

Young adults and alcohol: developing local government policy responses in inner- and outer-urban settings

Full report

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Executive summary

The purpose of this project was to better understand how alcohol cultures and patterns of use vary across urban settings. The project draws upon two main studies:

- The first is the Victorian Youth Alcohol and Drug Survey (VYADS), a representative telephone survey.
- The second involved 60 interviews designed to understand drinking cultures among young adults in two urban settings.

In addition to these two sources, data from Victoria Police and Ambulance Services were also reviewed.

Major findings:

- Almost all young people from both inner- and outer-urban settings who participated in the VYADS had consumed alcohol during their lifetime. Drinking patterns and alcohol-related harms did not differ substantially for young people across these settings.
- Participants from the inner region were slightly more likely to report having drunk five or more drinks in a single occasion than their outer-urban counterparts.
- Heavy drinking is an entrenched aspect of recreation for young adults from inner- and outer-urban Melbourne and many interview participants reported finding it hard to socialise if they didn't consume alcohol.
- Pre-drinking (consuming alcohol before attending licensed premises) is popular among young adults and no significant differences in pre-drinking rates by urban area were evident in survey data. Interviews with young adults suggested that getting drunk before travelling to entertainment precincts led to more problems for those living in outer-urban areas because of the distances they needed to travel. The most frequently given reason for pre-drinking by interview participants from both inner and outer-urban locations was the price differential between drinking at home and in venues.
- VYADS data indicated that young people living in outer-urban growth areas are more likely to drink at private parties than those who live in inner-urban settings. Interview participants said that they often drank heavily in private settings such as houses because they felt safe among friends and had less distance to travel home. Nonetheless, many participants also believed that licensed venue serving and promotional practices contributed to heavy drinking during nights out.
- Outer-urban young adults had greater involvement than inner-urban young people as both offenders and victims in assaults which occurred on Friday and Saturday night, when alcohol use is most prevalent. Our interviews enabled us to understand some reasons for this disparity. For a big night out, outer-urban young people tend to visit the inner-city entertainment precinct where many people mingle in an atmosphere of high excitement. Additionally outer-suburban young adults spoke more frequently about attending large commercial venues where alcohol use is heavily promoted and alcohol-related harms are more likely. These venues, particularly when they are located in close proximity to one another, are also more likely to be actively policed than smaller venues. This may account for some of the differences in assault rates. Outer-suburban young adults also experienced greater difficulties in travelling home at the end of a night out, some describing being stranded in the city when they missed the last train or tram. Finally, young men interviewed for the study who lived in the outer-suburbs were a little more likely than those from inner areas to believe that friends should jump into fights to defend a mate.

Local governments in all areas have a role to play in developing policies to manage alcohol outlet density, although legislative changes providing local governments with more concrete powers to influence liquor licensing decisions would better enable them to fulfil this role. Outer-urban local governments might explore the possibility of planning local entertainment hubs to offer more local night time entertainment options for young adults, with the aim of reducing overall rates of alcohol-related harm in metropolitan Melbourne. Additional recommendations for local governments in developing policies to reduce harms related to young adults' alcohol use are made in relation to:

- responding to heavy episodic alcohol consumption
- licensing and planning
- pricing and taxation
- enforcement of liquor license provisions
- information campaigns
- transport.

Introduction

In Victoria, local governments are required to develop a plan to address ‘special factors affecting the health of people within the municipal district’ (Department of Health & State Government of Victoria 2007). One of these factors is alcohol use.

Local governments have expressed concern that they lack the evidence required to develop effective alcohol policy responses that meet the specific health needs of people living in their areas (National Local Government Drug and Alcohol Advisory Committee 2008). Although some research considers how young adults’ drinking practices and patterns vary between urban and rural areas (see for example Miller, Coomber, Staiger, Zinkiewicz & Toumbourou 2010), few studies have investigated how alcohol consumption and related harms differ across urban settings.

In this report we compare survey data on alcohol patterns, cultures and harms for young adults aged 18–24 in inner- and outer-urban Melbourne. Trends within this data are interpreted in light of interviews conducted with 30 young adults from each of two local government areas. The first of these is the outer-urban City of Hume, which stretches from Broadmeadows and Roxburgh Park to the satellite town of Sunbury. Included in Hume’s boundaries are a number of designated growth area suburbs (Growth Areas Authority 2013). The second LGA is the inner-urban City of Yarra, which abuts Melbourne’s central business district.

The purpose of this report is to provide information to support urban local government alcohol policy development. Current legislative frameworks offer Victorian local governments limited powers to act on alcohol (Streker 2012). Where suggested actions fall outside the legislated role of local governments, we recommend that these agencies advocate for policy change at state and federal levels.

Method

The study explores both quantitative and qualitative information. We draw on quantitative datasets to examine how frequency of drinking at different levels, and experiences of harms associated with drinking, vary for young people in inner- and outer-urban areas. Qualitative interviews provided insight into drinking cultures (the meanings and purposes of drinking) for young adults across the two areas of interest.

