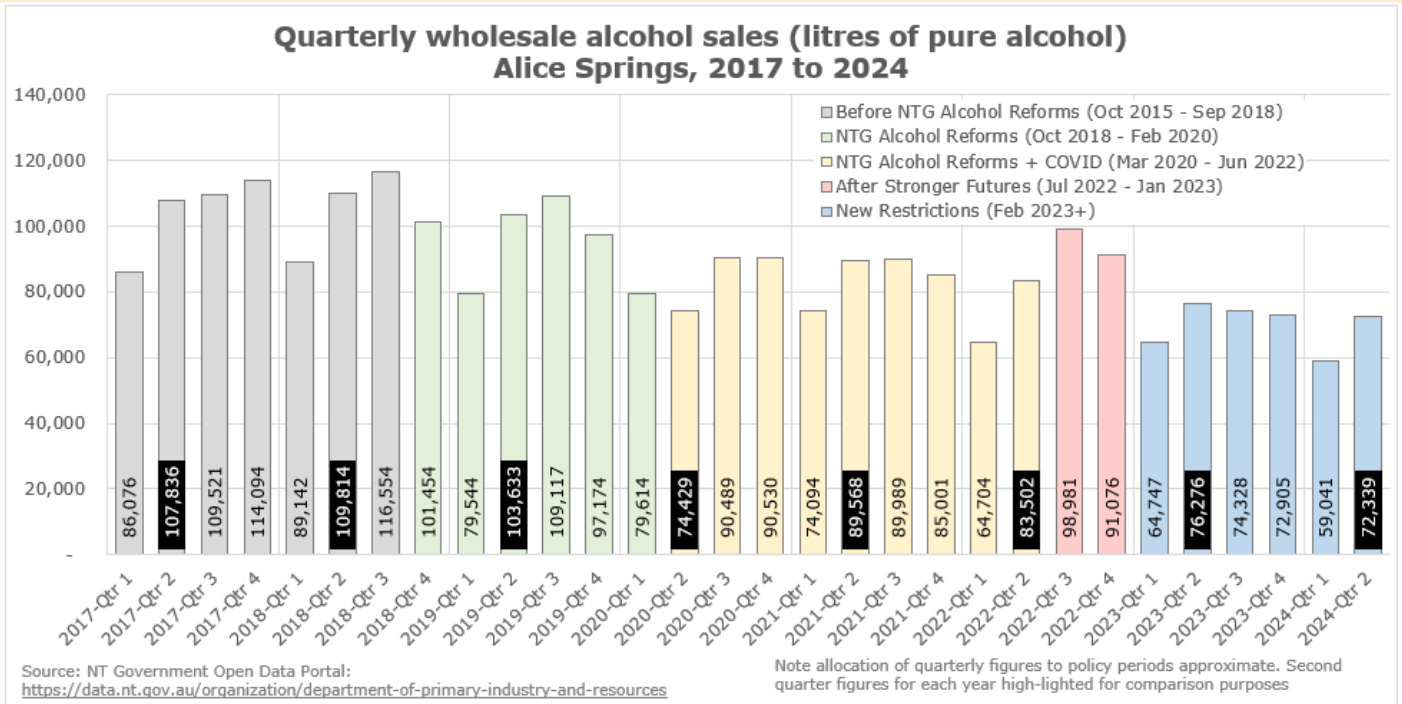
7. The alcohol related reforms introduced by the Northern Territory Government in 2018-19⁸ were associated with a reduction in sales/consumption of 9% and a fall of 21% in alcohol-related domestic assaults in Alice Springs (see Graphs 2 and 6).
8. A significant part of these reforms was the introduction of a Minimum Unit Price (MUP) of \$1.30 per standard drink to remove cheap and dangerous alcohol from sale.
9. An independent evaluation concluded that the MUP was associated with significant decreases in the rate of alcohol-related assault offences; protective custody episodes; alcohol-related ambulance attendances; and assault-related hospital admissions. The MUP was not associated with any significant changes in tourism numbers or expenditure; or the number of liquor licences across the NT⁹.

