

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

Organisation: Manly Council

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MANLY COUNCIL RESPONSE

Manly has an entrenched drinking culture. Young people dominate the late night environment. Most of them drink and party at late night licensed venues prior to ending up in the public space on their way home. There is a heavy social, environmental and economic cost to this situation.

Manly CBD has continually been identified as a major hotspot for alcohol related assault and anti-social behavior for many years. Offences occur primarily on the weekends between midnight and 6am. It mostly involves young (18-29 yrs), intoxicated males as both victim and offender. Apart from alcohol related assaults the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics, ranks Manly 4th in NSW for Offensive conduct (out of 141) most of which are alcohol related anti-social behaviour offences particularly urinating in public in the Manly CBD. In addition Manly LGA rates 3rd in the state for Steal from Person offences of which the majority occur inside Manly licensed premises. (source: BOCSAR).

This scale of regular public drunkenness impacts on wider community perceptions of safety as evidenced in *Manly Council's Community Strategic Plan Beyond 2021*, which identifies the top priority social issue as 'Binge Drinking and the Culture of Alcohol in Public Spaces'. Comments from this consultation included that *"drinking" was seen as a leisure/recreation activity for people in Manly* and *"people come to Manly to get wasted"*. As a result of the community consultation the Council's priority social objective is to 'Reduce Alcohol Culture and Binge Drinking.' In addition Manly LGA has one of the highest rates of Drink Driving and the highest rate of alcohol health related hospitalisations in Sydney.

Whilst this paper focuses on young people and alcohol as per the terms of reference, the drinking problem is a wider issue and needs to be looked at as a whole of society concern not just that of young people. A shift in the drinking culture is required.

The following comments are based on the experience, programs and knowledge of a range of local stakeholders and staff who work in the area of youth, road safety, crime prevention, compliance and community development in Manly.

a. the effect of alcohol advertisements and promotions on young people

- Feedback from young people is that they ARE affected by alcohol advertising with comments from local youth such as, *"When I see the ads for beer it makes me feel like having some."*
- Young people are motivated by price so cheap alcohol promotions are attractive to them.
- Liquor Licenses should not be permitted under their liquor license to sell cheap shots. They only cause rapid intoxication and are in direct conflict with Responsible Service of Alcohol.
- Restrict cheap alcohol marketing – restricting the availability of cheap liquor (eg cask wine, full strength beer) will reduce levels of harm. It is common for young people to 'preload' on 4litre casks prior to going out.
- Alcohol promotions that focus on pictures of alcohol being drunk in an aspirational, affluent, relaxed/happy background are misleading– there should be more real life depictions of the harms of alcohol. This includes alcohol and its insidious sponsorship of sporting teams – boys primarily are largely attracted to sports at both local and the national level. That alcohol and high level sports such as the NRL & AFL are inextricably linked is the message being received in the young minds that watch these sports.
- Alcohol advertising should be subject to the same controls as cigarette advertising. The impacts of alcohol misuse are causing serious and costly problems on both individuals and wider society.
- In relation to promoting harm minimization and public health messages our feedback is that humorous advertising and those with a 'real life story line' work the best for young people. For example using a similar approach to the skin cancer advertising campaign with the story of Wes Bonny is a great example of shock advertising but with a true story that is effective.
- For alcohol related health promotion messages - the advertising focus needs to shift from TV and radio to social media as this is where most of the young people are getting their information and is where alcohol suppliers are now targeting young people.

b. the effectiveness of harm minimization strategies targeted at young people

Three local programs that currently operate and we believe have positive impacts:

- Educational programs for parents of young people are effective in changing the parenting techniques of teenagers in relation to alcohol use. In Manly MDECC run a 'parents prepared' program which provides a 12 hour intensive workshop on up to date information on alcohol, drugs and communication tips.

