

Effects of Alcohol Policy on Alcohol related harm in Alice Springs, 2015 to 2023

(Data to November 2023)



Central Australian
Aboriginal Congress
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION | ICN 7823

Key Findings (see below and graphs for details)

The alcohol availability restrictions introduced for Alice Springs in early 2023¹ have led to:

- **a considerable reduction in alcohol sales / consumption** (down 25% in Q3 2023 compared to the same period in 2022)
- **halving of alcohol-related presentations at the Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department** immediately following the introduction of the restrictions
- **a considerable reduction in crime, including domestic and family violence** (alcohol-related Domestic Violence Assaults are down by 41%; alcohol-related Assaults by 42%; and Property Offences by 13%)

The results cannot be explained by seasonal variations. Comparing February to November 2023 with the same period in 2022, there have been 256 fewer alcohol-related DV assaults; 355 fewer alcohol-related assaults; and 502 fewer property offences

The takeaway restrictions introduced on 25 January 2023 have had the greatest effect on reducing alcohol-related harm; the Dry Area provisions introduced on 16 February 2023 appear to have had a further though smaller effect.

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

1. Quarterly alcohol wholesale data² provide an estimate of alcohol consumption in Alice Springs. The latest data shows that **alcohol sales /consumption were 25% lower in July-September 2023 compared to the same period 2022.**

Alcohol-related hospital presentations (Graphs 3 and 4)

2. One of the strongest sources of evidence for alcohol-related harm is the number of alcohol-related Emergency Department presentations. Unfortunately, data is not currently publicly available for Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department (ASH ED) for 2023. However the data that is available shows that:
 - a. **the Northern Territory Government's package of alcohol reforms in 2018 was associated with a significant (25%) reduction in alcohol-related presentations**
 - b. **the expiry of the *Stronger Futures* provisions in July 2022 was associated with a significant (35%) increase in alcohol-related presentations.**
3. The number of alcohol-related presentations at ASH ED – including for domestic violence – fell by half after the introduction of the January and February 2023 alcohol restrictions³.

Effects of reforms on alcohol-related crime (Graphs 5 to 10)

4. The effects of the 2023 restrictions can also be tracked through the publicly available NT Police crime statistics⁴. The latest figures cover the period up to November 2023. These show that since the introduction of the restrictions in Alice Springs, compared to the period after the expiry of the *Stronger Futures* provisions:
 - a. **the number of alcohol-related Domestic Violence Assaults has fallen by 41%** from an average of 115 per month to an average of 68 per month

- b. the number of alcohol-related Assaults has fallen by 42%** from an average of 152 per month to an average of 88 per month
- c. the number of Property Offences has fallen by 13%** from an average of 717 per month to an average of 621 per month.

Seasonal nature of alcohol-related harm (Graphs 11 to 13)

5. It has been suggested that the improvements are seasonal rather than a result of the alcohol reforms⁵. However, comparing the period February to November 2023 (when the reforms have been in place) with the same months in 2022, it appears that the improvements cannot be explained by seasonal changes. During the period February to November 2023:
 - a. Alcohol-related DV Assaults are 27% lower than in the same months in 2022** (equating to 256 fewer DV assaults in these months in 2023 compared to 2022)
 - b. Alcohol-related Assaults are 29% lower than in the same months in 2022** (equating to 355 fewer assaults in these months in 2023 compared to 2022)
 - c. Property Offences are 7% lower than in the same period in 2022** (equating to 502 fewer property offences in these months in 2023 compared to 2022)

Differential effects of the reforms (Graphs 14 to 16)

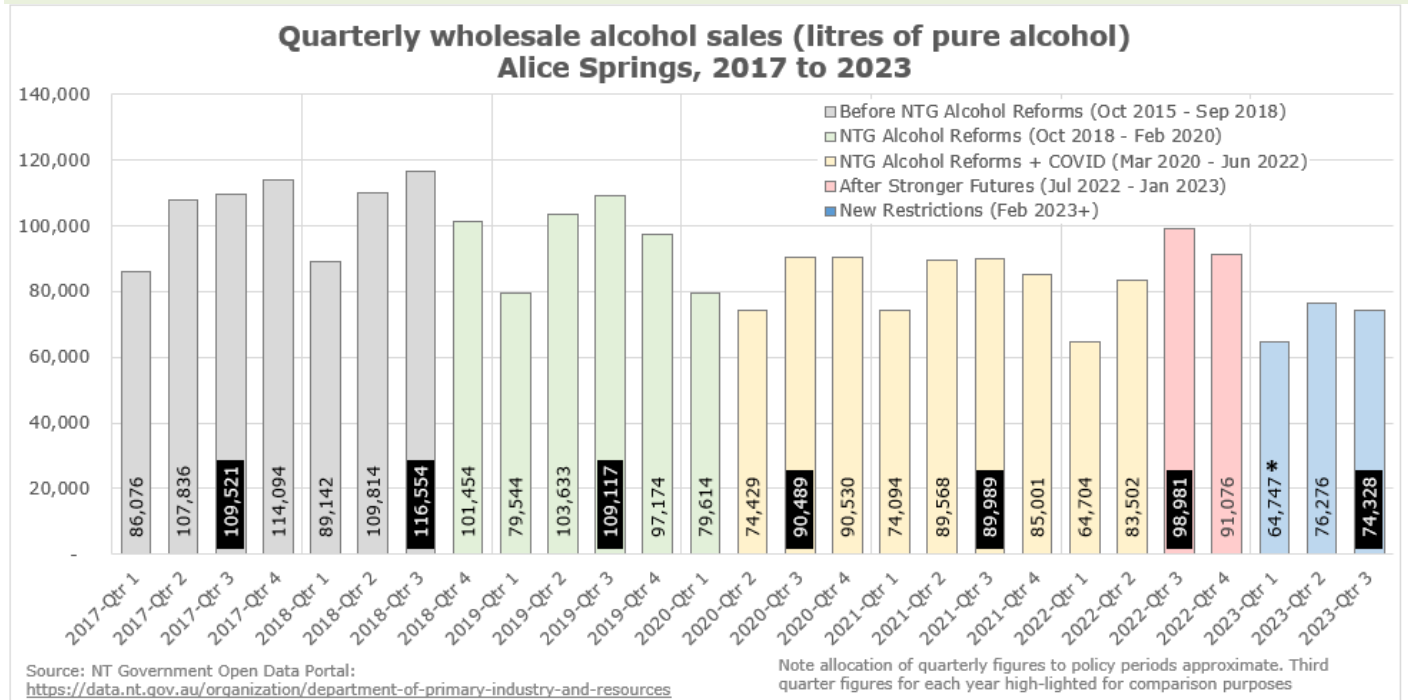
6. The two sets of reforms (takeaway restrictions and dry areas provisions) have complemented each other in reducing alcohol-related harm in Alice Springs. As they came into effect at different times, it is possible to estimate how much effect each of the two reforms had.
7. Graphs 14 to 16 show the effect on assault offences, DFV assaults and property offences in Alice Springs for:
 - the four weeks before any restrictions (weeks commencing 2 January 2023 to 23 January)
 - the three weeks when there were takeaway restrictions only (weeks commencing 30 January to 13 February)
 - the four weeks when there were both takeaway restrictions and Dry Area regulations in place (weeks commencing 20 February to 13 March)
8. These figures show that:
 - a. the takeaway restrictions introduced on 25 January 2023 appear to have had the greatest effect on reducing alcohol-related harm in Alice Springs**, being associated with a reduction in DV Assaults and all Assaults by around a third (32% and 31% respectively) and reducing property offences by about a half (48% reduction)
 - b. the Dry Area provisions introduced on 16 February 2023 appear to have had a further though smaller effect on reducing alcohol-related harm in Alice Springs**, being associated with a reduction in the above harms by between 7% and 16%.