Addressing the drivers of alcohol-related harm

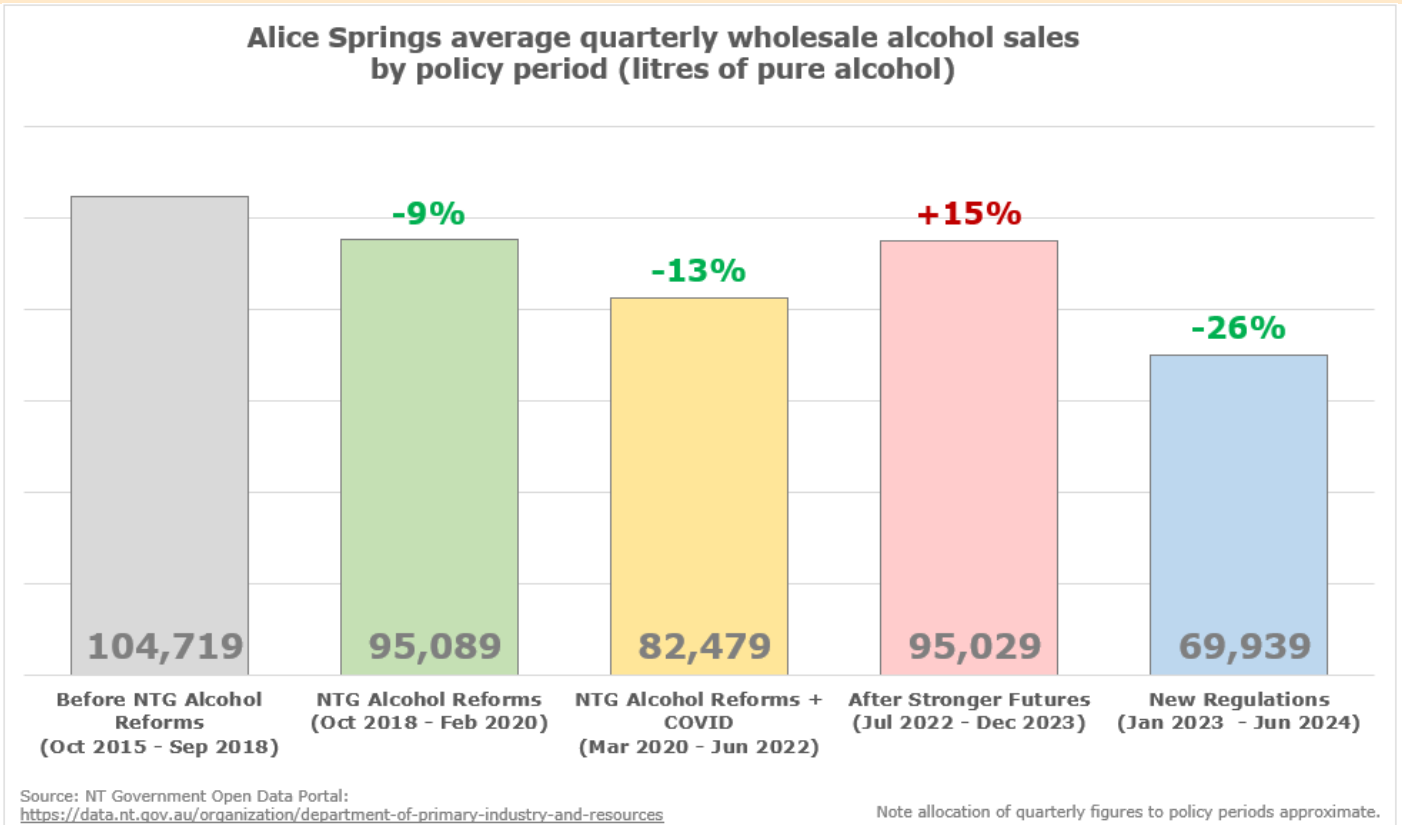
10. Alcohol supply regulation alone will not solve the issue of alcohol-related harm in Central Australia, including gendered violence, which will require **both**
 - a. sustained action to address the drivers of destructive drinking such as intergenerational trauma, poverty, inequality, poor education, gender inequality and discrimination; **and**
 - b. regulating the availability of alcohol to break the cycle of violence and keep Alice Springs residents, families, visitors and businesses safe.
11. Youth crime has complex causes relating to poverty, inequality and intergenerational trauma¹⁰. Reducing alcohol availability will have some effect on youth crime by reducing household drinking, but in general it requires a different range of evidence-based interventions.