- Drink awareness campaigns help to make the youth aware of their drinking levels and how to drink responsibly. Drink Check by MDECC is an iPad survey designed program that highlights drinking patterns that may cause adverse effects, safer drinking options and 'what is a standard drink?'.
- 'Year 12 Briefings' – we have recently trialled combined presentations by council, police and liquor licensees to local high school students, (who will inevitably end up partying in Manly) on alcohol laws, secondary supply, drink driving, alcohol free zones, common offences and consequences etc. It is information put into a local context with the aim of giving them a familiarization of their responsibilities about drinking/partying in Manly after they turn eighteen. Following positive feedback from the trial we now aim to extend this program.

d. the effectiveness of measures to reduce drink driving

In the Manly LGA there has been an ongoing problem with alcohol and drink driving and statistics show that the 17-25 year old category is no exception. The 17-25 age category represents over 50% of alcohol related crashes in 3 of the last 6 years from 2006 to 2011. The last year of data from 2011 displays an even higher percentage at 60%.

Year	Percentage of alcohol related crashes for 17-25 year old
2006	50%
2007	45%
2008	43%
2009	38%
2010	50%
2011	60%

- RMS campaigns such as the current 'Plan B' have an effect on some youth, but still needs a greater social media presence in months and years to come. The Victoria Metro created a video "Dumb Ways to Die" with over 34 million hits on Youtube is a great example of what could be done regarding the affects of drinking alcohol and how it can affect youth.
- Northern Beaches Councils including Pittwater, Warringah and Manly work together with NSW Police when addressing drink driving issues. The Highway Patrol is given additional funding to set up extra RBT units in these areas. It is important that this funding be retained as it is vital to detecting the after affects of someone drink driving, however finding ways to address this before it happens would be better.
- A comprehensive alcohol education program needs to be developed. The course content could include such items as a detailed review of alcohol laws including RSA (Responsible Service of Alcohol), the short term and long term effects of alcohol on the body and brain, responsible versus irresponsible drinking, financial and legal ramification of drink driving, peer pressure, sexuality and other health issues related to alcohol. It could also involve attendance at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting or a drink driving court hearing to actually hear and see what happens. Culminates with an exam that is linked to obtaining L Plates with follow ups for red P's and then another refresher for the green P's. Study for this could be provided on-line, hard copy or using other social media outlets, but the exam must be conducted in a formal setting such as the registry office or similar. The primary goal of the educational program is to reinforce responsible drinking and encourage young adults to make informed decisions about alcohol use and misuse.

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

The following measures are those that work well in Manly and those that we believe would further improve the environment:

- **Pricing of alcoholic drinks** – there is a direct correlation between price and consumption of alcohol. Often young people will change their choice of drink depending on what is the cheapest. To reduce this pricing of alcoholic drinks could be uniform, i.e. if the price of beer goes up so should wine. Young people often drink to get drunk and are motivated by price. They commonly 'preload' as it is significantly cheaper, eg. 5 litres of wine can be bought for \$10. – this is almost how much a single glass of wine can cost at a late night venue – quality is not a concern. This massive price disparity between the cost of alcohol from a discount bottle shop to that of a nightclub needs to be addressed.
- **Mixed night time economy** – by developing a better mix of bars, restaurants, shops, services and late night food outlets that are open at night will change the dynamics of late night entertainment centres. It encourages

a more diverse socio-demographic mix into these centres and if you also restrict the growth of alcohol-focused bars evidence suggests that you reduce the levels alcohol related violence.

The objective of a mix of business types at night would be to reduce the large scale public drunkenness that deters other groups from going out at night. The lack of diversity in the crowds in the late night environment prevents 'normalising' of the street environment and a loss of the informal daytime controls that maintain social order. (source: Hadfield P. 2011 Night Time Economy – International Evidence Literature Review Public Summary)