Quantitative data came from the most recent Victorian Youth Alcohol and Drug Survey (VYADS) conducted in 2009. VYADS used computer-assisted telephone interviewing to access Victorians aged 16 to 24 years old who lived in private dwellings and had landlines. The VYADS asked about respondents' consumption patterns and behaviors as well as their attitudes towards alcohol and drug use. To be consistent with the sample recruited to the qualitative study we report here on data from the 18 to 24 year olds. Samples from inner- and outer-urban Melbourne were selected based on respondents' postcodes. Figure 1 shows the identification of suburbs as inner- or outer-urban. The figure is collated from postcodes of VYADS participants aged 18–24. Areas where no VYADS participant in this age range was living at the time of survey are shaded white.

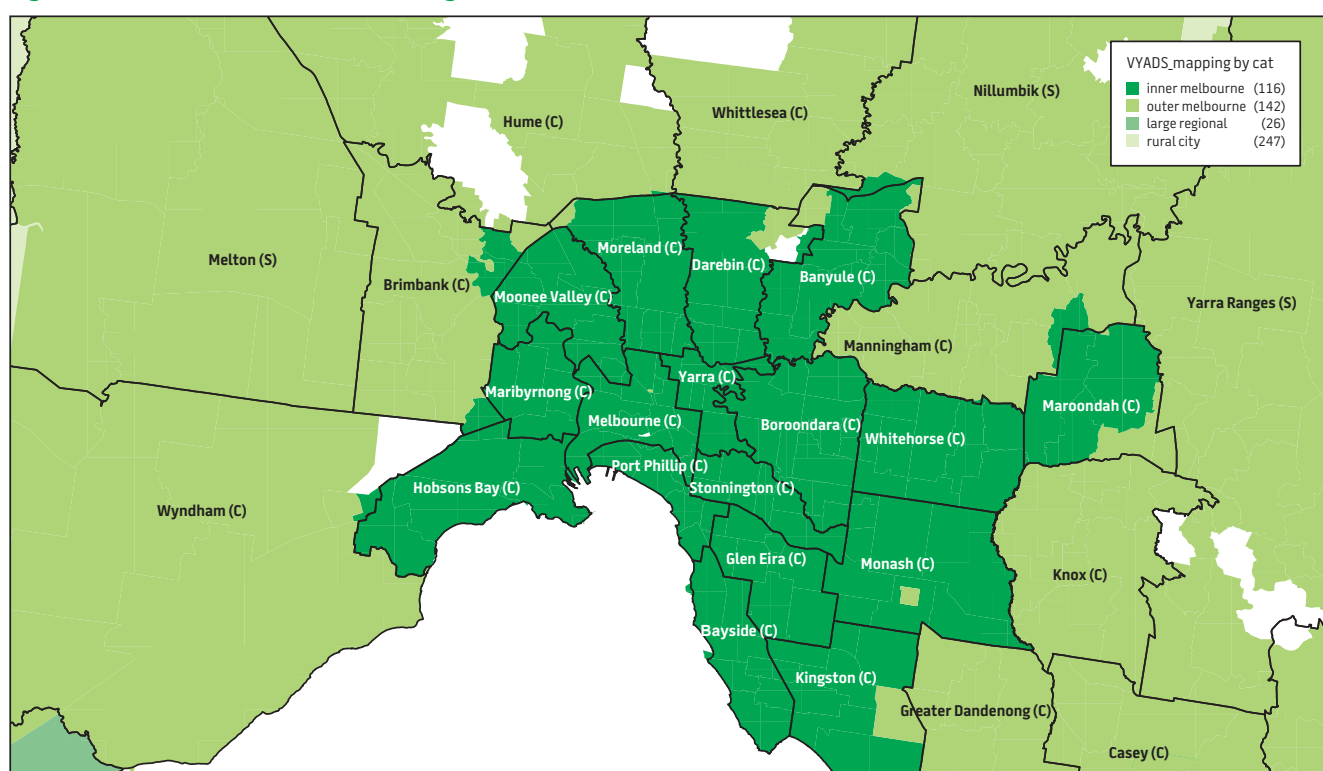
In addition to the VYADS, assault data recorded by Victoria Police are used here. Data from 2011–12 was the most recent data available when these analyses were conducted. As there is no reliable coding for alcohol involvement in assaults within

police data, assaults recorded from Friday and Saturday nights (between 8 pm and 6 am) are used as a proxy for alcohol-related assaults.

The qualitative data came from interviews conducted with 60 young adults aged 18–24 years in 2012. Half of the respondents lived in the City of Yarra and half lived in the City of Hume. To be eligible to participate, respondents had to have consumed at least one alcoholic drink within the previous six months. Participants were recruited via local tertiary education institutions, social welfare agencies and through word of mouth. Participants were offered a choice of speaking to the researcher on their own or with one or two friends. The sample included equal numbers of women and men, with the majority studying either full- or part-time. Two-thirds were employed full- or part-time and six participants were neither studying nor working. The sample was ethnically diverse: 19 participants spoke a language other than English. All participants said that they had visited bars, clubs or pubs at night.

The qualitative study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Melbourne and Curtin University. Where it is not explicit from the surrounding text, each participant's age, gender and urban area is identified in brackets following quotes the first time she or he is referred to. False names are used when referring to participants.

