

**Submission
No 80**

MEASURES TO REDUCE ALCOHOL AND DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE

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**The Salvation Army
Australia Eastern Territory**

**Submission to the
*Inquiry into measures to reduce alcohol and drug related violence in the
Sydney central business district.***

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The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory

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The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army has been providing a wide range of support services to the Australian in community people for over 130 years. We currently operate in more than 900 locations across Australia delivering 1000 programs and support to more than 200,000 people each year.

Our mission, as part of the universal Christian Church is to meet human needs without discrimination. To achieve this we provide a wide range of services and practical support designed to meet the social, emotional, material and spiritual needs of people who are disadvantaged.

Through our work in the community, we see many people affected by alcohol, drugs and gambling. As a result we have a wide range of recovery support services, treatment services, out-client services and day therapeutic community programs, and family support services.

We currently provide eight residential treatment services and three detoxification services across NSW, Queensland and the ACT (Australia Eastern Territory). Our largest NSW centre, in inner Sydney is William Booth House, a residential program that provides medical detoxification and rehabilitation from problematic alcohol use, substance abuse and gambling addictions.

It is through our experience and firsthand knowledge of the impacts of problematic alcohol use and related violence that we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into measures to reduce alcohol and drug related violence in the Sydney central business district. We have responded to those terms of reference where we have direct relevant experience.

Our Response

As a provider of services to address problematic alcohol and other drug misuse, The Salvation Army acknowledges that the issues which confront individuals and the community in this area are complex.

The Salvation Army comes face to face with the very real and damaging consequences of alcohol and substance abuse and violence on individuals, families and communities. The Salvation Army promotes an abstinence based approach in supporting people affected by problematic alcohol use and other controlling substances, but takes a harm minimisation approach where necessary, acknowledging that this is a widely accepted and effective policy in contemporary practice. We are particularly concerned with the rate of alcohol misuse in the Australian community. It is a harmful drug: yet legal, widely available and relatively inexpensive.

The recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report ¹ *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: 2012-13* confirms that that alcohol continues to be the most common principal drug of concern. Data from William Booth supports this finding, with alcohol being the primary drug of choice for 50% of persons admitted for rehabilitation in the year July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. Additionally, 66% of remaining clients stated that alcohol was their secondary drug of choice. Of all clients admitted in this twelve month period, 31% had current criminal convictions, the majority of which were alcohol related. ²

Furthermore, Australian Institute of Criminology research³ has found that the rates of physical and verbal abuse experienced by a person affected by alcohol were more than twice the rate for other drug types. The study also found that the 'victim' was often also alcohol or drug affected, particularly

¹ AIHW 2014. *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2012-13*. Drug treatment series no. 24. Cat. no. HSE 150. Canberra: AIHW.

² The Salvation Army data accessed from *SAMIS – Service and Mission Information System*. 12.08.2014

³ Australian Institute of Criminology – accessed at <www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rip/1-10/04.html>; 12.08.2014

in domestic violence situations. This strong link between alcohol misuse and violence is evidence of the need for significant interventions.

Terms of Reference - Trends in alcohol and drug related violence in licensed venues and general street areas

Substantial research into the types of interventions that work to reduce alcohol-related violence suggests that a focus on the systemic causes of alcohol abuse, including supply, price and culture, are necessary for any intervention to be sustainable.⁴ The Salvation Army's experience shows that 'lock out' and enforcement changes only address the immediate and have the potential to disseminate alcohol-related violence into the wider community, where it already exists and is not being addressed by the current measures.

While research shows that heavy drinking and intoxication is associated with physical violence, the majority of people who use alcohol do not become aggressive⁵. Therefore, alcohol consumption is not always a precursor to violent behaviour.

Accordingly, not all venues are high risk, but indeed, there are venues where various risk factors are present, contributing to the likelihood of violence. Risk factors include extended trading hours, long queues, large capacity, crowding. Staff characteristics are another risk factor which should be considered in the targeting of high-risk venues.⁶ The targeting of such venues would be an evidence based strategy to reduce alcohol-related violence.

The density of alcohol outlets also impacts on the rate of violence, therefore localities with higher densities of outlets have been found to experience higher rates of assault. We suggest that a re-evaluation could be undertaken regarding licensing allocation, particularly within high-risk areas. This could include placing a limit on the number of licenses distributed in these high-risk areas.

The Salvation Army supports measures by the NSW Government to reduce alcohol and drug related violence in the Sydney central business district, but believes that the government must also consider the underlying cultural and structural factors that contribute to this problem. In order to address these issues effectively, a long term and strategic approach must address the systemic and personal issues that lead to the abuse of alcohol and other drugs.

Recommendations

It is vital that additional funding is allocated to treatment facilities to ensure treatment opportunities for people experiencing problematic alcohol use.

Greater education and treatment programs should be considered by the courts for sentencing options for people charged with alcohol or drug related offences.

⁴ Smart Justice, May, 2010. Fact sheet, "Reducing Alcohol-related violence", accessed at <www.smartjustice.org.au, 12.08.2014.