Wholesale alcohol sales (consumption)

Graph 1

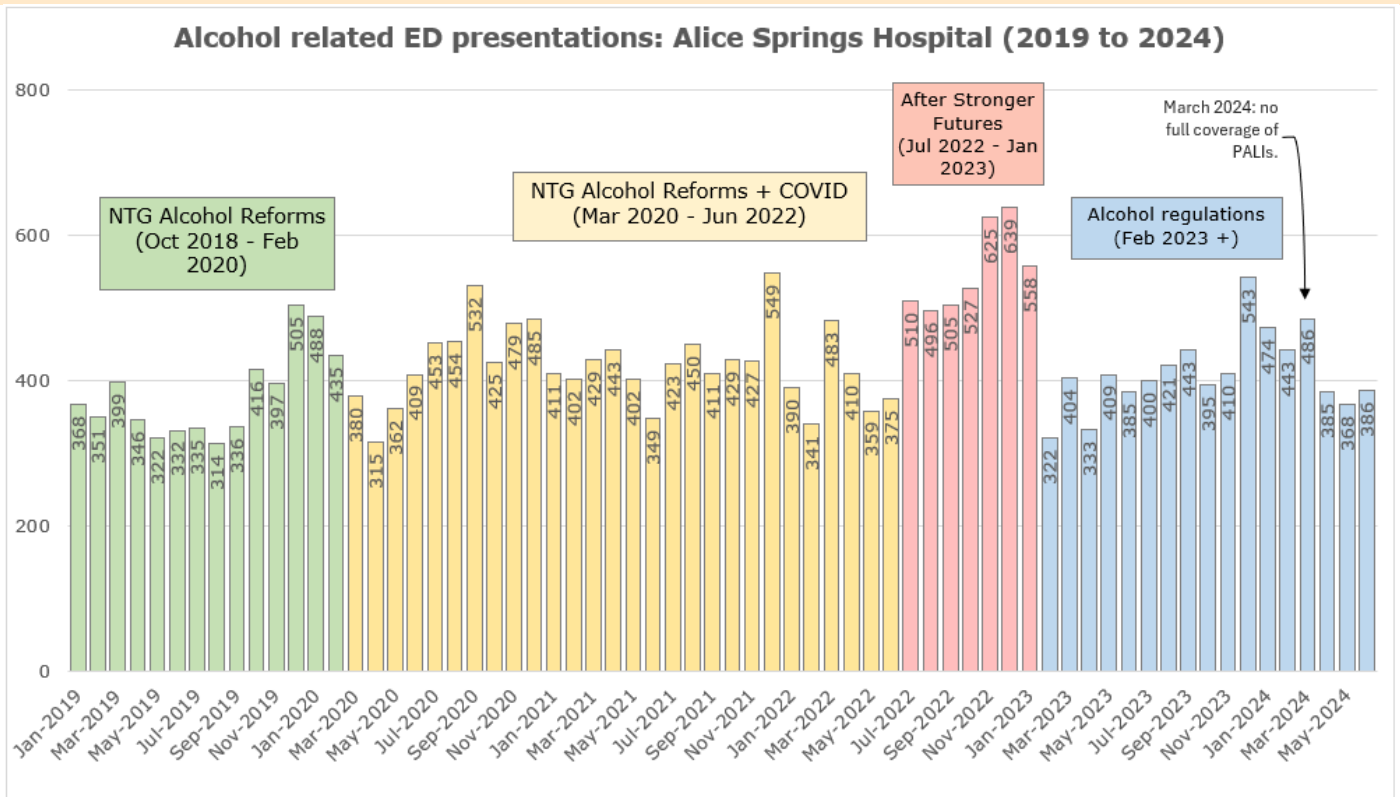


Graph 2

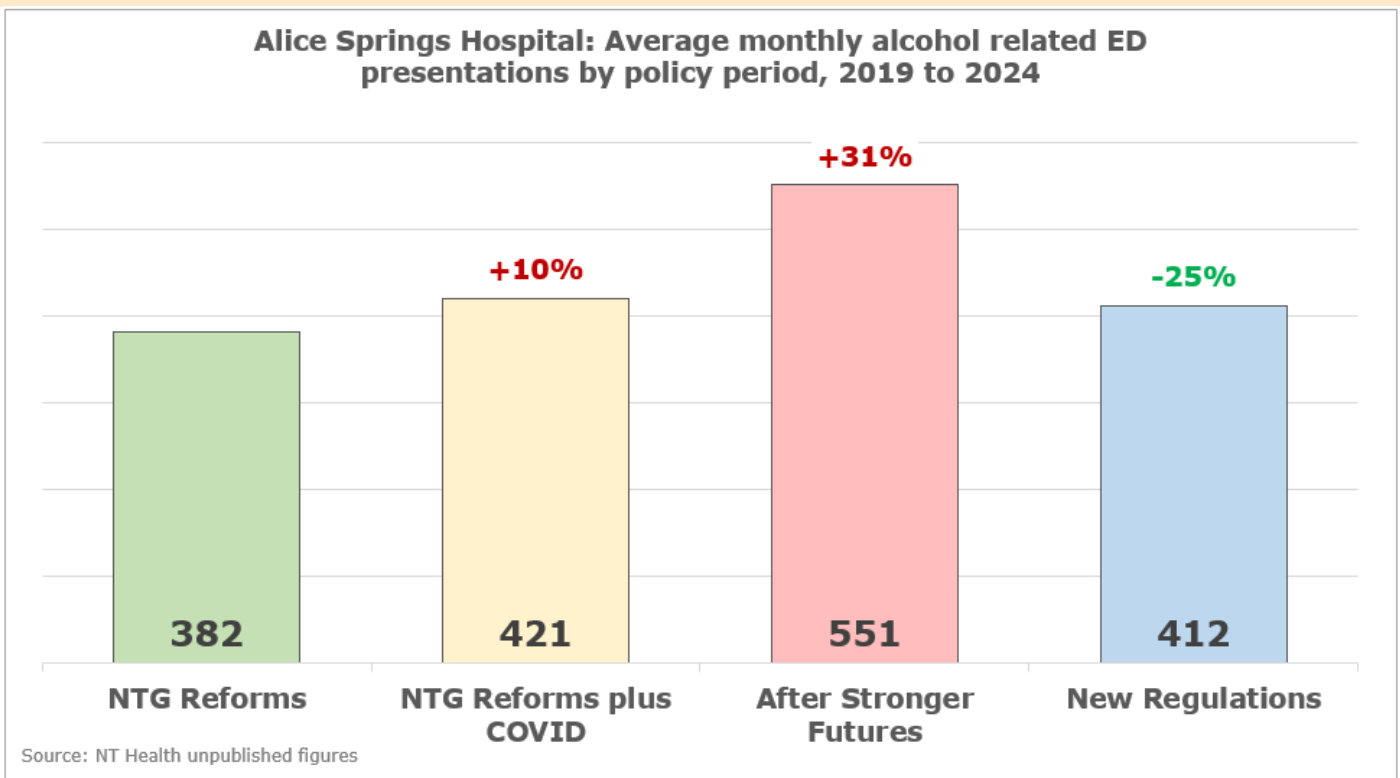


Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department presentations

Graph 3

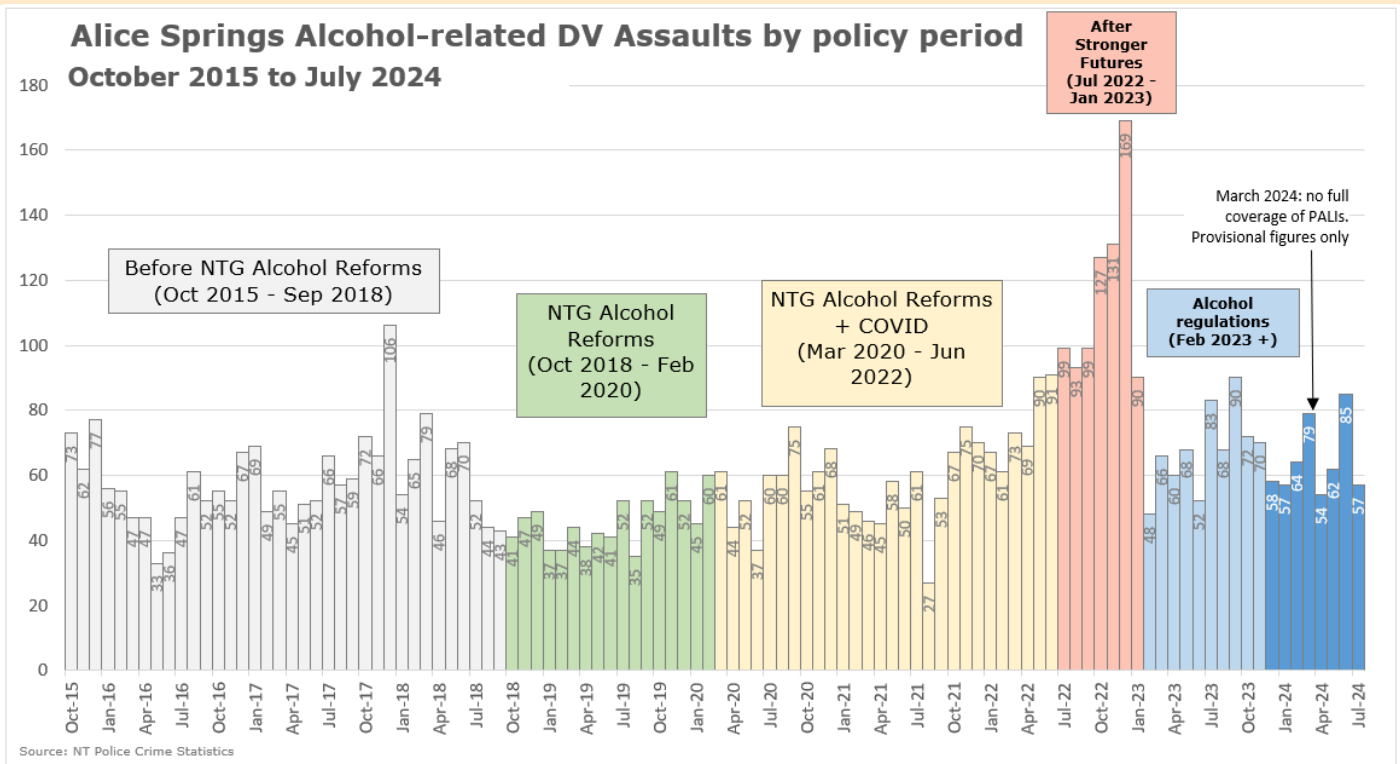


Graph 4



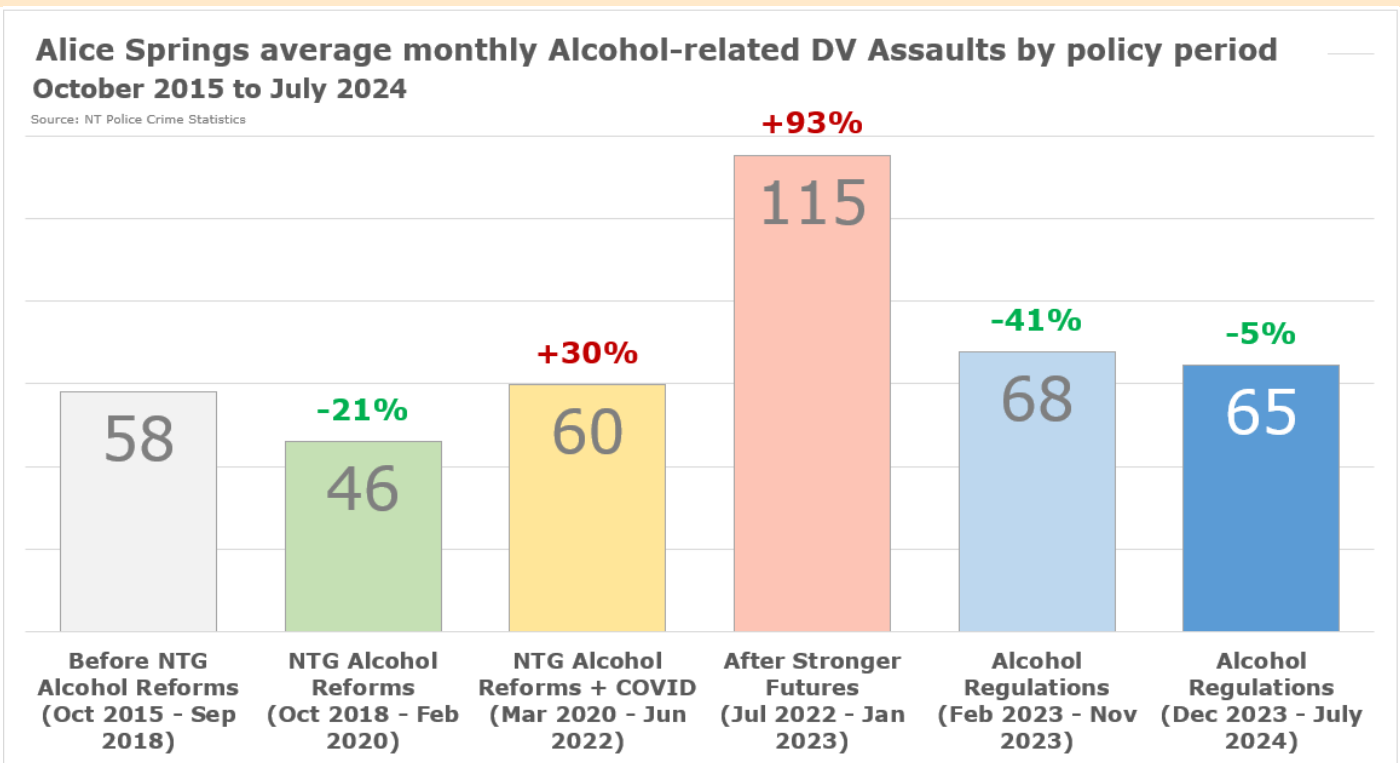
Alcohol-related Domestic Violence Assaults