Figure 1. Inner- and outer-Melbourne local government areas



Drinking patterns

VYADS data shows that drinking patterns for young adults did not differ substantially across inner- and outer-urban areas. An estimated 95% of inner-urban young adults and 94% of outer-urban young adults reported ever trying alcohol (Table 1). Young people from outer-urban areas were less likely to have drunk alcohol in the past 12 months (90% inner- and 88% outer-urban) although there was no significant difference. The proportion of young people reporting drinking five or more drinks in a single occasion in the past 12 months was significantly higher for participants from the inner region compared to those from the outer region (84.8% and 80.5% respectively). This remained significant at the 0.05 level when controlling for differences in age, sex, and socioeconomic differences (SEIFA) (data not shown). There were no significant differences in the proportion of young people reporting drinking 20 or more drinks on one occasion in the past 12 months. Rates of alcohol consumption across inner and outer-urban Melbourne (measured as consuming five or more, or 20 or more, standard drinks at least once during the prior 12 months) were lower than for the rest of the state.

Table 1: Drinking patterns by urban area (percentage reported) 18–24 year olds, Victorian Youth Alcohol and Drug Survey 2009

	Unadjusted (bivariate)			
	Inner-urban	Outer-urban	<i>p</i> -value	Rest of Victoria
Ever tried alcohol	95.3%	94.2%	0.199	97.2%
Alcohol use in the last 12 months	90.1%	88.4%	0.160	92.3%
Pattern of use (one or more times past 12 months)				
5+ drinks	84.8%	80.5%	0.007	86.6%
20+ drinks	44.5%	42.8%	0.385	49.8%

Heavy drinkers

The previous table indicates that more than 40% of VYADS participants in both areas consumed 20 or more standard drinks in a single session at least once during the year prior to the survey. Most qualitative research participants from both inner- and outer-areas saw drinking alcohol, and often heavy alcohol consumption, as an important part of their recreational time (Zajdow & MacLean, in press). In the following quote Jaime (21, male, outer-urban) discusses the pleasures of drinking, suggesting a high degree of social acceptability associated with being very intoxicated:

You know that stage [of drunkenness] where everything's hilarious no matter what it is? Yeah I love doing that. Yeah 'cause I'm just with my mates and we, that's all we do, just crack jokes and make fun of each other and sh*t like that. That's the best, I don't know how many drinks that'd be – that'd be about ten drinks. You're talking so much cr*p and you lose track, you drink and you smoke. And then after I think like 15 or 16 drinks that's when I'm just, I'm tired, I've gotta go to bed. And I lay down in bed and I can feel it, I'm gonna throw up... And you go: 'That's it, gotta run to the toilet!' [laughs].

For Katie (23, female, inner-urban) drinking was ubiquitous:

It's just accepted, you see it everywhere. Everybody drinks, everybody of a certain age gets drunk on the weekend. And it's just so, so normal.

A minority of participants suggested heavy drinking gave them the sense that they were enjoying life. Thanh (24, male, inner-urban) felt that drinking alcohol helped him to be a more exciting person:

To me and my friends we consider that we consume a lot of alcohol, you know we have like a meaningful life, our life's a lot of fun, adventurous, exciting.

Most heavy drinking seemed to occur with friends on weekend nights. Participants also noted that they consumed more alcohol and other substances just prior to public holidays, particularly on New Year's Eve and Australia Day. This often coincided with special events at large venues where cheap drinks were heavily promoted. Amy (19, female, outer-urban) was a light drinker but would 'let loose' on New Year's Eve.

Many participants spoke of feeling obliged to drink particularly heavily when celebrating their own or a friend's birthday. Dave (21, male, outer-urban) drank most heavily on these occasions: 'Say I'm going to a friend's twenty-first and it's at his place. I'll have a big night'. Alice (19, female, outer-urban) felt that when celebrating your own birthday: 'you have to pass out before everyone and chuck [vomit]'.

Some participants spoke of mixing alcohol with other drugs. Anita (23, female, inner-urban) found that combining amphetamines with alcohol helped her stay awake longer:

Yeah it gives me more energy when I'm drinking, makes me a bit more clear headed, like not so sloppy drunk. You get drunk and more alert.

Participants who drank heavily generally claimed to have relatively little control over how much they drank.

Like even if we say, you know, 'me and my friends will come and we'll have a few quiet ones tonight'. It's never a few quiet ones... Once you've had a few you know you just wanna keep drinking, kind of to excess. (*Kara, 19, female, outer-urban*)

Lighter drinkers

Although participants agreed that it was up to the individual whether they wanted to drink or not, many felt that it was hard to socialize if they didn't want to consume alcohol. Lighter drinkers in both inner- and outer-urban settings felt this particularly strongly. Trent (18, male, outer-urban) drank alcohol infrequently, largely because he was focused on playing competitive sport and did not want to compromise his form through over-using alcohol. Trent said that this made it quite awkward for him to socialize with his friends at the local football club:

There's definitely a bit, a bit more of belonging [when you drink alcohol] if that makes sense...Yeah being around a football club where everyone drinks and you don't drink it's sort of like a tough situation.

Some participants said that they wouldn't go out with friends who were non-drinkers or light drinkers because they were unlikely to be able to participate in the fun. Anita (23, female, inner-urban) had a friend who drank reasonably moderately and said this friend felt left out of her social group:

One of my friends, she will come and drink about four [drinks] and she'll go home pretty early. But, yeah, the ones who don't drink don't, don't really go out... She's excluded a little bit because everyone's acting in a certain way and they're all drinking.