⁵ Australian Institute of Criminology – accessed at <www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rip/1-10/04.html>; 12.08.2014

⁶ Smart Justice, May, 2010. Fact sheet, "Reducing Alcohol-related violence", accessed at <www.smartjustice.org.au, 12.08.2014.

Terms of Reference - Possible further measures to reduce alcohol and drug-related violence

Alcohol consumption is widely accepted as a significant part of Australian culture and is associated with many forms of entertainment and participation in social events.

The Salvation Army has a highly visible presence in city venues and public spaces where people congregate and celebrate. Salvation Army officers, street chaplains and outreach teams come into regular contact with people who are impacted by alcohol misuse and related violence. We see an increasing within Sydney, CBD of binge drinking; defined as excessive alcohol use, undertaken in a short period of time, in order to get drunk.

This binge drinking trend can result in a host of anti-social behaviours. Many factors contribute to this practice, especially for young people, including peer pressure, boundary testing and risk taking behaviours; all common traits in adolescent development and legitimised by Australia's drinking culture.

Effective measures to address alcohol-related violence require an understanding of the characteristics of the perpetrators and the violent incidents themselves. The association between alcohol and aggression is a complex interaction between a number of variables including:

- Pharmacological effects of alcohol on the cognitive, affective or behavioural functioning of the consumer which may lead to increased risk taking, reduced anxiety regarding possible sanctions for behaviour, heightened emotionality, impulsive behaviour, an inability to resolve incidents verbally or 'liquid courage' (a distorted interpretation of events);
- Individual characteristics including age, gender, personality traits, predisposition to aggression, deviant attitudes and expectation of the consumer about the effect of alcohol on their behaviour while intoxicated;
- Effects of the environment in which consumption is occurring including situational factors such as crowding, permissiveness of violent behaviour, the management of licensed premises and the role and behaviour of venue staff (including managers and security);
- Societal attitudes and values, including a culture of drinking to deliberately become intoxicated, using alcohol as an excuse for behaviour not normally condoned and for holding individuals less responsible for their actions⁷.

The Salvation Army recognises a change in the binge drinking trend is necessary to contribute towards reducing alcohol and drug related violence in venues and public spaces. Further measures to address this issue must consider the social and cultural implications of alcohol use and factors which contribute to alcohol misuse. We are calling for a cultural shift in thinking which must be facilitated by government, and we recognise that such a shift will not take place in a short period of time, but education is the first step in that shift.

Recommendation

A large-scale community education process is undertaken, educating all demographics specifically on the negative impact of binge drinking and high levels of intoxication.

⁷ Australian Institute of Criminology – accessed at <www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rip/1-10/04.html>; 12.08.2014

Terms of Reference - The effectiveness of measures taken to reduce alcohol and drug related violence in other jurisdictions.

The Salvation Army recognises that alcohol misuse in Australia has become known as a 'wicked problem'⁸ meaning that it goes beyond the capacity of any one organisation to address the issue. It is a complex issue that is difficult to resolve and requires a coordinated response from a number of stakeholders with clear understandings of local communities.

Interventions and strategies to reduce alcohol and drug related violence must be based upon a clear understanding of the interacting processes and risk factors, and must draw upon the evidence base of the most effective interventions to address all the factors. Strategies must be customised to comply with the specific circumstances of each community.⁹

An intervention that has a proven track record is a model in Melbourne CBD, whereby The Salvation Army works alongside police to offer support to alcohol-affected people. Affected persons are given the opportunity to sober up in a safe environment, a safe passage home and ongoing support to address misuse of alcohol and other drugs.

A similar project that successfully addresses binge drinking culture is The Salvation Army's *Red Frogs*. This is an internationally recognized project that supports young people during "schoolies" celebrations that has been operating for over 12 years. Red Frog volunteers encourage young people to celebrate safely in environments that can be known for high levels of potentially harmful behaviours.

The Salvation Army works in other communities engaging those who are at risk while they are intoxicated. Street Chaplains run a coffee service and street patrols in the inner city area, making contact with people engaged in alcohol and substance use. Chaplains build relationships and provide information for counselling, alcohol/ drug rehabilitation, legal assistance and accommodation.

The longevity of The Salvation Army street chaplaincy, outreach and support services are evidence of the effectiveness of the role they play in supporting people engaging in excessive alcohol consumption.

Recommendation

Measures to reduce alcohol and drug related violence must be a coordinated whole of community response including all levels of government, health practitioners, police, community organisations and the wider community. Interventions must be holistic and place-based, strategic, long-term in nature and must address the systemic issues of the factors contributing to alcohol abuse.

⁸ Hunter, D.J. 2009. Leading for Health and Wellbeing: the need for a new paradigm, in *Journal of Public Health*, vol. 31 (2), pp202-204. Oxford Press.

⁹ Australian Institute of Criminology – accessed at <www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rip/1-10/04.html>; 12.08.2014