Graph 5



Following the implementation of the NT Police SerPro system on 27 November 2023, the crime statistics from December 2023 onwards have been determined to be not comparable with earlier published NT crime statistics. December 2023 represents a break in the series, and data for December 2023 onwards will be published separately.

Graph 6



NOTES

¹ This monthly report is based on alcohol sales/consumption data to June 2024; Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department data to June 2024; and crime statistics to July 2024.

² On 25 January 2023 the Northern Territory Chief Minister announced regulations on take away alcohol availability in Alice Springs including:

- One sale per day per person, following industry guidance
- Alcohol free days on Monday and Tuesday for takeaway purchases
- Limiting hours of alcohol being sold between 3pm-7pm, except for on Saturdays.

This was followed on 16 February 2023 by legislation taking effect whereby Aboriginal town camps and communities reverted to being 'dry' zones, after such regulations were removed with the expiry of *Stronger Futures* provisions in July 2022. The new 'dry area' provisions will remain in place until 2027, pending decisions by those communities to develop Community Alcohol Plans and opt-out of the regulations.

³ On 27 February 2024, the Northern Territory Government announced the removal of Police Auxiliary Liquor Inspectors from Alice Springs for training (<https://createsend.com/t/t-455A413053CCE4AA2540EF23F30FEDED>).

⁴ On 27 March 2024, the Northern Territory Government declared an Emergency Situation in Alice Springs, including an immediate curfew for people under 18 years old and the deployment of extra police (<https://createsend.com/t/t-E4C0EC1643031CED2540EF23F30FEDED>). The curfew ran until 6am on Tuesday 16 April 2024 (<https://createsend.com/t/t-B8760DF52B02F8442540EF23F30FEDED>).

⁵ <https://data.nt.gov.au/dataset/wholesale-alcohol-supply-june-2024>

⁶ Sales figures include all sales, so reduced tourist numbers during COVID will have had an effect. The failure of interstate and international tourist numbers to fully recover post-COVID will have many causes which are beyond the scope of this analysis. However, it is reasonable to consider that one of those causes will have been the negative national and international publicity surrounding alcohol-related violence in Alice Springs.

⁷ All data from <https://pfes.nt.gov.au/police/community-safety/nt-crime-statistics/statistical-publications>. Note that following the implementation of the NT Police SerPro system on 27 November 2023, the crime statistics from December 2023 onwards have been determined to be not comparable with earlier published NT crime statistics.

⁸ In 2017-19, the Northern Territory Government introduced a range of alcohol reforms to deal with high levels of alcohol-related harm. These included:

- Police Auxiliary Liquor Inspectors (PALIs) at bottle shops in Alice Springs (2018),
- a Banned Drinkers Register (BDR) to reduce access to take-away alcohol by problem drinkers (September 2017),
- a Minimum Unit Price of \$1.30 per standard drink to prevent the sale of cheap alcohol (October 2018), and
- a new Liquor Act that included risk-based licencing and greater monitoring of on-licence drinking (2019).

⁹ Taylor, N., et al., *The impact of a minimum unit price on wholesale alcohol supply trends in the Northern Territory, Australia*. Aust N Z J Public Health, 2021. **45**(1): p. 26-33

¹⁰ Vargas (2023) *The impact of socioeconomic factors on crime rates* *Addiction & Criminology* Volume 6, Issue 4. <https://www.alliedacademies.org/articles/the-impact-of-socioeconomic-factors-on-crime-rates-26135.html>