

**Submission
No 43**

**INQUIRY INTO STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ALCOHOL
ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW**

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Submission - Inquiry into strategies to reduce alcohol abuse among young people in NSW

The Illawarra Forum is the peak body working for community services and organisations in the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven. We support community organisations, promote expertise and innovation in community development, foster industry development and advocate for social justice.

For more than twenty years, the Illawarra Forum has taken a leadership role in the local community services sector, which is a major employment sector in the region, and currently consists of more than 300 organisations in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven areas of New South Wales.

The Illawarra Forum works closely with numerous organisations which provide support to young people and families including Council Youth Centres, Barnardos South Coast, Southern Youth & Family Services, and Access Community Group. In addition, the Illawarra Forum works with:

- Services for individual and families who live with multiple layers of social and financial disadvantage;
- Services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault ;
- Youth work programs;
- Social housing and homelessness services;
- Home and community care services;
- Community health services, including mental health and drug/alcohol services;
- Community legal centre services; and
- Community development and community capacity building programs.

The Illawarra Forum consulted with members and service providers to develop this response.

Effect of Alcohol Advertisements and Promotions on Young People

Alcohol advertising which targets young people (and anecdotal evidence suggests that advertising and promotion is targeting an increasingly younger cohort) is ubiquitous and relentless. This is particularly evident in family-centred sporting events such as all day cricket games, and in celebrity culture. The celebrities and sporting heroes who are looked up to by young people are frequently photographed for social pages with drinks in their hands, or are featured in news articles for alcohol-influenced disorderly behaviour

Of particular concern is the manner in which promotion works to “normalise” alcohol in everyday life, and as such influence very young children in public places such as supermarkets. Some examples include

- The colocation of groceries and alcohol by having alcohol sections in local supermarkets
- Alcohol discount vouchers and ‘2 for 1’ offers on supermarket and petrol receipts – such as the ‘get a tankful, get a gutful’ promotion
- Marketing of alcohol flavoured confectionary such as liqueur chocolates and whiskey and other spirits-flavoured toffees
- Alcohol flavoured biscuits such as Kahlua flavoured Mint Slices and Tia Maria flavoured Tim Tams
- Vodka flavoured lipgloss
- Toys with alcohol advertising, such as replica racing cars with alcohol sponsorships, and toy trucks with alcohol logos.

The relatively recent rise of energy drinks and soft drinks also normalises alcohol consumption as the packaging and marketing of these drinks is similar to alcoholic drinks, and thereby presents alcohol as a “normal” beverage for young people.

Another recent trend to use social media such as Facebook to advertise alcohol to young people makes its presence even more pervasive in youth culture.

It is evident that legislation around alcohol advertising is lagging, particularly around social media advertising. In addition, many marketing strategies appear to be purposely provocative in order to be banned; thereby gaining a following on social media and Youtube. A key issue in addressing alcohol advertising and promotion is industry self-regulation of advertising, and the fact that the current complaints system is complicated and ineffectual.

Participants in our consultations highlighted the issue of secondary supply. Well-intentioned parents may believe that gradual introduction of alcohol to minors will ‘get their systems used to drinking’. However with 61% of young people saying they consume alcohol to get drunk and 30% of 15 year olds and 44% of 17 year olds drinking at levels that risk alcohol-related harm, this approach proves to be questionable as a ‘safe’ alternative to abstinence (AERF 2011). Parents and adults in general need to be educated on the risks, and promotion of healthy ‘social norms’ around drinking need to be explored and promoted.

“The 2008 Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) report, Supporting the families of young people with problematic drug use: Investigating support

options highlights adolescents whose parents display a permissive attitude towards alcohol consumption tend to drink more and once adolescents start experimenting with alcohol (Fry, Dawe et al, 2008)".

Recommendations

The promotion of alcohol to young people must be better regulated. Consumer groups and peak youth services could provide insight into how this regulation could be best achieved and should be included in consultations on the regulation of alcohol promotion.