- **Licensed Trading hours** – restricting licensing hours and introducing earlier lock outs has proven an effective way of reducing alcohol related offences in licensed premises within Manly. 3.00am is the absolute latest that any venue should be allowed to operate. Whilst the Manly Late Night Venues Development Control Plan states a 2.00am close, many existing venues still have 24 hour liquor licenses so 2am cannot be enforced by way of conditions of consent. It can only be achieved by State Government legislating 2am lockouts with a 3.00am closing time.
- **Premises design and operation** –Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment should be a condition of a late night licensed venue including consideration of the following:
 - Glassware management – plastic or polycarbonate only in violent venues
 - Manager and staff training – implementation of educational programs to bar staff in relation to dealing with alcohol related aggression and the reduction of problem behavior (beyond RSA)
 - Venue Layout – limits on large open plan areas as they encourage overcrowding and 'vertical drinking' thus an environment that can encourage violence. More seating and places to put drinks should be provided as this has a twofold effect of reducing frustration from standing for long periods and reduces the speed of a person's drinking. It is also more difficult to fight with someone from a seated position.
- **Late Night Transport** – an efficient late night transport system is essential, as in Manly with the secure late night taxi ranks and bus networks. It should be a condition of a late night venues that they must financially contribute to the late night transport arrangements for their patrons out of the area. It is not fair that these costs are currently borne by government alone.
- **Street Pastors** – is a UK accredited initiative operating in Manly and first and only in Australia. It involves volunteers from a coalition of 13 local churches. On Saturday nights between 11pm to 4am 4-8 volunteers patrol the CBD. Their role is pastoral and practical including helping intoxicated patrons with transport access, ensuring the safety of vulnerable people and removing bottles and potential weapons from the streets. They have proved a very welcome and effective resource in the Manly CBD by introducing a very calm, non-threatening presence into the otherwise chaotic environment. The Manly Community Safety Committee and Manly Police are extremely grateful for the contribution they provide to improving late night safety.

Positive news - Venue Driven Change

The Steyne Hotel is one of the largest late trading hotels in NSW and over the years had gained a notorious reputation as one of the most violent and at one stage rated second in the State for alcohol related assaults. The licensee with the support of the hotel owners has been instrumental in turning the place around by changing the hotel's business model to focus on attracting patrons in the daytime and earlier in the evening. He has actively engaged with the locals and initiated community events and generously hosted a range of fundraisers for a variety of worthwhile causes. This has built up a high level of goodwill in the community and in turn helped to shift the demographics of his customers and reduced reliance on a late night party crowd. He has also helped achieve this with a fun and family friendly approach by introducing ideas such as ping pong tables, a café, live music sessions, better food choices, a Chinese restaurant and an environment that is open, light and inviting.

After weighing up the cost and risk of trading after midnight the licensee is slowly reducing the hotel's late night trade. This in turn is impacting on the wider community by helping to reduce alcohol related problems in the public space and slowly but surely improving a sense of safety overall.

The licensee has acknowledged that the cost/benefit of staying open after midnight is far too expensive in security, potential fines, troublesome patrons and complaints. By shifting the business model to attract a wider clientele earlier in the day and evening this venue no longer relies on trading much past 1.00am. Whilst alcohol is still the core business the hotel has extended its focus to coffee, food and community events. This approach is attracting other nearby licensees who are now also looking to reduce their late night operations by improving daytime and evening business.

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

Manly residents have more hospitalisations for alcohol related health problems than any other area in Sydney. (source: Health Statistics NSW ABS) One theory for this is that there is an abundance of accessibility to alcohol,

higher than average disposable incomes combined with a culture that uses alcohol to socialize and celebrate nearly everything.

Two suggestions to offset the late night weekend impact on hospital emergency:

- **'Booze Buses'** – Westminster council in the UK operate a booze bus that can treat several people at the same time and frees up A & E and hospital beds, often wasted on people who are just heavily intoxicated. They are able to contact family and friends to come and get them and take them home. Before being taken home all patients are required to talk to 'turning point', which provide advice on alcohol related problems.
- **Triage/Field Hospitals** – This system operates in Cardiff, Wales and provides an emergency service at weekends and for major events. A treatment centre is set up in a large stadium where patients can be assessed and treated unless they require additional treatment at A & E. On recent statistics in 2011 of 159 patients treated at the triage 67% did not need further treatment at A&E and thus saving the equivalent of 360 hours of A&E time.