Acculturating to Australian drinking patterns

Interviewees came from many different ethnic backgrounds and some discussed how they had needed to acculturate to Australian drinking patterns. Two participants from cultural backgrounds where alcohol use was generally deemed inappropriate spoke of difficulties they had experienced in encountering alcohol at parties without any experience to draw on. Both felt that they had needed help to learn how to use alcohol moderately. Zain (24, male, outer-urban) described his desire to drink alcohol eloquently as he was growing up:

Our parents don't know about it [alcohol] and, and we're frothing for it... 'Cause the other kids that aren't like us [Muslim]. From when they're young they know what marijuana is, they know what alcohol is. We don't. By the time we drink we're eighteen years old... It's like food, you've never seen food before and now you, there's food in front of you. What are you gonna do? You're gonna eat it! You're gonna do it! You're gonna go crazy!

Going out at night

For most interviewees, drinking alcohol was regarded as necessary to enjoying a night out with friends. Interviewees spoke of pre-drinking at their homes or the homes of friends, of drinking on the way to venues and at venues, and of post-drinking parties after leaving a venue.

Pre-drinking

Pre-drinking consists of consuming alcohol before going out to licensed venues. When we examined VYADS data to compare the prevalence of pre-drinking for people in inner- and outer-urban settings no significant differences emerged, with around three quarters of VYADS participants reporting pre-drinking at least sometimes over the previous year (MacLean & Callinan 2013). Our research interviewees from the outer-suburbs spoke of drinking, often quite heavily, at their or their friends' homes before visiting venues closer to the city. This meant that some people were quite intoxicated on public transport or in cars. In the inner-suburbs a greater range of pre-drinking settings were available, with participants reporting pre-drinking at bars as well as at their own or their friends' houses.

The popularity of pre-drinking meant that some participants were quite intoxicated before they even entered the commercial night time economy. Yusef (20, male, outer-urban) explained that his evening starts with a gathering of friends who become semi-intoxicated together before they go out, thus saving money on alcohol once they are at a venue.

First we gather up [at] whoever's house it is. We buy something from the bottle shop so it's not expensive. Say for example there's five of us, we'd buy like a slab and a half [36 cans of beer]. Just to get us like tipsy, to get all of us ready for it [going out]. So instead of just going sober to the club and spending big money, we start off [at someone's house], so we're already halfway there. And when we get to the club, we finish it off [become very intoxicated].

The most frequently given reason for pre-drinking was the price differential between drinking at home and in venues (MacLean & Callinan 2013). Carolyn (21, female, inner-urban) and her friends bought very cheap wine to drink before they went out:

We probably drink a bottle of wine each before we go out... We usually go for the two ninety-nine bottle of red [laughter].

We found that people who pre-drink are more likely than those who don't to drink at a high risk level, which we defined as drinking 11 or more standard drinks in a session at least monthly over a year. This remained the case when we adjusted for intention to get drunk, suggesting that even if you intend to get drunk you are more likely to do so if you pre-drink. Our interviews indicate that this is because people pre-drink quickly, often selecting the most potent products to consume, and that if you are already drunk when you arrive at a venue you are likely to continue drinking (MacLean & Callinan 2013).

Participants also discussed side-loading (drinking outside a venue) and post-loading (drinking after attending venues).

Private parties

Young adults from inner and outer suburbs of Melbourne have different options for going out at night. VYADS data indicates that young adults who live in outer-urban growth areas appear more likely to drink at private parties than do those who live in inner-urban settings. This is at least partly due to the lesser availability of bars and clubs in these areas (MacLean, Ferris, & Livingston 2013).

In some ways parties were less problematic for participants than going out to venues. Parties were often close to home so it was easier to return at the end of the night. Friends and family were more likely to be around to help out if required, and if participants got really drunk they could sometimes stay the night at the house where the party was. Nonetheless, some young adults said they would be particularly likely to drink heavily at private parties as they could bring cheap alcohol that they had purchased from bottle shops. Amy (19, female, outer-urban) explained how she got so drunk at her friend's party that she accidentally dived into a pool with her clothes on. This anecdote was accompanied by laughter from her friend, interviewed at the same time, and again demonstrates social acceptability of becoming extremely intoxicated:

Amy: Oh I just do things that people tell me to do or I will start dancing. I really like to dance when I'm drunk, crazy. Friends have told me. And like I've jumped into a, (or...) like a pool, which was only six degrees in the middle of winter with short shorts on and a singlet and then supposedly I ran through the house and slipped and smacked my head. But then I got back out and ran out and dived in the pool.

Interviewer: And you can't remember that?

Amy: Nuh. I went through a full bottle of tequila that night and then a bottle of Green Fairy [absinth]. Once I'm drunk if someone gives me something I drink it, but I didn't realise what I grabbed was actually Green Fairy [absinth], I thought it was cordial... I just woke up the next day and I was like 'Oh god what happened?'

Interviewer: You were still there [at the house where the party was held]?

Amy: Yeah with my best friend. Everyone was laughing. I'm like: 'Yep, [that was a] good night!'

Venue choice

The inner-suburbs contain a diverse range of venues and most inner-urban participants felt that they could find something which catered to their tastes. People sought out venues where like-minded people would be gathered and occasionally felt a sense of resentment if their preferred venue seemed to be becoming too commercial or if the clientele included people they were uncomfortable with. Many noted that they preferred to attend smaller venues where they felt safe. Other people chose venues based on the music they played.