Addressing the drivers of alcohol-related harm

9. Congress advocates that alcohol bans alone will not solve the issue of alcohol-related harm in Central Australia, which will require **both**
 - a. sustained action to address the drivers of destructive drinking** such as intergenerational trauma, poverty, inequality, poor education, and discrimination; **and**
 - b. reforms on the availability of alcohol** to break the cycle of violence and keep Alice Springs residents, families, visitors and businesses safe.

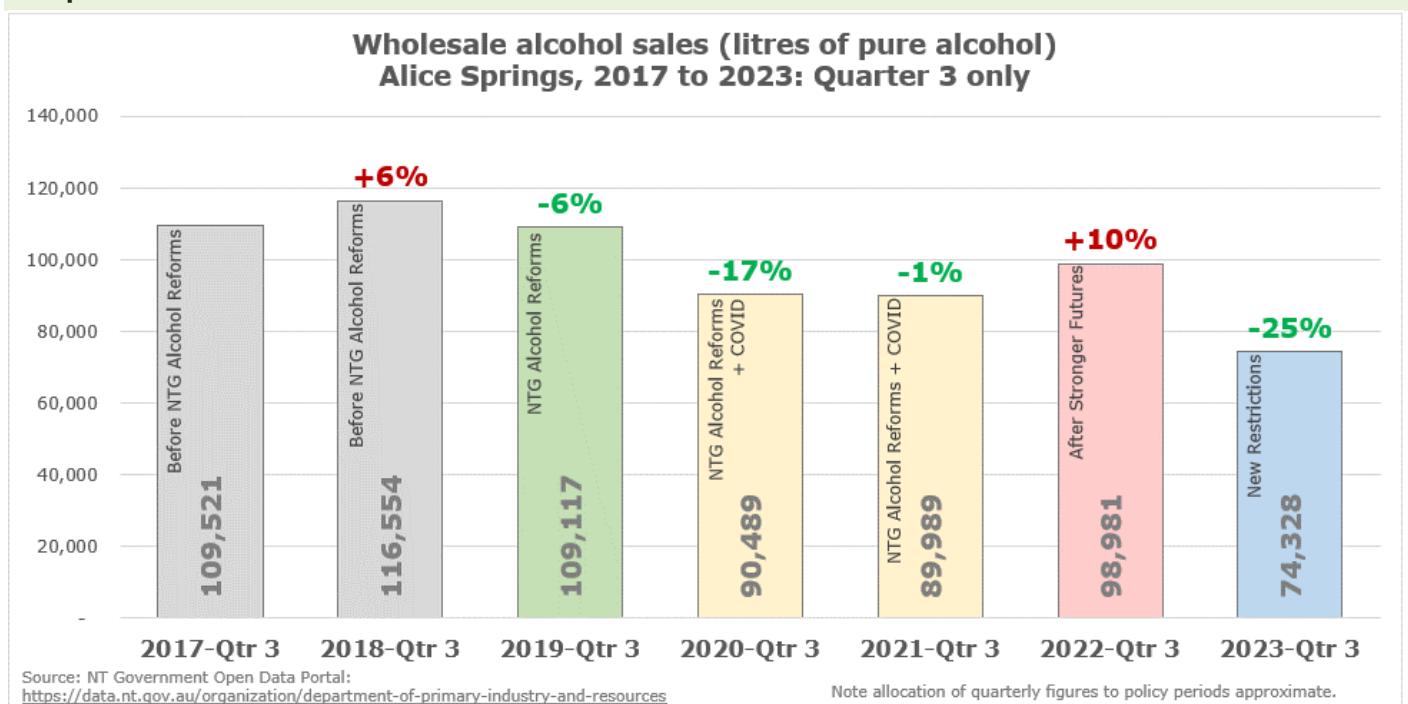
Wholesale alcohol sales (consumption)

