

MEDIA RELEASE

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Bottle shop density linked to binge drinking: report

Victorian residents with eight or more takeaway alcohol outlets within one kilometre of their homes are twice as likely to binge drink, a University of Melbourne and VicHealth study shows.

Researcher Professor Anne Kavanagh surveyed 2,334 people from 21 local government areas within 20 kilometres of the Melbourne CBD to discover whether take-away liquor outlet density was associated with the amount of alcohol they drank – and how often.

“We found that the more outlets a person has in their neighbourhood, the more likely it is that they will drink alcohol at a level that can cause short-term harm,” Prof. Kavanagh said.

“Interestingly, we found no evidence that having a bottle shop close to your house is linked to heavier drinking patterns, so it’s not necessarily the proximity to the alcohol outlet, it’s more the sheer number of alcohol stores that makes a difference.

“Binge drinking can cause injuries, violence and accidents and drinking frequently over a long period is associated with chronic diseases, like heart disease, a number of cancers and liver disease. So by reducing the volume of outlets around Victoria, we could make substantial inroads to reducing accidents and chronic diseases. This is a good public health intervention.”

The report also provides interesting evidence to suggest people who live close to bottle shops with a wide range of alcoholic beverages are less likely to drink at levels of long-term harm. This may be because consumers have a bigger selection of beverages with low alcohol content (e.g. light beers).

Prof. Kavanagh said more than one in 10 people in the survey drank at a harmful level once a week (13.5%), one in three did so once a month (30.4%) and one in 20 people drank at levels that could lead to long-term health problem (5.5%). One in five (18.7%) drank alcohol on five or more days of the week.

Prof. Kavanagh and her team also examined who was drinking, how often and at what level of risk, revealing interesting trends by age, gender, employment status, occupation and level of education (see p.27 of the report for results).

VicHealth’s Manager of Alcohol Brian Vandenberg believes a tightening of alcohol licensing is warranted in Victoria.

“Clearly, a new approach that takes into account the differences in neighbourhoods is needed to deal with Victoria’s harmful drinking culture. There is a need for better state-wide prevention policies that address the availability of alcohol, as well as local responses, devised by communities themselves,” Mr Vandenberg said.

“It’s time to give some control back to local communities who feel under siege by alcohol problems in their neighbourhood”.

To download the report, go to <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/Publications/Alcohol-Misuse.aspx>