In contrast, young adults who lived in outer-suburbs complained that few local options for going out at night were available and that local venues lacked atmosphere. Participants from the outer-suburbs spoke of generally going into Melbourne's city centre when they wanted to have a big night (MacLean & Moore 2014). Carley (18, female, outer-urban) lived in an urban-fringe town. As she commented, the opportunity to be with new people is an important attraction of the inner-city for people who live in small communities. What appeals to her is 'dancing all night and meeting a group of new people... Because it's a small town... we know a lot of the people and even if we don't know them we've seen them, and you know what they're like'.

Clearly, licensing and venue design decisions play into people's attraction to the city. Jade (19, female, outer-urban) pointed out that her local pub closes at 1am, which means that she and her friends are left drunk and with nothing to do once the venue closes.

Some felt anxious for their safety in entertainment precincts. Women were often wary about their safety and that of their friends, expressing concern that their drinks might be spiked with drugs and they would be assaulted when unable to protect themselves.

How venues promote heavy alcohol consumption

Some participants described drinking heavily at venues and felt that clubs encouraged people to drink through promoting cheap alcohol and creating an atmosphere of excitement. Marco (21, male, inner-urban) said that while some venues encourage heavy drinking, others promote a more moderate approach:

Yeah it depends on the environment. Some pubs like they don't have like loud music or dance floors or whatever. So... it's all about like dining and you sit down and you relax and you drink. But like if you're at a place like a club or something it's really loud and it's fast paced, I don't know, you just drink more for some reason.

People frequently spoke of purchasing the cheapest drink with the highest alcohol content. Many felt that the best value for money in venues was to buy shots, which got them drunk very quickly (Callinan & MacLean 2013). They often drank shots when they were out at venues:

I prefer the strong ones so that I can get going faster. It's like tequila shots or ABC or 151 or ABC bomb, that sort of thing... I don't take shots at home 'cause, well I don't really like shots. The reason why I take shots is just to get drunk and get high and enjoy the music more and yeah to, to meet [men]... So the, the practical choice you just go for shots. I would just usually drink two shots at one go. I'll just get high straight away. (*May, 20 female, inner-urban*)

Doing shot and then... you're getting to the high status very fast. Otherwise you drinking beer you have to like ten or fifteen bottles. (*Thanh, 24, male, inner-urban*)

A recent study of enforcement practices in Victoria found licensees and their staff were rarely fined for irresponsible service of alcohol; enforcement tended to focus on breaches of the liquor laws relating to correct paperwork and signage at venues (Wilkinson & MacLean 2013). A few research participants reported that some venues continued to serve alcohol to people who were quite intoxicated and to underage clients. Marco had only seen people asked to leave a particular inner-urban venue when they became so drunk that they were sick:

The only time that the security guard kicks you out if you're like really gone, like if you're vomiting and that, that's [only] every now and then. But everyone else is normally just like pretty drunk but they just continue to give you alcohol 'cause they're making more money off them. (*Marco, 21, male, inner-urban*)

Alcohol-related harms across urban settings

When we compared VYADS measures of alcohol-related harms, few differences emerged for inner- and outer-urban participants reflecting their relatively similar alcohol consumption patterns. Outer-urban VYADS respondents were slightly (and non-significantly) more likely to report verbally abusing someone while they were under the influence of alcohol than inner-urban respondents (20.2% and 18.1% respectively). However, rates for other drinking behaviours – causing public disturbances, damaging property, and being injured or driving a motor vehicle while under the influence – were very similar for inner- and outer-urban young people. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Drinking behaviours by urban area (percentage reported) 18–24 year olds, Victorian Youth Alcohol and Drug Survey 2009

	Inner-urban	Outer-urban	p-value
While under the influence in the past 12 months have you:			
created a public disturbance or nuisance	9.7%	8.5%	0.292
caused damage to property	5.9%	5.4%	0.644
been injured	17.2%	17.6%	0.829
driven a motor vehicle	10.4%	11.4%	0.435
verbally abused someone	18.1%	20.2%	0.187

We also examined ambulance data to identify whether young adults in outer suburbs required ambulance call-outs for intoxication involving alcohol at a greater or lesser frequency than young adults from inner suburbs (data not shown). This did not differ significantly by inner- or outer-urban setting. However, when we looked at police data during hours when alcohol was most likely to be consumed heavily (8pm to 6am on Friday and Saturday nights) a different picture emerged. In 2011–12, the rate of assault involving an offender from the outer-urban area was more than twice the rate of assault involving a young offender from the inner-urban areas (61 compared to 27 assaults per 10,000 people) (Table 3). Similarly, people from outer suburbs were more likely to be victims of assaults during high alcohol hours than young people from the inner suburbs.

Table 3. Assault data involving 18–24 year olds for 2011–12: assault location and victim and offender residence

	Victim Residence		Offender Residence		Assault Location	
	Rate per 10,000 (95% CI)	Number	Rate per 10,000 (95% CI)	Number	Rate per 10,000 (95% CI)	Number
Outer-urban	42.6 (39.7–45.5)	830	60.5 (57.1–64.0)	1179	32.4 (29.9–34.9)	631
Inner-urban	25.2 (23.2–27.2)	596	27.2 (25.1–29.3)	642	34.1 (31.8–36.5)	807
Inner-urban excl. CoM	25.5 (23.4–27.7)	543	28.1 (25.8–30.3)	597	22.6 (20.6–24.6)	480

Our interviews with young adults from both inner- and outer-urban settings helped us understand factors that may be at work in outer-urban young adults' greater involvement either as offender or victim in alcohol-hour assaults. In the following section we discuss some possible reasons for this. For an extended discussion of this see MacLean & Moore (2014).