Graph 1



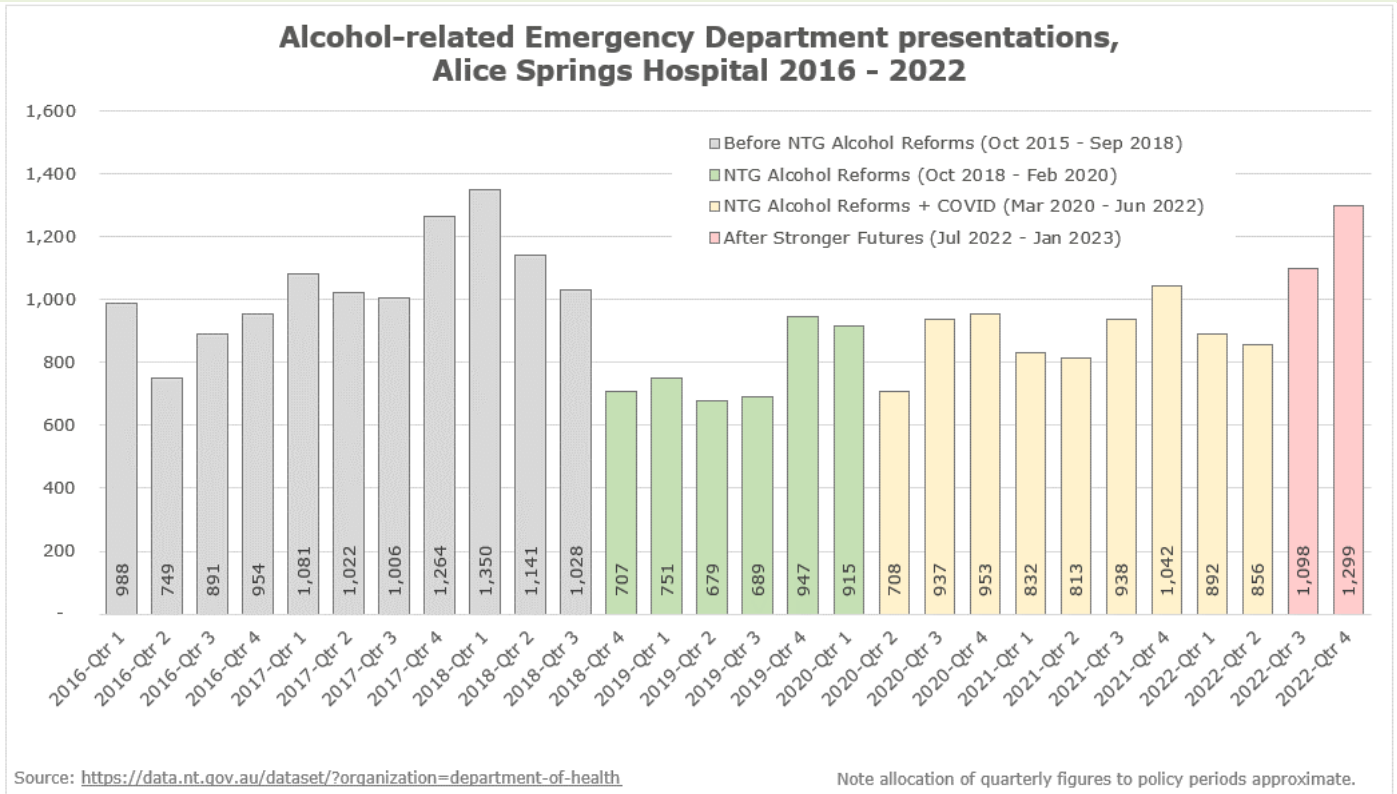
* Note that the first quarter of 2023 sales figures include approximately a month when the takeaway restrictions (introduced 25 January) were not in place, and approximately six weeks when the new dry areas (introduced 16 February 2023) were not in place, and therefore underestimate the effect of the restrictions on sales / consumption.

