

**Submission
No 240**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

Organisation: WayAhead Mental Health Association

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The Hon. Natalie Ward MLC
Committee Chair
Joint Select Committee on Sydney's night time economy

Via: NightTimeEconomy@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Ward

SUBMISSION TO THE *INQUIRY INTO SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Inquiry into Sydney's night time economy*.

At WayAhead, we work every day to educate people throughout New South Wales on mental health and wellbeing and link them to services and resources that improve their mental health. Our vision is for a society that understands, values and actively supports the best possible mental health and wellbeing. If WayAhead values good mental health and wellbeing for everyone we are compelled to support a public health initiative that reduces alcohol consumption with the added advantage of getting people home safely and into bed for a good night's sleep, also essential for good mental health.

The risk of harm relating to alcohol increases with the amount of alcohol consumed. If you drink more than the recommended limit on a regular basis, this can have a harmful effect on many of the body's systems and organs, including the brain.

People may use alcohol as an escape from difficult situations or feelings and eventually lose their ability to cope with day to day life without the use of alcohol. Personal relationships, family responsibilities, work, accommodation and education may become neglected as the person's use of alcohol becomes more and more important to them.

Although most people drink to relax, have fun, or fit in with a group, some people find it difficult to control their use of alcohol and find themselves drinking more than they intended. Alcohol use, particularly excessive alcohol use is correlated with incidents of assault, homicide, accidents and incidents of domestic violence and it is estimated that over 3,000 Australians die each year because of harmful drinking.

Anxiety and depression are also strongly linked to alcohol, with around 40% of those seeking treatment for alcohol dependence also experiencing symptoms consistent with depression.

This review process provides the NSW Government with an important opportunity to ensure that Sydney's night time economy is safe for all to enjoy, by retaining the live-saving late night measures. There is overwhelming evidence that the comprehensive reforms that have reduced alcohol harm in Sydney, has had positive impacts on the diversification and growth of Sydney's night time economy.

The recently published report on Sydney's night time economy from Deloitte, *ImagineSydney*, highlights the importance of a planning and licensing system that is not solely focus on drinking and instead encourages initiatives like late night gallery and museum hours, live music or comedy, food and other retail offerings. A city that is dependent on the sale of alcohol past 3am is not a healthy or sustainable city. The violence associated with heavy drinking is exclusionary, and actively discourages many people from enjoying the more diverse night time economy that Sydney needs to continue to develop to be a world-class city.

We would like to offer our support to the submission prepared by the NSW/ ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance (NAAPA). NAAPA is a coalition of 48 organisations working to reduce alcohol harm by ensuring that evidence-based solutions inform alcohol policy discussions in NSW and the ACT. WayAhead supports NAAPA's call for the retention of the lifesaving alcohol harm reduction policies that were introduced in Sydney to prevent violence following the tragic and unnecessary deaths of our young people. We note the evidence that the suite of measures has been credited, following their introduction in Sydney on 24 February 2014, with:

- dramatic reductions in non-domestic violence, with substantial reductions observed in entertainment precincts
- reduced rates of alcohol-related serious injury presentations
- a 60 per cent reduction in serious facial injuries requiring surgery at St Vincent's Hospital in the two years following their introduction.

The main conditions in the suite of measures designed to reduce alcohol harm are 3.00am last drinks and a 1.30am one-way door policy (live entertainment venues can apply for a half hour extension). These policies have been subject to several government and academic studies and reviews, which show significant reductions in harm, including reductions in alcohol-related non-domestic violence, reductions in hospital admissions and emergency department presentations, and significantly improved local amenity. These findings are also consistent with evidence on the effectiveness of late-night measures from Europe and Canada.

Furthermore, the measures have promoted greater diversification in the night time economy by encouraging substantial growth in the number of entertainment establishments since 2013. Additionally, the drinks subsector alone saw increases in the number of establishments (4.9%) and employment (8.7 %) for the period 2016-2017. It is

evident that the lifesaving policies are having positive impacts on health and community safety as well as on Sydney's Night Time Economy.

The suite of alcohol harm reduction policies in Sydney's CBD and Kings Cross are paramount to striking the balance and promoting diverse night time offerings. The policies save lives and must be retained.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these important issues with you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Priestley'.

Elizabeth Priestley
CEO