The process for complaints about particular advertisements must be streamlined and made more accessible to the general community. At present the methods of complaint are not 'user friendly' and in fact may discourage multiple complaints for ads that have already been 'dealt with', or future complaints from individuals who become disillusioned with the system.

Advertising also needs to be targeted at parents who are still the responsible persons for their teenager's behaviour. These targeted advertisements should highlight the developmental dangers of introducing children and young people to alcohol too early. Advertising should also highlight the fact that parents have the right to say no to supplying alcohol to their teenagers.

b) the effectiveness of alcohol harm minimisation strategies targeted at young people

It is well documented that abuse of alcohol by young people often results in violence at licenced venues, in the street, and in the home. This is exacerbated when alcohol is used in conjunction with other drugs – prescribed and recreational.

However youth workers and other service providers working with young people are reporting increasing rates of risky behaviour around alcohol use. As more underage people drink regularly at parties, in private homes, and in public spaces; secondary supply is being revealed as a major issue.

For those over 18, the trend to have cheap 'pre-drinks' at home before going out places extra pressure of staff at licensed venues.

Whilst drinking in licensed venues is highly regulated, and security staff monitor behaviour, young people drinking in private and less visible areas are exposed to increased dangers such as violence and sexual assault. Some of the alarming social trends for young people include:

- Having "pre's" at home before a night out. This encourages young people to drink large amounts of cheap alcohol at home before going out
- The reduction in social stigmatisation of 'goon bags' which makes 4 litres of alcohol very affordable and increasingly socially acceptable
- The growing trend to dance parties which seem to attract both alcohol abuse and recreational drug use

Current harm minimisation advertising aimed at minors making decisions about their drinking habits do not seem to be working. 82% of Australians believe that a minor drinking

is harmful, however young people are allowed to drink at home, as parents feel this is a safer alternative (Naylor-Clarke 2012).

“The current law deflects responsibility solely to parents. It additionally, provides a mixed messages in allowing parents to supply alcohol to minors, reinforcing misconstrued beliefs that it is relatively harmless, thus perpetuating an environment in which the Australian drinking culture is accepted, via conveying a permissive attitude to alcohol misuse. Lack of strong legislation fails to support parents to make the best choice regarding their child’s welfare in terms of drinking alcohol” (Naylor-Clarke 2012).

Recommendations

More harm minimisation strategies should be directed at parents. These strategies could focus on information about how alcohol affects the young brain and its long term effects. Please see attached clip by TAFE Illawarra students highlighting the issue of secondary supply.

There should be awareness raising campaigns focussing on secondary supply. These strategies should emphasise the risks of under-age drinking outside licenced venues. Penalties for adults supplying alcohol to young people should be increased, policed and enforced. Technology could be developed which linked barcodes on alcohol with the credit cards or loyalty cards of the purchaser, thereby making detection of secondary suppliers more streamlined.

Research should be conducted on why dance parties attract more alcohol-related violence than, for example, licenced venues and events with bands. This in turn could inform minimisation strategies.

Representatives from Illawarra Clubs in the area note that some of the strategies enforcing lock outs and curfews could prevent good harm minimisation strategies that security and staff are best positioned to perform. Please see presentation of one such proposed solution.

http://prezi.com/joxtdxegni8k/cpn/?auth_key=5deff46c6a2b88e0e224e9af63af5ab66be83586&kw=view-joxtdxegni8k&rc=ref-913

c) measures to minimise the impact of alcohol in the workplace and in the general community

Investment in treatment services is the most cost-effective and efficient option to keep young people out of jail, out of hospital and in education or employment. Community-based youth health services - counselling, in-patient withdrawal management, out-patient detox – are examples of effective community-based options. Workers in these fields report that even one counselling session can prevent an admission to Accident & Emergency, thus reducing the resource demands on the already-strained hospital system; and reducing the physical and emotional strain on young people and their families. Despite their

effectiveness, many more of these services are urgently needed in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven and should be backed up by support services for the young people's families. This form of investment will keep more young people connected with their family and community, and pursuing their education or employment while they are addressing their dependency.