Graph 2

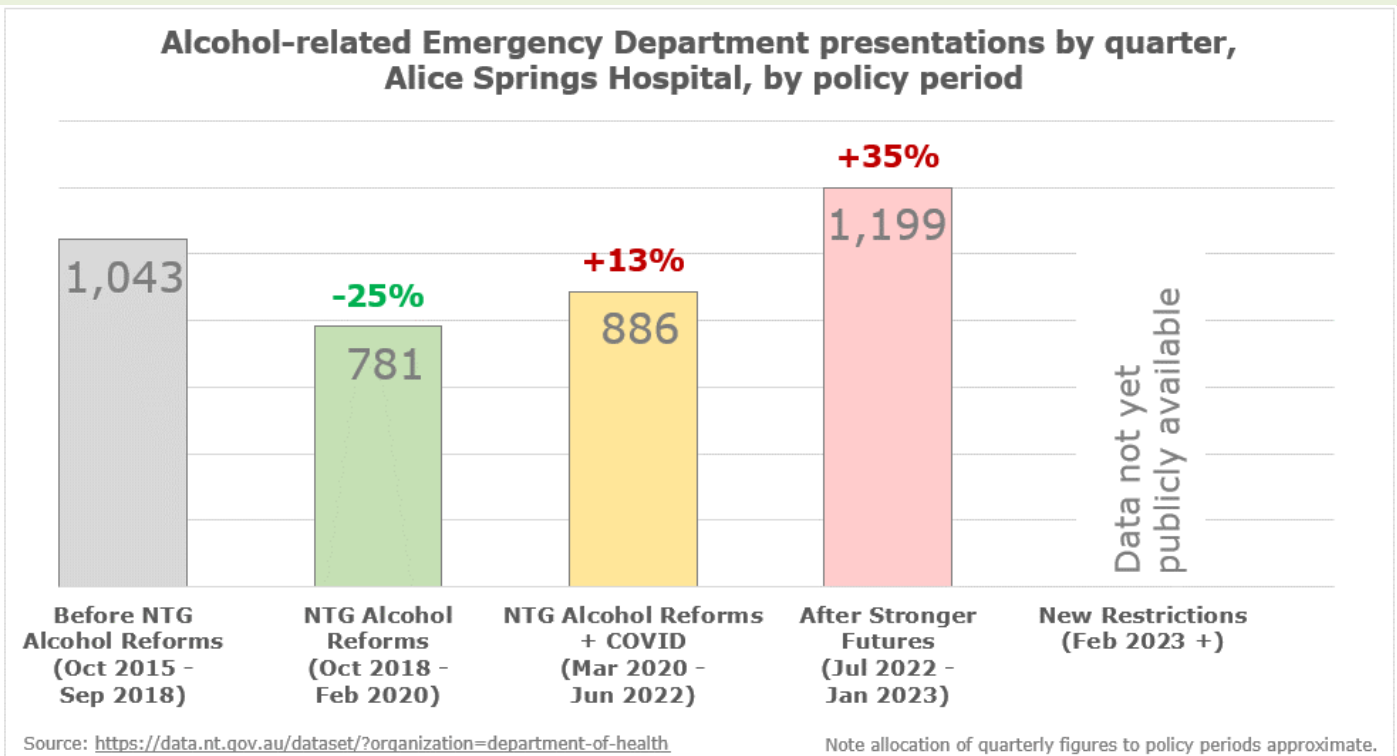


Alcohol-related Emergency Department presentations

Graph 3

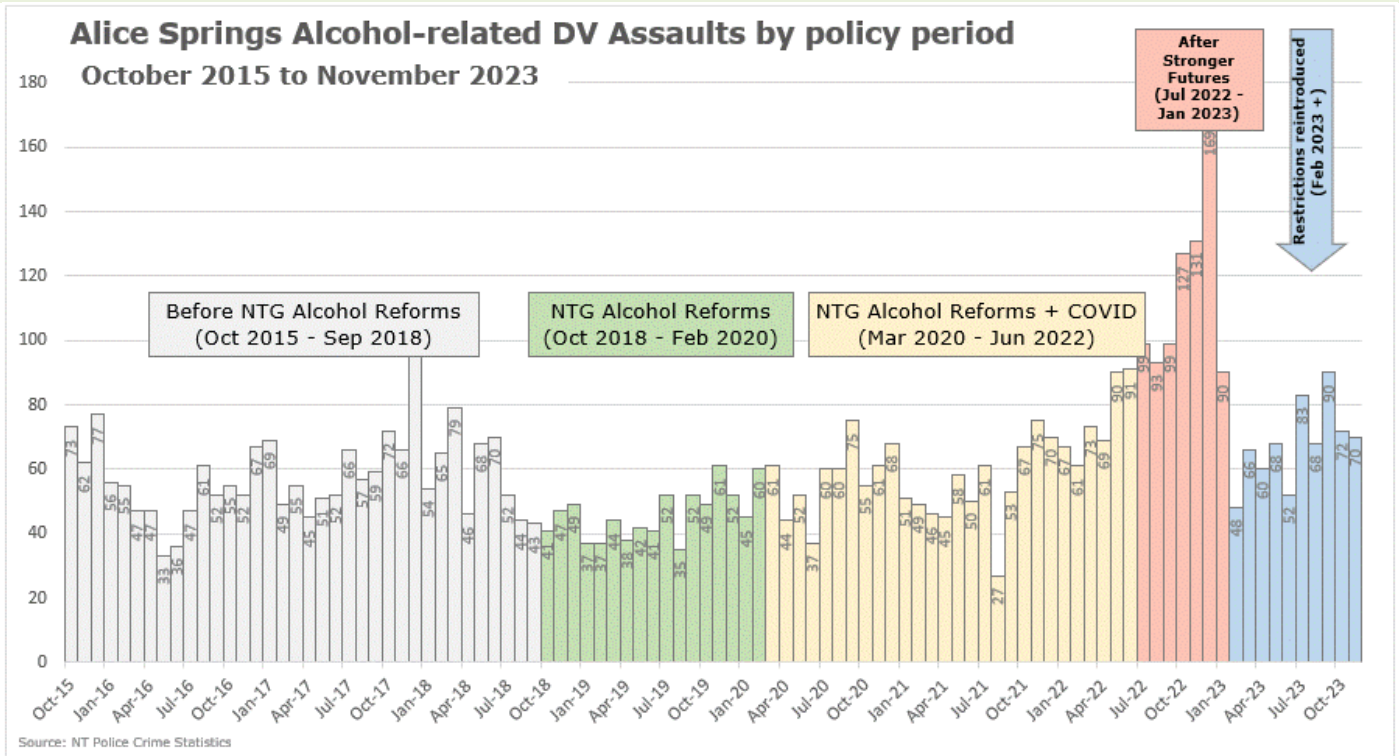


Graph 4

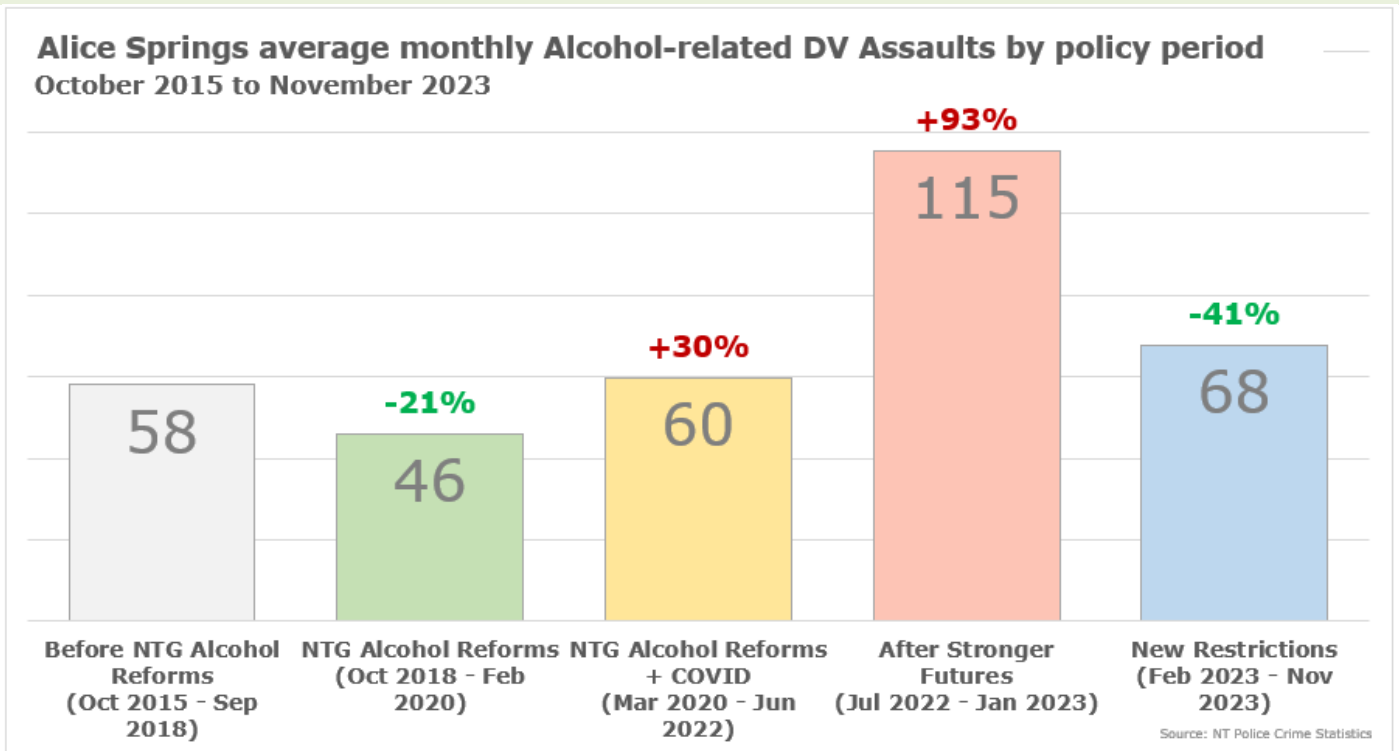


Alcohol-related Domestic Violence Assaults

Graph 5

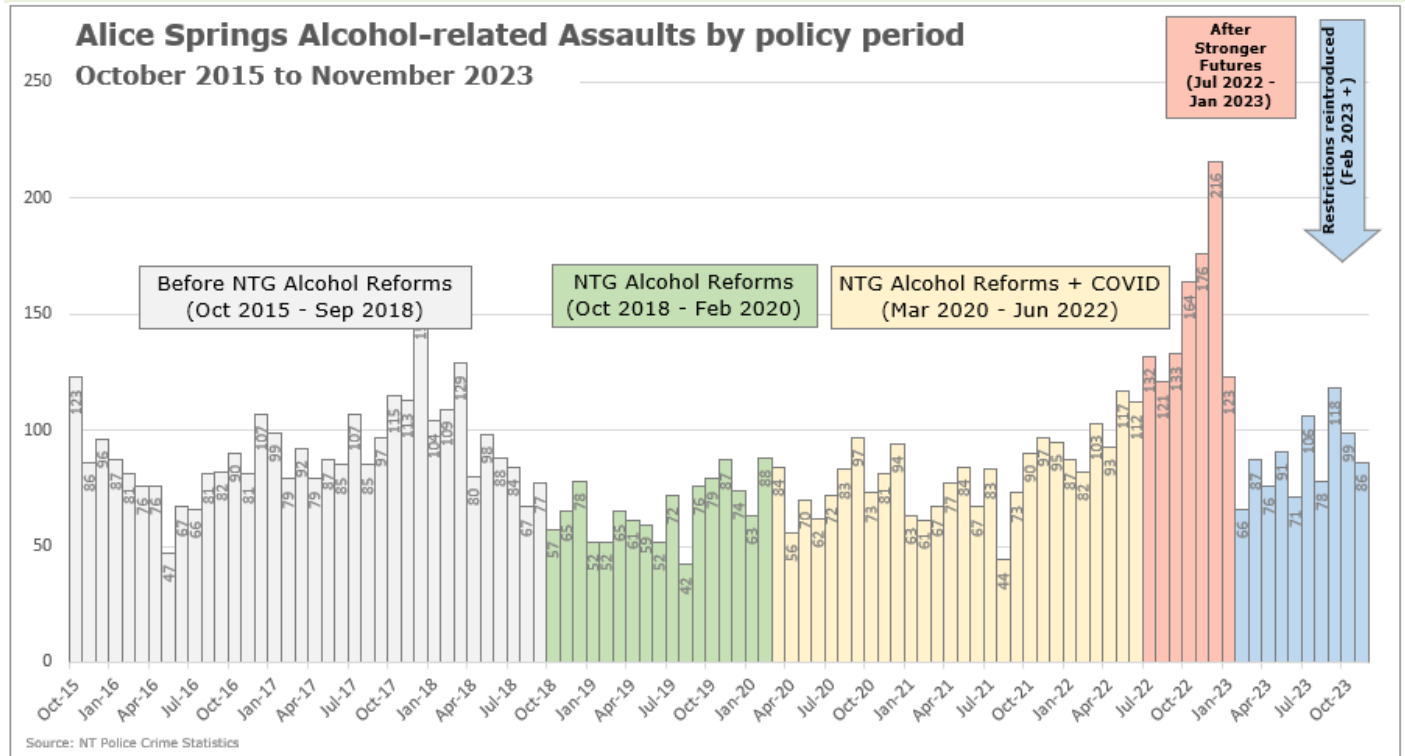


Graph 6

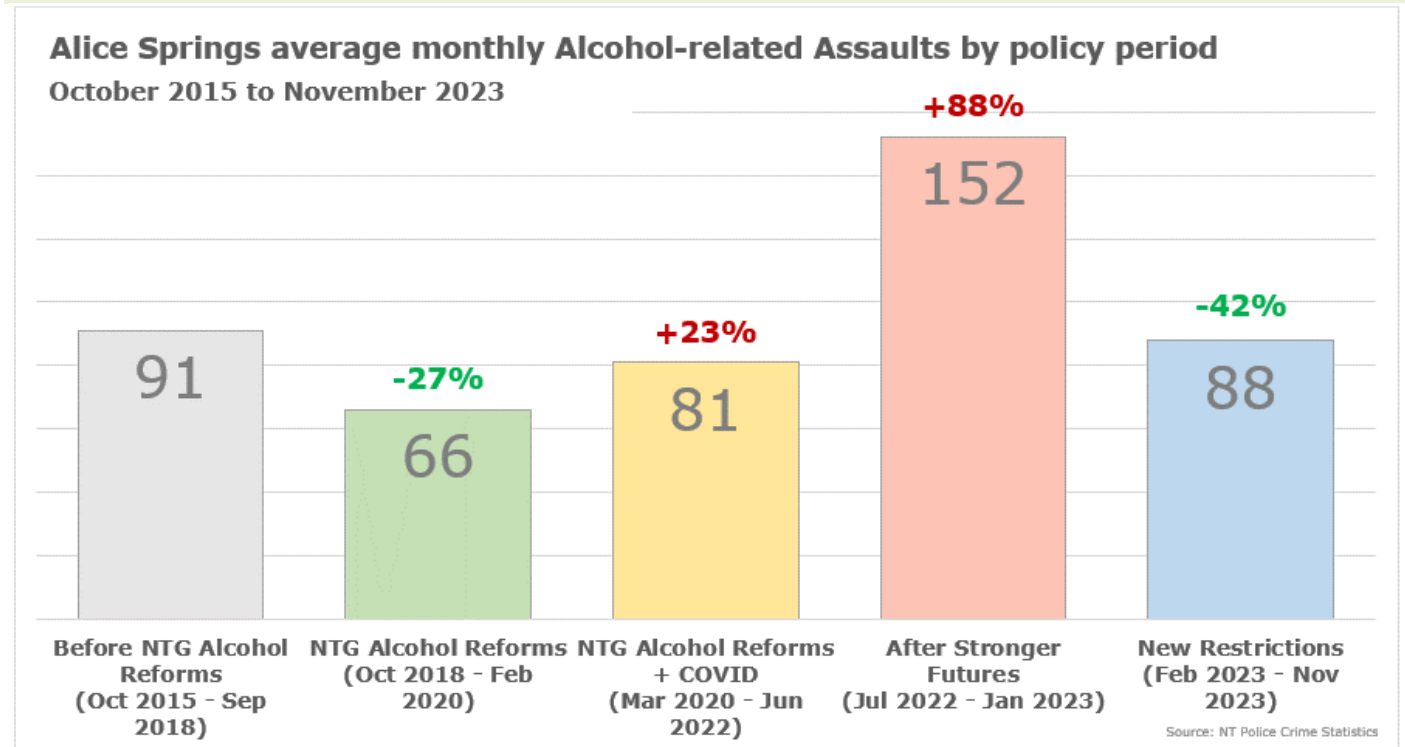


Alcohol-related Assaults

