

MEDIA RELEASE

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BOTTLE SHOPS CONCENTRATED IN LOW-INCOME VICTORIA

A Turning Point and VicHealth investigation into the concentration of liquor outlets has revealed residents in the poorest areas of Victoria have up to six times more bottle shops in their neighbourhoods than those who are well-off.

The health groups say this is cause for concern, due to the health and social problems that are directly correlated to availability of alcohol.

The study used census data to rank 10 rural and regional and 10 metropolitan areas by level of social disadvantage, and compared those areas with liquor licensing data from 1991 to 2008.

The researchers included general licences (pubs, hotels, taverns), on-premise licences (restaurants, bars and nightclubs), packaged licences (bottle shops, grocery stores) and club licences (RSLs, sporting clubs).

The researchers found:

- Based on the number of alcohol licenses *per person*, people in disadvantaged areas in and around the city had access to twice as many bottle shops than those in the wealthiest areas.
- In the city, there are more general and on-premise licences located in well-off suburbs, *per kilometre*, but more than three times as many bottle shops concentrated in disadvantaged areas per kilometre.
- In rural and regional Victoria, disadvantaged areas house six times as many packaged liquor outlets and four times as many pubs and clubs *per person* than their wealthier rural and regional neighbours.
- In rural and regional Victoria, lower socio-economic areas have more liquor licences of *all types* (bars, clubs, bottle shops, etc.)
- Disturbingly, there has not been any change in local concentrations of licences in the poorest communities over time. For example, in regional areas, access to alcohol was heavily skewed towards more disadvantaged neighbourhoods in 1991, a situation that hasn't changed in 15 years.

Lead author of the *Using geocoded liquor licensing data in Victoria report*, Turning Point's Michael Livingston said the data parallels similar studies done overseas about tobacco availability or fast food and social disadvantage, but was the first of to examine liquor and disadvantage in Australia.

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“The relationship between socio-economic status and alcohol availability is complex. In cities, restaurants and pubs tend to cluster in wealthier neighbourhoods, while bottle shops cluster in poor areas. In the country, all kinds of alcohol outlets tend to be located in disadvantaged areas,” Mr Livingston said.

“It’s not immediately clear why poorer areas attract more bottle shops. It could be that wealthier neighbourhoods have been better at resisting the addition of new outlets, or possibly this distribution represents a specific approach by the retailers to target certain groups of consumers.”

VicHealth’s Alcohol Manager Brian Vandenberg said the proliferation of liquor licenses in Victoria over the past two decades has coincided with a sharp rise in alcohol-related accidents, illnesses and social problems across the state.

“There is very clear evidence that the more bottle shops there are in one area, the more problems that area has with alcohol-related violence, accidents and youth binge drinking,” Mr Vandenberg said.

“Bars and nightclubs will always be a concern for alcohol harm, but we are particularly worried about the saturation of bottle shops and other take away liquor outlets.

“Take away liquor is cheap, it is often bought in bulk, and it ends up being consumed at home, where there’s no limit to how much a person can drink. That really makes it the hidden aspect of the alcohol problem in Victoria.

“We can begin to address these problems with more stringent licensing laws, earlier pub and club closing times and by taxing alcohol with common sense so that it’s no longer cheaper than bottled water.”

NOTES

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

To read a journal article on liquor licence distribution around Victoria, go to <http://alcoholreports.blogspot.com/2011/11/social-gradient-of-alcohol-availability.html>

Michael Livingston and Brian Vandenberg are available for interview about liquor licence density, social disadvantage, and the associated health risks in Victoria.

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