In order to minimise the impact of alcohol in the workplace, more employers need to address their workplace culture. They need to review how the company regards alcohol, for example do they tolerate misuse of alcohol by giving alcohol as rewards for service or performance, or do they encourage drinking by promoting after work celebrations? (DIF 2013).

Workplaces need to be encouraged to take on services such as 'Employee Assistance Programs' available confidentially to all staff as a first point of call to address either their alcohol consumption or worries that may cause a person to drink.

Recommendations

Increase investment in community-based treatment services such as counselling, in-patient withdrawal management, and out-patient detox. And increase investment in corresponding support services for families and partners.

Encourage employers to review their alcohol policies, and discourage the practices of rewarding performance with alcohol and holding alcohol-fuelled celebrations.

d) the effectiveness of measures to reduce drink driving

One of the pleasing trends in youth culture is the effectiveness of drink driving campaigns. Anecdotal evidence indicates that young people do not regard drink driving as the norm. Young people have embraced the practice of having a designated driver.

The introduction of laws inhibiting Learner and P-plate from drinking any alcohol also appears to be highly effective.

e) measures to reduce alcohol related violence, including in and around licensed venues

Alcohol related violence is exacerbated by large crowds of intoxicated people milling around in public spaces, so lack of public transport is a key element in alcohol related violence. In many areas there are simply no public buses or courtesy buses, and there are insufficient taxis to quickly disperse the large crowds of people milling around taxi ranks.

Monitoring of transport to clear high traffic and known trouble spots needs to remain on the agenda for discussion and planning.

The large numbers of intoxicated people on the streets may be reduced by the introduction of staggered closing times in high traffic areas. In order to avoid patrons being discharged from one venue and simply migrating to another, staggered closing should also be combined with across the board lock-outs. Currently such plans are working in several areas and a similar model be effective in the Illawarra. There is a good example currently put in place by the Kiama Liquor Accord. This model combines a transport plan and strict curfews.

Liquor licensing laws are also a vital tool in curbing alcohol-related violence. By imposing strict restrictions on venues which are repeatedly scenes of violent brawls, the culture of the venue can be altered, and management can be encouraged to monitor patron behaviour more closely. Similarly, licensees should be required to address any violent events when they come to renew or extend their liquor licence.

Recommendations

Review transport needs in high traffic areas and known trouble spots.

Implement staggered closing times of venues, strict curfews, and coordinated lock-outs.

Encourage venues to have courtesy buses to provide transport to patrons.

Stricter applications to renew or extend a liquor licence.

f) measures to address the impact of alcohol abuse on the health system

The impact of domestic violence and street violence associated with the use of alcohol by young people is an enormous cost to the community. And alcohol abuse has the greatest impact on young brains. However, the kinds of anti-drinking messages currently available are too extreme to have real relevance for young people. Anecdotal evidence from young people shows that, just like they don't know anyone with gangrene – which affects the anti-smoking message; they also know plenty of people who have gone out, drunk to excess, and haven't ended up falling through a glass coffee table.

Anti-drinking messages should have some relevance for their audience.

One other clear message that emerged from our consultation with the sector was that taxing alcohol to make it more expensive will only make illicit drugs more attractive, which in turn could have greater impacts on the health and justice systems.

g) any other related matter

The Illawarra Forum strongly recommends that the juvenile justice system embrace the NSW Youth Drug and Alcohol Court (YDAC) which aims to reduce recidivism in young people by helping them overcome their drug or alcohol problem. We strongly urge the extension of

YDACs to regional areas of NSW, particularly in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on strategies to reduce alcohol abuse among young people in NSW.

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CEO

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