Graph 7

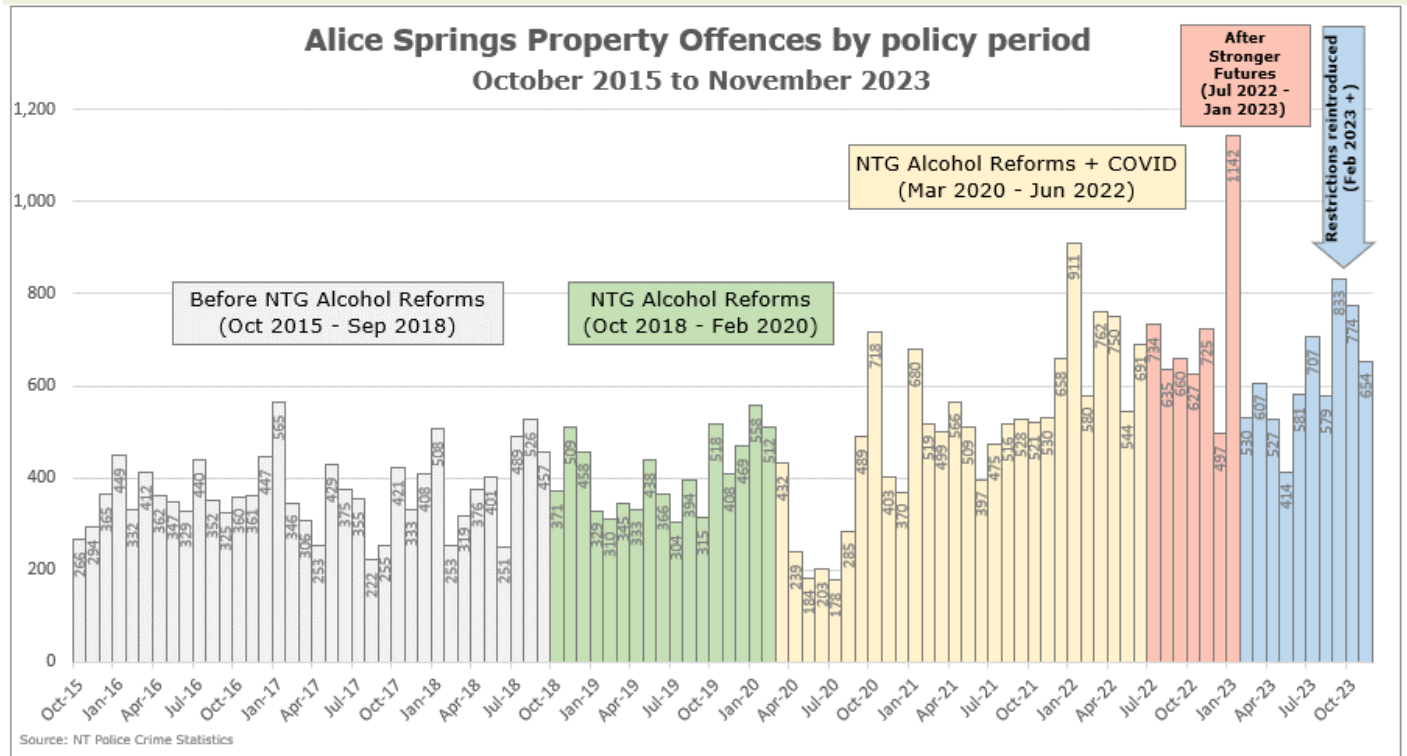


Graph 8

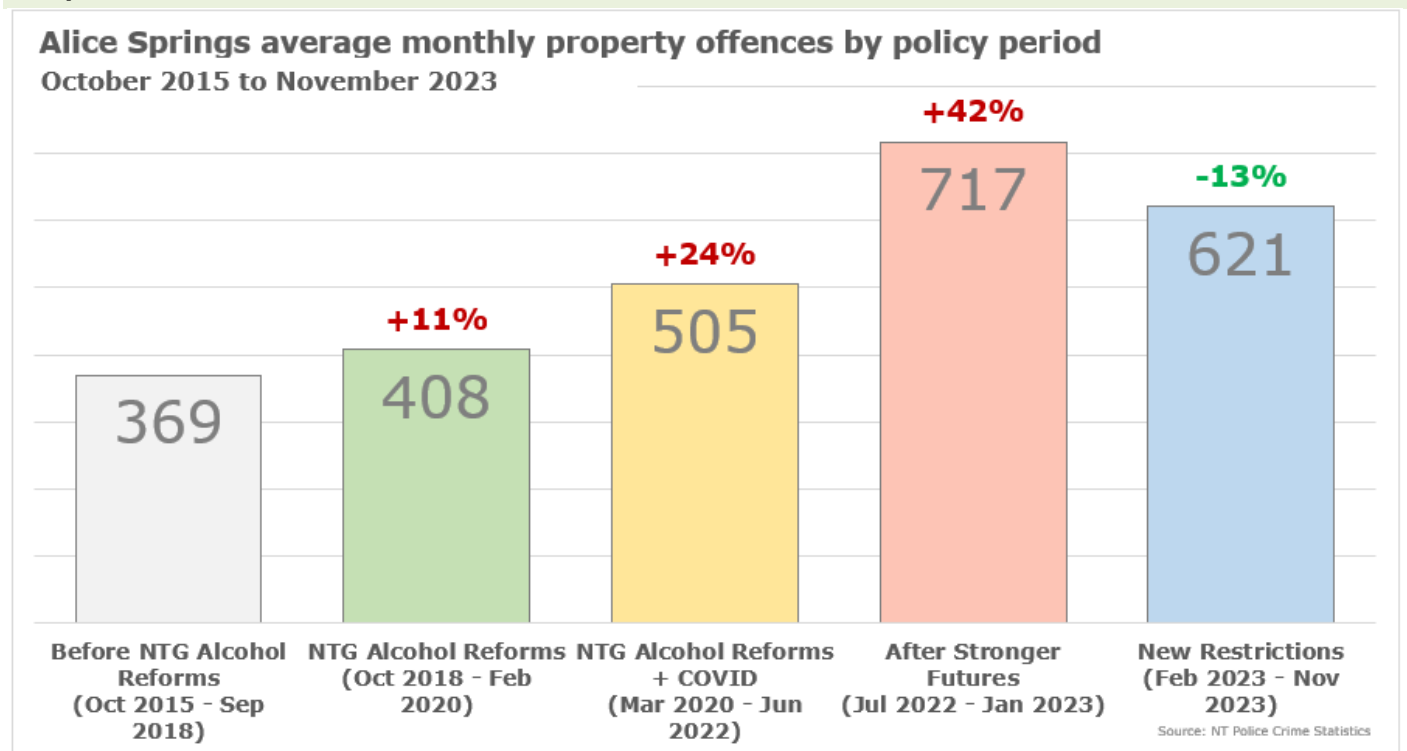


Property Offences

Graph 9

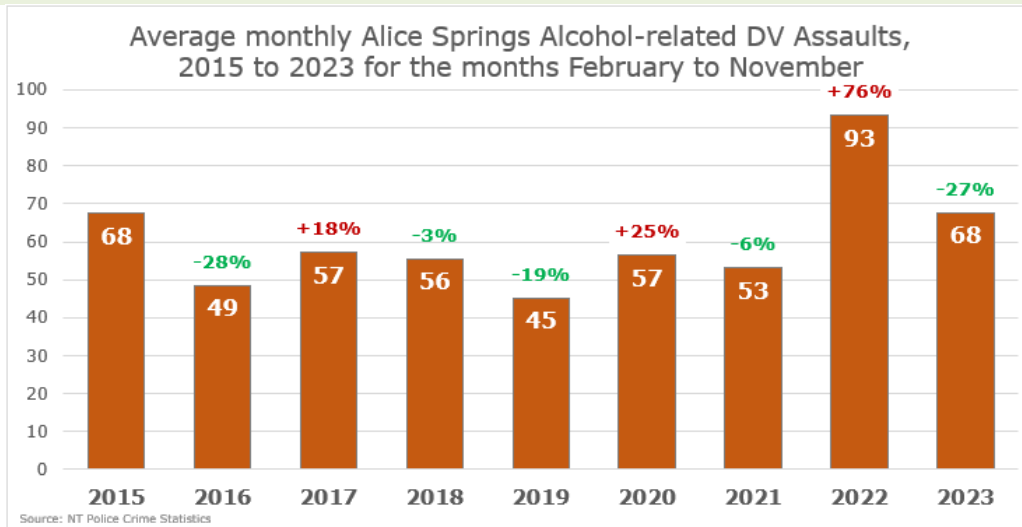


Graph 10

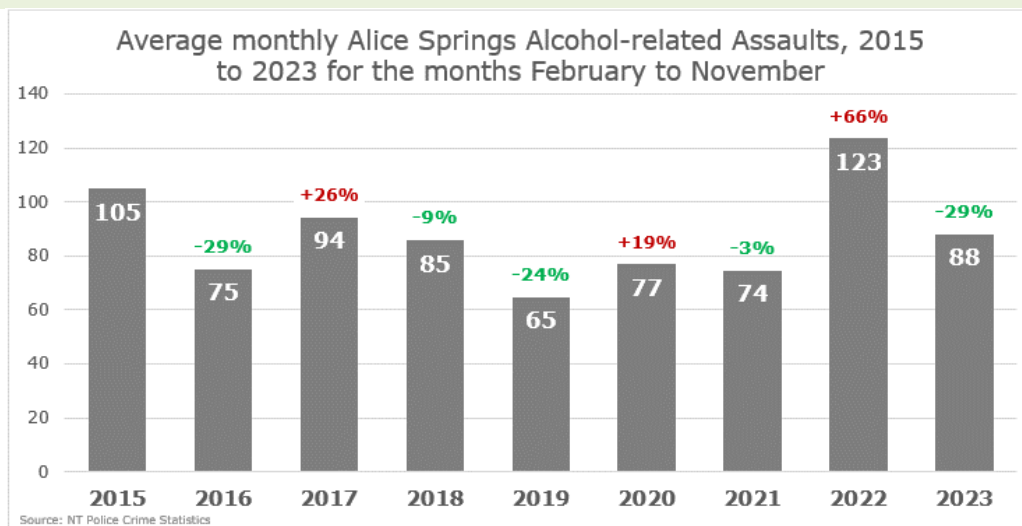


Comparisons to the same period in previous years

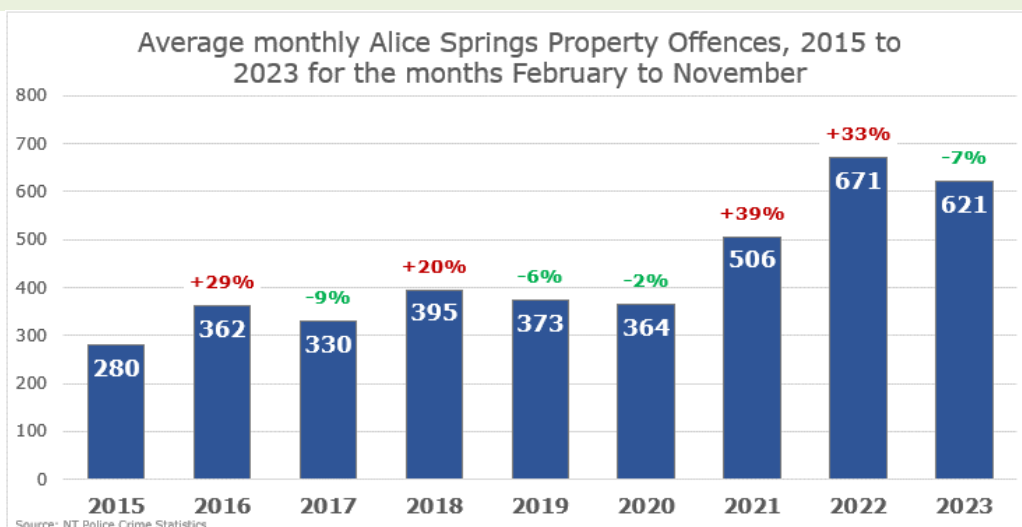
Graph 11



Graph 12

