



# Reducing harm from alcohol

## Local government action guide

Councils can influence the quality and distribution of conditions needed for good health, that is, the natural, built and social environments in which we live, learn, work and play.<sup>1</sup> They have a major role in supporting the objectives of the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* by protecting, improving and promoting public health.<sup>2</sup>

Although major alcohol control policies are typically the responsibility of the state and federal governments, councils can reduce residents' risk of harm from alcohol by:

- developing strategic plans and policies that explicitly aim to reduce alcohol-related harm
- designing environments that reduce alcohol-related harm
- implementing strategic approaches that change alcohol cultures by changing social norms, attitudes and beliefs about alcohol consumption and intoxication
- building local partnerships that reduce alcohol-related harm.

This guide is one of six providing evidence-informed actions that councils may consider when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and other local strategies. The proposed strategies are consistent with national and state health promotion priorities and prevention frameworks, including the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019* (the Plan).<sup>3</sup>

The Plan builds on a 'systems thinking' perspective that recognises the complexity of health issues and the underlying causes of poor health and wellbeing. It also identifies place-based approaches as a key platform for change, recognising that the places where people spend their time – communities, schools, workplaces, sporting clubs and more – play an important role in shaping their health and wellbeing. The aim is to maximise value by leveraging multiple networks, investments and activities to deliver outcomes for communities.

Links to other guides and further resources are available at [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/localgovernmentguides](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/localgovernmentguides).

Links to the Victorian Population Health Survey 2014 findings are available at [www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/population-health-systems/health-status-of-victorians/survey-data-and-reports/victorian-population-health-survey/victorian-population-health-survey-2014](http://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/population-health-systems/health-status-of-victorians/survey-data-and-reports/victorian-population-health-survey/victorian-population-health-survey-2014).

For more detailed information on your area go to [www.exploreyourdata.com.au](http://www.exploreyourdata.com.au).

## Why should reducing harm from alcohol be a public health and wellbeing priority?

- A nationwide burden of disease study found that in 2010 there were 5554 deaths and 157,132 hospitalisations that were directly attributable to alcohol in Australia. This included 1214 deaths and 39,381 hospitalisations in Victoria during this period.<sup>4</sup>
- Over the past 10 years, there has been a threefold increase in the number of alcohol-related ambulance attendances in metropolitan Melbourne.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2012–13 there were 14,015 family violence incidents in Victoria involving alcohol.<sup>6</sup>
- Alcohol-related harm is estimated to cost the Australian community \$15 billion per annum with \$10.8 billion attributed to tangible costs (e.g. labour and health costs) and \$4.5 billion to intangible costs such as death from violence.<sup>7</sup>
- In relation to Victorian adults, the VicHealth Indicators Survey 2015<sup>8</sup> found that:
  - 29.4% of Victorians are at risk of short-term harm from alcohol each month, and 9.2% are at very high risk
  - age is a significant predictor of risk of short-term harm from alcohol. Risk is greatest among younger Victorians, with 44.6% of 18–24 year olds at risk
  - risky drinking varies substantially by gender, with risk among men (40.1%) considerably higher than among women (19.1%)
  - more than one in four Victorians (27.9%) agree that getting drunk every now and then to the point of losing balance is okay.
- Some evidence shows that despite consuming less alcohol, people from low socioeconomic groups are more susceptible to the damaging effects of alcohol and experience higher rates of alcohol-related disease.<sup>9,10</sup>
- Recent research shows that almost half (46.0%) of young Victorians aged 16–29 feel obliged to drink by their peers.<sup>11</sup>

### Understanding equity

**Health equity** is the notion that everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential if it can be avoided.

**Inequities** are the observed differences between population groups (e.g. a subpopulation group and the Victorian population) that stem from socioeconomic, political and cultural drivers of social position.

**Equitable** approaches are those aimed at closing the gap in outcomes for different population groups. This may mean providing additional support for people experiencing disadvantage in order to achieve equal outcomes.

## Strategic goal

Council is committed to taking action to support people and create environments to reduce harm from alcohol misuse.<sup>3</sup>

### Objectives and actions

#### Develop strategic plans and policies that reduce alcohol-related harm

- Map alcohol-related harm in the municipality by using local government area data collected by the Victorian Government and other agencies (including AODstats, Crime Statistics Agency and Community Indicators Victoria) and local police to understand the population in the local government area.<sup>12,13</sup> In particular, identify groups that experience inequities in alcohol consumption and related harms, and ensure council resources, policies and programs prioritise the inclusion of these groups.<sup>14</sup> VicHealth's *About Fair Foundations and promoting health equity* resource<sup>15</sup> provides further information about how this can be achieved – [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/fairfoundations](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/fairfoundations).
- Design and implement an alcohol management plan in partnership with representatives from the local community, including groups who are affected, to guide a comprehensive whole-of-council and area approach to reduce the harms from alcohol.<sup>14</sup>
- An alcohol management plan can address alcohol-related harm through:<sup>12,13,16</sup>
  - setting explicit goals and objectives in relation to reducing inequities in alcohol-related harm
  - local government's role in assessing planning permits for licensed premises
  - local government's role in strategic and statutory planning
  - local government advocacy around reform of the liquor licensing system (see VicHealth's *Unlocking Liquor Licensing* resources at [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/unlocking-liquor-licensing](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/unlocking-liquor-licensing))
  - managing the environment and amenity around licensed premises (e.g. supervised taxi ranks, lighting, regulating venue queues)
  - raising community awareness of alcohol-related harms through council publications, events and networks
  - implementing workplace health programs within council that aim to reduce alcohol consumption and harm
  - helping other organisations within the municipality participate in workplace health programs that aim to reduce the harms from alcohol
  - developing collaborative preventive local approaches to reducing alcohol-related harm by engaging with the public and licensees through forums and accords
  - strengthening the enforcement of local laws that prohibit alcohol consumption in public spaces such as shopping centres, parks and beaches
  - organising alcohol-free events and activities for residents and visitors
  - encouraging local sporting clubs and recreational facilities to limit alcohol advertising and sponsorship