Source: Alcohol consumption in the night time economy – working paper 55 – Melisa Wickham – September 2012
Source: MDECC Website

Both these types of systems could operate in areas of NSW to varying degrees with designated late night entertainment precincts and for major sporting events. They could be located in the near vicinity of the precinct thereby saving hospital and ambulance resources.

g. Any Other Related Matter

Planning and Compliance Issues

- That a database is made available from OLGR to Councils that includes all licensed venues, capacities, trading hours, plans of management and license conditions. Local Government should have more control and/or input over the issue, the impact and the enforcement of liquor licenses in their area
- Any Development Application involving alcohol for sale should not be permitted to be certified by a private certifier.
- All liquor license application should undergo a cumulative impact assessment by OLGR. There needs to be a identified threshold of liquor licenses issued within an area.
There are more than 90 licensed venues within approx 200 metre radius in Manly CBD. Both research and experience tells us that an oversupply of bars and clubs within short walking distance leads to alcohol related violence and damage. The experience of Manly repeatedly proves this yet there is still no cumulative impact assessment required for a liquor licence – applications are still considered in isolation.

Parent Education & Support

Anecdotal evidence on the Northern Beaches suggests that parents commonly give their teenager a 4 pack of 'premixes' such as Bacardi and Cokes under the misapprehension that it is better or safer than the teen finding their own alcohol. The reality is that it becomes implicitly acceptable to drink and only adds to the amount they drink not control it.

Parents are conflicted with their own entrenched attitudes and experiences. They are also confused with the "Mediterranean" model whereby parents give their children small amounts of alcohol during large family gatherings. This model does not work in Australia where the predominant culture is that of binge drinking

There needs to be more public education and engagement to assist parents in addressing this issue with their children. Legal and health arguments carry the most weight in arguing why they should not let them drink.

Financial Assistance

Maintaining the night time environment is extremely costly to Council (more than \$1million per annum direct costs) including Cleansing & Waste, CCTV, Night Rangers, lighting, 24 hr public toilets, signage and damage resulting from drunken patrons. In addition there are less obvious costs such as legal expenses relating to objections to various licensed venues and staff time in dealing with compliance and complaints.

More external funding to assist with infrastructure to ensure safer late night entertainment precincts is needed. Whilst large councils such as City of Sydney are financially capable of managing late night weekends in the same approach as if they were special events, small Councils such as Manly cannot afford to sustain this approach without additional financial support.

A great example of assistance is the security at late night taxi ranks is funded by State Government. This is a fantastic support. It would be extremely helpful if State government could also consider support for other late night initiatives such as portable urinals.

Takeaway Liquor

- Current research and local experience indicates that bottle shops/takeaway liquor is the most damaging of all alcohol outlets in terms of social cost in the form of violence in the home and in public space and contributing to chronic health problems. There is little if any responsibility by those who sell it at a bottle shop for the ramifications of its consumption compared to other types of licensed venues. (Livingstone,M.11Oct 12, Local government reducing alcohol related harms in the community,<http://vimeo.com/52137906>)
- Perhaps an Alcohol Linking program for drinks purchased at takeaway outlets could be established by NSW Police to provide evidence and establish more responsibility by alcohol outlets.

Alternative Late Night Activities

Young people need places to socialise at night time, they need opportunities for connection – this is a normal desire. Currently in NSW (certainly in Manly) after 10pm at night the ONLY places to go to fulfil this need are almost entirely licensed venues whose main motivation is to sell liquor. A long term goal is to create and offer safe, appropriate and attractive spaces, where people can come together and “hang out” without the overwhelming influence of alcohol such as outdoor movies, night markets, karaoke, carpark dances, late night gallery/library openings, full moon sports events etc. By introducing a range of other socialising opportunities we may have a chance to start shifting the overwhelming and predominant socialising culture of alcohol.

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