TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the review of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. As a National Organisation based in Victoria the Luke Batty Foundation believes it is crucial that the laws that govern the sale and control of alcohol in this State acknowledge alcohol’s contribution to family violence.

Far too many Victorians have been affected by family violence and too many lives are being damaged or lost. It is imperative that we do everything possible to end this situation and we should commit to examining all the factors that contribute to family violence, including alcohol.

Role of alcohol in family violence

Alcohol’s role in family violence is complex but it cannot be overlooked. The likelihood of violence occurring increases on days where either the perpetrator or victim has drunk alcohol. The likelihood of serious injury or death through family violence also increases with perpetrators and victim’s use of alcohol.

Alcohol also contributes to existing stresses in relationships, puts victims at increased risk of harm, it affects cognitive functioning and places children at greater risk of injury and harm. Children who witness family violence are more likely to have problems with alcohol later in life.

Where we drink, when we drink and how we behave when drinking, are all influenced and shaped by society and the rules that govern us. For example if we believe that alcohol effects our ability to behave appropriately, then we can consciously drink to give ourselves ‘time-out,’ to behave in ways that are known as unacceptable. This is the reason that nine per cent of Australian’s agree that violence against women can be excused in certain circumstances if the perpetrator is affected by alcohol. It is also why one in ten Australians believe that family violence can be excused if the victim is affected by alcohol.

Breaking the cycle

This cycle needs to be broken and it can be done. Last year, our CEO and Australian of the Year Rosie Batty launched the National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence, on behalf of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE). This framework outlined the actions that Governments, including State Governments can implement to help prevent alcohol-related family violence.

Central to these actions is reducing the physical availability of alcohol outlets. Victorian research has shown that increases in the number of liquor outlets leads to increases in family violence. Further research found that those who live in the most disadvantaged areas had access to twice as many bottle-shops as those who live in wealthier areas.

We remind you that this is not international research, it is Victorian research. While family violence cuts across all socio-economic groups, the proliferation of alcohol outlets in poorer areas creates further disadvantage and put these women and children at greater risk of harm. The location and
opening hours of liquor outlets (bottle-shops and pubs/clubs) is the main purpose of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998.

Research has shown that increases in trading hours for alcohol outlets are associated with increases in alcohol harms. Conversely, reductions in trading hours have shown significant reductions in rates of violent crime in some communities, such as Newcastle. Measures to reduce trading hours should be seriously considered by the Government as a means to reduce and prevent family violence.

Commit to preventive action

For the past two years, led by our CEO Rosie Batty, we have campaigned to ensure that victims of family violence receive the respect, safety and support that they deserve. How Government policy contributes to family violence is crucial, and we urge the Government, through this review, to commit to real preventive action that will bring about lasting change. One area where change is necessary is alcohol policy reform.

Section 3.11 of the Liquor Act review discussion paper asks What opportunities are there to address family violence with the LCRA?

There are clear actions government can take to reduce alcohol-related family violence, beginning with decreasing the availability of alcohol by:

- Preventing suburban areas from becoming saturated with liquor outlets.
- Reducing the excessive availability of alcohol in areas already saturated with liquor outlets.
- Introducing trading hour restrictions to reduce the excessive availability of alcohol.

The review of the Liquor Control Reform 1998 Act provides the Government with an opportunity to reduce alcohol-related family violence by reforming the way alcohol is made available across the State. Such action has been shown to reduce the incidence of family violence and child maltreatment in other places.

Kind regards

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REFERENCES