- promoting water consumption as a healthier option in sites that serve alcohol. Information about water in licensed premises is available from the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation (VCGLR)
- evaluating impacts and outcomes of local policies and programs for different social groups.

Examples of alcohol management plans and opportunities to address alcohol-related harm through the planning system will be available from [www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au](http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au) in late 2017.

### Design environments that reduce alcohol-related harm

- Review and improve the amenity of public areas around licensed venues to reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm, e.g. landscape and urban design, lighting, bins, safe road crossings, taxi ranks, public transport and security.<sup>13,16</sup> (See Designing Out Crime Research Centre and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design in 'Useful links'.)

### Implement strategic approaches that change alcohol cultures

- Use the VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework ([www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/alcohol-cultures-framework](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/alcohol-cultures-framework)) to plan and deliver alcohol-related cultural change projects that target social norms, beliefs and attitudes influencing people's alcohol consumption.
- Mandate membership of the GoodSports program as a condition for sports clubs that serve alcohol and lease council-managed facilities (see useful links).
- Continue to work with community sporting clubs to adopt the GoodSports program to comply with Responsible Service of Alcohol requirements.
- Encourage sports clubs to diversify their fundraising so they are less reliant on alcohol sales.<sup>17</sup>
- Continue to promote the Achievement Program to encourage low-risk drinking practices within settings such as schools, childcare facilities, sports clubs, workplaces and hospitals.<sup>18</sup>
- Incorporate community education, health messaging and awareness through local government publications.
- Collaborate and promote external programs and campaigns that encourage residents to engage in moderate- or non-drinking environments such as Active April, Hello Sunday Morning, #SoberSelfie, Be a Brother, Your Drinking Profile, FebFast, Dry July, Ocober, Drink Less Live More, and other state and federal government initiatives.<sup>13</sup>

### Build local partnerships that reduce alcohol-related harm

- Collaborate with staff from other municipalities to coordinate efforts and share resources and lessons for an integrated approach to the management of alcohol-related harms, e.g. South East Melbourne Councils Alliance (SEMCA) 'Alcohol Management Strategies for South East Melbourne' project.
- Work with licensees, schools, sports clubs, community centres, police and local businesses to support low-risk drinking practices within the community.<sup>13</sup>
- Continue to support community-based agencies that provide services to those directly and indirectly affected by alcohol-related problems.<sup>13</sup>
- Support community-driven action by encouraging community members to raise their concerns and possible solutions, and by building community capacity to address local alcohol-related issues.<sup>12</sup>

## Useful links

### #SoberSelfie

<http://soberselfie.adf.org.au/>

### Access to alcohol, Community Indicators Victoria

[www.communityindicators.net.au/metadata\\_items/access\\_to\\_alcohol](http://www.communityindicators.net.au/metadata_items/access_to_alcohol)

### Achievement Program

[www.achievementprogram.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.achievementprogram.health.vic.gov.au)

### Active April

[www.activeapril.vic.gov.au](http://www.activeapril.vic.gov.au)

### Alcohol, Better Health Channel

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/alcohol](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/alcohol)

### AODstats

[www.aodstats.org.au](http://www.aodstats.org.au)

### Be a Brother

<https://cohealthartsgenerator.com/2015/11/26/be-a-brother-campaign/>

### Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, Victoria Police

[www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?document\\_id=10444](http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?document_id=10444)

### Crime Statistics Agency

[www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au](http://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au)

### Designing Out Crime Research Centre

<http://designingoutcrime.com>

### Drink Less Live More

[www.cutyourcancerrisk.org.au/how-to-cut-cancer-risk/drink-less-live-more](http://www.cutyourcancerrisk.org.au/how-to-cut-cancer-risk/drink-less-live-more)

### Dry July

[www.dryjuly.com](http://www.dryjuly.com)

### FebFast

<http://febfast.org.au/>

### Free drinking water for patrons, Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation

[www.vcglr.vic.gov.au/home/liquor/standard+licence+obligations/free+drinking+water+in+premises](http://www.vcglr.vic.gov.au/home/liquor/standard+licence+obligations/free+drinking+water+in+premises)

### GoodSports program

<http://goodsports.com.au/>

### Hello Sunday Morning

[www.hellosundaymorning.org](http://www.hellosundaymorning.org)

### Ocober

[www.ocober.com.au](http://www.ocober.com.au)

### Your Drinking Profile

[www.yourdrinkingprofile.com.au](http://www.yourdrinkingprofile.com.au)

## References

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