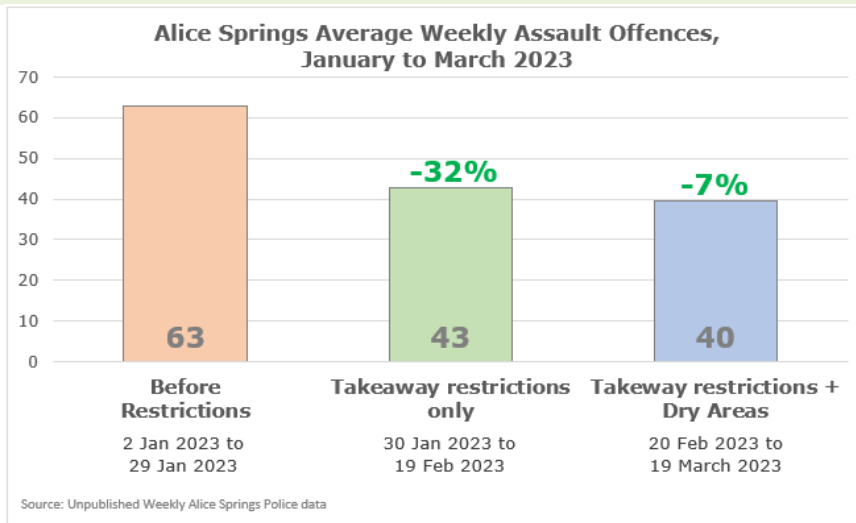


Graph 13

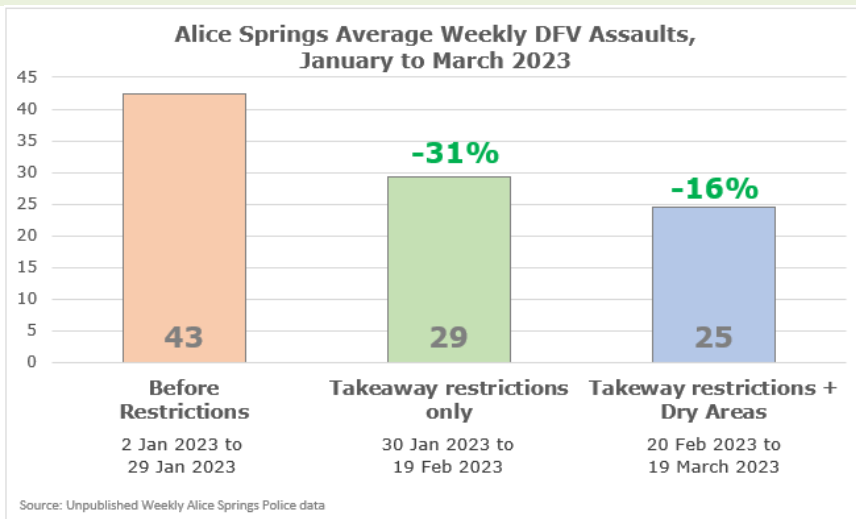


Differential effects of reforms

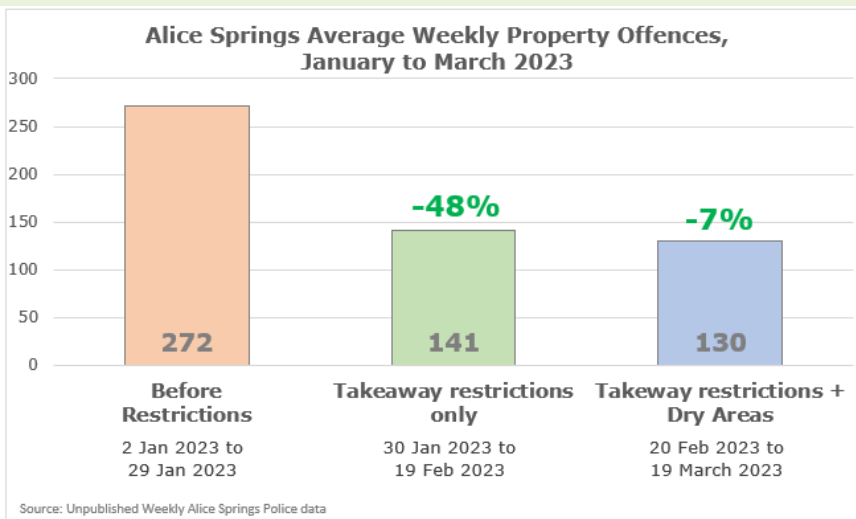
Graph 14



Graph 15



Graph 16



Notes

¹ On 25 January 2023 the Northern Territory Chief Minister announced restrictions 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 restrictions 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 restrictions.

² <https://data.nt.gov.au/organization/department-of-primary-industry-and-resources>

³ ABC News 30 March 2023 *Alice Springs Hospital sees sharp fall in domestic violence cases since return of alcohol bans* <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-30/alice-springs-hospital-dv-alcohol-case-reduction/102164712>

⁴ All data from <https://pfes.nt.gov.au/police/community-safety/nt-crime-statistics/statistical-publications>

⁵ e.g. ABC News 9 March 2023 *Crime has dropped in Alice Springs but experts divided on whether alcohol bans are effective* <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-09/alice-springs-crime-data-decline-experts-question-information/102075212>