Excitement in the Melbourne local government area (LGA) entertainment precinct

Table 3 shows that inner-Melbourne was strongly over-represented as the location for alcohol-hour assaults involving young adults in 2011–12. Where Melbourne LGA saw 327 assaults in high alcohol hours, the remaining 17 LGAs between them saw 480 during this period. Additionally, more assaults occurred in outer suburbs than in inner suburbs when Melbourne LGA is excluded.

Many interviewees from outer suburbs were attracted to the city because of the sense of high excitement that they found there. People went to the city for a big night, often involving heavy alcohol consumption. This excitement was generated by density of venues and the convergence of crowds of people from across greater Melbourne together to drink and have fun. Participants reported that both of these factors increased the likelihood of violence.

Interviewees from the inner-urban area seemed to use the city less frequently for a night out. Although people felt safer in areas outside the CBD, violence could occur anywhere. Honey (24, female, inner-urban) often spent time with gay male friends and said that her friends were sometimes subjected to homophobic taunting in the inner suburb of Fitzroy:

You get a lot of d**kheads around Brunswick Street on weekends in particular, or the people come in and guys who wanna fight and they will. A lot of my friends are gay males in particular and they get a lot of sh*t. Like a lot of people will yell stuff at them in cars. Not necessarily actually physically touch them but be physically [threatening] to my friends and it's just not pleasant to come on this side. So we'll stay on Smith Street which is a lot safer.

Patronage of large commercial venues

A systematic review of alcohol-related harm in licensed venues found that factors that appeared particularly important in contributing to alcohol-related problems included 'a permissive environment, discounted drinks, promotions, poor cleanliness, crowding, loud music and poor staff practice' (Hughes et al. 2011). A striking difference between the participants in the study from inner- and outer-urban locations was that greater proportions of outer-urban participants attended large commercial venues such as Crown Casino and Billboards when they visited entertainment precincts. These participants were also much more likely to have encountered violence and conflict in the night-time economy. Some young women, however, felt safer in large venues because of the greater police presence around them.

Participants from the inner-city were more likely to visit smaller 'niche' venues where the focus was on music or attracting people of a particular cultural style. It is problematic to draw clear conclusions about venue preferences on the experiences of a small sample such as this, however a similar finding is also noted elsewhere (Lindsay 2006).

Beliefs about fighting

A small number of inner-urban participants argued that people from outer suburbs or the country tended to drink particularly heavily in the city and that this led to conflict. Similarly some outer-urban interviewees felt unwelcome in city venues. Mitchell (23, male, inner-urban) was wary of the city on weekend nights because it was full of people he felt uncomfortable around:

From out in the country... who aren't normally around the city, getting really, really wasted... And then you know that if you're out in the city for too long on one of those nights you will see someone get punched in the face.

Most of the violence that participants noted having observed occurred between men. Participants mentioned that women were also drawn into fights, often with other women, but said that these were usually verbal and involved less physical violence. Male interviewees were frequently anxious about getting caught up in conflicts in the night-time economy. Some men would plan evenings so to avoid exposure to fights as Ryan (male, 23, inner-urban) related:

I get nervous, a bit worried sometimes. I don't wanna start a fight, like I don't wanna get in trouble. Like I wouldn't feel that comfortable walking around King Street [in the CBD] by myself, especially if I was drunk or on drugs and I would be a bit intimidated by a lot of the people around there.

Nonetheless, men in the study had been involved in fights invariably spoke of doing so to help a friend already embroiled in the conflict. Dave (21, male, outer-urban), for example, said that he and his friends would always 'jump into' a fight to defend each other. Although the study involved only a small convenience sample of participants, meaning that conclusions are speculative, it did appear that a greater proportion of outer-urban than inner-urban participants felt a responsibility to join their friend in a fight.

Late-night transport and trouble getting home

Another point of difference for inner- and outer-urban research participants was around the degree of difficulty they experienced getting home from a night out at an entertainment precinct. Getting home was time-consuming and expensive for outer-urban participants, particularly when they missed the last train or tram for the night. Waiting around for transport home or being stranded in the city were points in time when involvement in conflict was greatest. Lachie (18, male, outer-urban) told a story about getting stuck in the city and sleeping outside a supermarket:

We just got like chased by older blokes. And then we... ran off and just went like tried to find a secluded place... We like slept under like a Safeway sort of like docking area. We couldn't think of nowhere else to get home and sh*t.

Participants repeatedly commented on the need for better public transport late at night. Carley and her friends complained that a taxi from central Melbourne to her house cost well over \$100. Their alternative was to catch the Night Rider bus which they claimed would take two or three hours, getting them home around six in the morning.

Many participants, particularly women, felt uncomfortable and unsafe on the Night Rider bus, a service which provides transport through the night to outer areas. One young woman related two frightening experiences of the bus, firstly when accompanying a friend who was very drunk, whom she thought might start a fight, and secondly, when she was kicked off the bus by the driver for disruptive behavior that she claimed she wasn't actually involved in and had to wait in an unfamiliar area for the next bus. Lucy (18, female, outer-urban) spoke of witnessing her sister's drunken ex-fiancée being badly beaten:

My sister's ex-fiancé likes his drinks and stuff like that. And then we catch a bus called the Night Rider what comes really late to take you home. We got on it. There were other kids from other parties... For some reason they picked on the kid that was with us. They had known him from footy or something like that, started a fight. It was his brother involved so he got involved too 'cause he was intoxicated. He got knocked unconscious... ended up at the hospital 'til seven in the morning.

