

**EXAMINATION OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL'S
PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORTS SEPTEMBER
2013 – JULY 2014**

Organisation: Department of Premier and Cabinet

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Premier & Cabinet

Reference: A1040318

Mr Jonathan O'Dea MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr O'Dea

I refer to your letter dated 19 November 2014 regarding the Auditor-General's July 2013 report on the *Cost of Alcohol Abuse to the NSW Government*.

I understand an upcoming Legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee inquiry will examine the report, and that submissions have been sought from NSW Treasury, NSW Police Force, NSW Ministry of Health, the Department of Justice and the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The enclosed whole-of-Government submission has been prepared for the Committee's consideration.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, the appropriate contacts in my department are Ms Anita Truninger, Director, Partnerships, NGO Reform and Health, Communities and Social Investment Group on 9228 3144 or anita.truninger@dpc.nsw.gov.au, or Ms Caroline Reed, Director, Partnerships, NGO Reform and Health, Communities and Social Investment Group on 9228 3385 or caroline.reed@dpc.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Blair Comley PSM
Secretary

4 February 2015

NSW GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Examination of Auditor-General's Performance Audit Reports: Report No. 235 - Cost of Alcohol Abuse to the NSW Government

A Government response to the Auditor-General's recommendations was included in the report pursuant to section 38C of the *Public Finance and Audit Act*. The positions outlined in that response remain unchanged.

As noted in the report, measuring and attributing alcohol-related costs is a complex task. NSW agencies already collect and report on a wide range of measures that provide strong insights into the prevalence and impact of alcohol abuse. For these reasons, the Government continues to believe that any future decisions to collect and report on additional data in this area needs to be based on a robust assessment of the costs and benefits involved.

The Government continues to recognise the important contribution alcohol-related data can make to policy development and review, as demonstrated by the evaluation plan established to accompany the Sydney CBD Entertainment Precinct Plan of Management.

Released on 28 May 2014, the Plan of Management is a comprehensive set of measures designed to reduce alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour in the Sydney CBD Entertainment Precinct. It formed part of the broader package of reforms introduced by the Government in January 2014 to address alcohol and drug-related violence.

In evaluating the Plan of Management's impact, NSW Treasury's Centre for Policy Evaluation will draw on data from a range of sources including NSW Police Force, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, NSW Health, NSW Ambulance and the City of Sydney, as well as licensed venue compliance standards and incident registers, industry and community feedback, and public transport patronage levels. The evaluation will also include a study by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research to quantify the effect of the new alcohol regulations implemented in Sydney in 2014, including the impact on the incidence of alcohol-related non-domestic assaults.

The Government remains of the view that the circumstances in which recovering the costs of alcohol-related services from individuals would be appropriate are likely to be limited. The financial disincentive it creates may discourage individuals, particularly the vulnerable and disadvantaged, from accessing the services they need.

Efforts to educate individuals and communities about the risks associated with harmful alcohol consumption are also ongoing. Examples of recent and upcoming initiatives include the following:

- In 2014, the NSW Police Force commenced the state-wide rollout of Your Choice, an alcohol education program available to young people under the age of 18 years who are caught possessing, consuming or attempting to obtain alcohol in public places and on licensed premises. It aims to challenge perceptions about underage drinking and to educate young people about the consequences of excessive alcohol consumption. A web-based version of the program is also available as a resource that can be readily accessed by a wider audience, including parents, schools, and community groups.
- The Department of Education and Communities has reviewed and revised the mandatory Crossroads program for Year 11 and/or 12 students. The revised course

provides a strengthened focus on drug and alcohol information, including responsible, healthy behaviours and protective strategies for situations where drugs and/or alcohol may be present. It also addresses contemporary issues such as alcohol-related violence. The revised course was published in November 2014 and will be implemented in government schools in 2015. The course and support materials were also made available to non-government schools at the same time.

- The NSW Ministry of Health is currently developing specific alcohol modules for the *Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service*, and will integrate alcohol within the *Quit for New Life Program* which supports pregnant Aboriginal women to quit smoking.