In contrast to these experiences, many transport options are open to people living in inner-Melbourne when they go out, including walking, biking, private cars, taxis (which are cheaper if the distance travelled is shorter) and public transport:

I live inner city so walking places is easy and preferable if possible, or trams or trains to get there. (*Scarlett, 23, female, inner-urban*)

People often needed to use cabs late at night when they were too drunk to drive or cycle home and did not feel safe walking. Taxis are more available at some points of the night than others. Honey (24, female, inner-urban) found it impossible to get a cab when she usually wanted to leave the city, at around 2am and often resorted to a long walk home.

Even for participants who were in their twenties, families were important resources for emergency transport. Zara's mother (20, female, outer-urban) was prepared to pick up her daughter in the middle of the night if no other safe option was available.

Local government policy responses in inner- and outer-urban settings

We have identified similarities and differences in alcohol consumption patterns and cultures across greater Melbourne. Heavy episodic drinking appears common for young adults across the inner and outer suburbs with slightly lower rates than reported in regional and rural Victoria. Interview participants from both inner- and outer-urban areas spoke of heavy drinking as an intrinsic part of most of the social opportunities that were available to them. Lighter drinkers from both areas felt somewhat left out of social events.

According to survey data, young adults from outer-urban areas do not drink greater quantities of alcohol than their inner-urban counter-parts. Indeed, they may drink less overall. Nonetheless, outer-urban youth do seem to be involved more frequently in assaults that occur during high-alcohol hours, both as offenders and as victims. The reasons for this are complex. Factors identified in this research include the greater sense of occasion and excitement that many young adults from outer suburbs feel on accessing the city and their tendency to attend large commercial venues. This is compounded by a lack of late night transport options from the city to the urban fringes, meaning that people find themselves stranded in the city when they no longer wish to be there. It is also possible that outer-suburban young adults are more likely to see it as their responsibility to join a fight in which their friends are involved. Another study (MacLean & Livingston 2014) found a relatively far greater availability of bottle shops compared with on-premise-only liquor outlets in Melbourne growth areas than in inner-urban areas. This is particularly concerning in light of research suggesting that adding packaged liquor outlets to suburban areas results in greater increases in harm than adding them to other areas (Livingston 2008). Young people and members of disadvantaged groups may be disproportionately at risk of short-term harm associated with packaged liquor availability and consumption (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2013).

Local governments have limited influence over approval or refusal of new licensed or determining licensed premises opening hours (Streker 2012) – two effective policy mechanisms for reducing alcohol-related harms (Babor et al. 2010). Recent changes by the Victorian state government mean local governments are empowered to approve planning permit applications for new bottle-shops, as well as on-premise outlets. These decisions can, however, be appealed by license applicants. A state government-issued checklist encourages local governments to assess negative impacts from the accumulation of licensed premises in a given area (Victorian Government Department of Planning and Community Development 2011). However, it is not yet known whether this checklist will give local governments greater control over the liquor licensing process (Wilkinson 2012).

A report by the Victorian Auditor General concluded that the current licensing system requires significant reform to provide greater local control over alcohol availability:

Councils' ability to influence the liquor and hospitality industry on behalf of the communities they represent is restricted by shortcomings in the planning permit and liquor licence application processes. The grounds for objecting to a liquor licence are narrow, and the evidentiary requirements and decision-making process for contested licence applications are not clear. (*Victorian Auditor General's Office 2012*)

Local governments frequently develop local policies to guide decision-making on license applications (Victorian Auditor General's Office 2012). Stonnington Council in inner-Melbourne, for example, undertook research to determine the saturation level (where harms became unacceptable) of licensed premises within the Chapel Street area after 12am. On the basis of this research the Council developed a policy on late-night licensing. It then successfully sought approval from the State Minister for Planning to implement mandatory liquor licensing controls in the Chapel Street Precinct, taking effect in February 2012 (City of Stonnington 2012).

A liquor accord is a voluntary agreement between a group of agencies which may include licensees, police, local government, the director of the liquor licensing body, state government departments and community representatives. These accords are often coordinated by police or local government. As a member of local liquor accords, local governments may facilitate agreements between licensees and in some cases negotiate voluntary restrictions on alcohol availability. However, the few existing evaluations provide little evidence of the effectiveness of local liquor accords in reducing alcohol-related harms (Manton 2014).

Planning laws and development plans may be used to create safer spaces and encourage mixed land use – supporting a mix of both day-time and night-time economies. The provision and location of street lighting, public toilets, rubbish bins and transport access can create a safer and more comfortable environment (City of Sydney 2011).

Local laws banning public drinking are increasingly used by Victorian local governments. An evaluation of their use internationally found their effect is more likely to be increasing perception of community safety rather than reducing the incidence of alcohol-related harms (Pennay & Room 2012).

As a land owner of recreational facilities and public places, local governments are responsible for the safe provision of alcohol on their own facilities. It can be particularly challenging ensuring responsible service of alcohol training is maintained when such venues use casual and volunteer staff. Local governments may organise and co-ordinate enforcement and health services at festivals and public events.

Local governments disseminate health information as part of their communications with the communities they serve. This can include advice on reducing alcohol-related harms that is targeted to the needs of local communities. Local governments can also be involved in consulting with and surveying communities to identify health and information needs. They have a further role in representing and advocating for their community to improve state and federal policies that impact on alcohol-related harms. This may be done individually, by forming partnerships with other local governments, or through local government representative bodies.

Following we make some recommendations for local governments in developing policies to reduce harms related to young adults' alcohol use. While some recommendations relate to policy levers that fall outside the legislative role of local government, they are included because they are important to the overall effort to reduce alcohol-related harms.

Recommendations

While the report reflects the steering committee's regular discussions throughout the project, the views expressed here are those of the authors alone and do not represent those of the partner agencies and funding bodies.

Responding to heavy episodic alcohol consumption

- Heavy alcohol consumption is an entrenched aspect of recreation for many young adults in inner- and outer-urban Melbourne. Strategies at all levels of government are needed to address this.
- Some participants spoke of being unable to limit their drinking, even on 'quiet nights' with friends. This suggests that education encouraging responsible drinking is only part of the solution to problem drinking. Research evidence suggests that measures to restrict alcohol availability (including limiting the number of outlets licensed to sell alcohol and the hours during which alcohol may be sold) are critical to prevent heavy drinking (Babor et al. 2010). Reducing alcohol availability should be part of the response to harmful alcohol consumption wherever possible.

Licensing and planning

- Some light drinkers living in outer-urban areas felt that their options for going out at night were fairly limited. Outer-urban local governments could work to ensure opportunities for non-alcohol-related recreation are available, particularly at night.
- Young people from the inner suburbs generally felt that inner-fringe entertainment precincts such as Brunswick and Smith Streets in Fitzroy and Collingwood were safer places to be at night than the CBD. Where relevant, inner-urban local government should work to maintain the existing range of small bars and pubs.
- Where possible local governments should prefer approving planning permits for smaller-capacity venues where opportunity to sit and to eat are available and where patrons numbers are restricted, over licenses for large, crowded venues (Allen Consulting Group 2009). This should occur only in the context of reducing overall alcohol availability in areas which appear to be affected by cumulative impacts from existing liquor licenses.
- Outer-urban councils have the benefit of a more well-developed evidence base regarding associations between the density of licensed outlets and alcohol-related harms, than was available when many night-time entertainment precincts in inner city areas developed. Subsequently, outer-urban councils should aim to develop entertainment precincts that are appealing to young people, but also ensure that a range of recreation options are available, with a focus on smaller, on-premises bars and restaurants rather than packaged liquor outlets which are more strongly associated with various alcohol-related harms (Livingston 2011).

- Developing entertainment precincts in outer-urban areas may reduce some problems currently reported in relation to the inner-city entertainment precincts, such as the long distance people are required to travel home. To be viable, these hubs would require similar licensing provisions to those operating in the inner-city, which should be achieved by winding back venue closing hours in the inner-city rather than increasing hours when alcohol is available in outer-urban areas.

Pricing and taxation

- Price differentials between off-premise takeaway alcohol and alcohol purchased at venues are influential in young adults' tendency to pre-drink (MacLean & Callinan 2013). Local governments could lobby at a Commonwealth level for this differential to be reduced by introducing minimum alcohol pricing policies that aim to increase the price of alcohol sold at off-premises related to on-premises outlets. Discounting for bulk liquor purchases should also be discouraged.
- Further, many people interviewed felt that the best value for money in venues was to buy shots, which got them drunk very quickly. Based upon this, state and local governments should explore a ban on on-premises venues selling shots late at night.

Enforcement of liquor license provisions

- Our interviews suggest that people are entering venues while they are intoxicated and continue to be served alcohol when they are quite drunk. Enforcement of restrictions against alcohol sales to the intoxicated is a state government responsibility but local governments and community members can lobby for enhanced enforcement where a need for this is indicated.
- The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research routinely collects self-report data regarding the service of alcohol to young people showing signs of intoxication. The Victorian government and other agencies should consider collaborating with NSW researchers to trial a similar system in Victoria to assess the extent to which young people from both inner- and outer-urban area are entering venues already intoxicated (Donnelly 2012).

Information provision

- Private parties are frequently the venues for alcohol consumption in outer-urban areas. This means that education and resources advising people how to manage alcohol availability at parties should be disseminated to households in these areas.
- Young men particularly should be encouraged to develop strategies for responding to situations where their friends are involved in a fight which do not involve joining in. This also underlines the importance of evaluating interventions such as the Victorian Government's 'Wingman' campaign to assess their impact on rates of alcohol-related assault.
- Some young people from families and cultures where alcohol is not used feel unprepared for exposure to alcohol and other drugs. Further research investigating strategies to support these young people to manage situations where they will be exposed to alcohol and other drugs could be useful.

Transport

- Late night public transport is essential to improving safety in the night-time economy (City of Sydney 2011). Train and trams should run until after all late-night venues have closed to ensure people are not stranded in the inner-city in the early hours of the morning.
- A cost benefit analysis comparing the expense of running late-night public transport with the likely health care and policing savings should be conducted.
- Many young adults, particularly women, do not feel safe on the Night Rider bus. Placing Protective Service Officers on Night Rider buses would alleviate this.

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