

**Submission
No 51**

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

Organisation: Local Government NSW

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into strategies to reduce alcohol abuse in young people

March 2013

Introduction

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the independent peak organisation representing 152 general purpose councils, 12 special purpose councils and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. Councils can choose to be members of the Association. We represent the views of councils by:

- Advocating councils' views to governments.
- Promoting Local Government to the community.
- Providing specialist advice and services.

The mission of LGNSW is to be a credible, professional organisation representing Local Government and facilitating the development of an effective community-based system of Local Government in NSW. In pursuit of this mission, LGNSW represents the views of councils to the NSW and Australian Governments, provides industrial relations and specialist services to councils, and promotes Local Government to the community.

LGNSW is providing a submission to the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues which has commenced an inquiry into strategies to reduce alcohol abuse in young people, referred by the Hon Kevin Humphries MP, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Healthy Lifestyles and Minister for Western New South Wales.

LGNSW thanks the NSW Legislative Assembly Social Policy Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission concerning alcohol abuse in young people. We are addressing the following Terms of Reference in our submission.

Purpose

The purpose of this submission is to outline the current role of Local Government in addressing the issues arising from alcohol abuse by young people as they manifest in local communities.

Councils are not the lead agency in responding to alcohol and other drug issues and/or mental health issues in the community. Nor are they the lead agency in the development of overarching strategies to address the holistic needs of young people. Nevertheless, it is recognised that responding to community concerns and issues associated with the social and public health requirements of local communities is an important part of the role and responsibilities of councils. Through local knowledge of the needs of people within their communities Local Government has an important complementary role.

Local Government is increasingly dealing with the issue of alcohol and its impact on the community's social and physical environments. Council crime prevention strategies are central to targeting the incidence of alcohol related assaults and anti-social behaviours. It is vital that the strategies being implemented by all spheres of government are consistent and mutually supportive, recognising vital links between public health campaigns and the health sector, law enforcement and life as experienced by young people.

Councils are aware that young people form a particular *at risk* population. Heightened levels of risk are present in the context of experimentation with drugs and alcohol, peer pressure and socialising. Alcohol misuse can result in injury, road trauma, accidental death and this is particularly true for young males (Alcohol and other drugs: A reference guide, Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW 2009). Diverse approaches are required in order to communicate with a diverse age group; one where kids not even in high school are binge drinking, one where teenagers are experiencing a huge amount of change during their years of puberty, one where young people are experiencing varying degrees of stress as a result of

secondary study and/or the prospect of getting a job or choosing a career, and one where perhaps most importantly alcohol is inextricably linked with a pathway into adulthood.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as a diverse group who will benefit from both mainstream approaches to addressing alcohol abuse but who will also require specific programs that are culturally appropriate and sensitive to their communities' and individual needs. Council programs are based on the core principles of universal access seeking to encourage broad participation. Where possible, programs will also be provided to address specific cultural, community and individual needs. Local Government is certainly limited to adequately and appropriately address the needs of these young people.

Following is an appropriate example of an overview of the broad role of Local Government in addressing issues arising from alcohol abuse across all ages in a city community from Newcastle City Council's *Alcohol Management Strategy 2010-2013* (p.8) (it should be noted that councils have varying levels of involvement and resources in this area of program development and implementation):

Local government can help reduce the impact of alcohol-related harm in the following areas:

- *Public space management (improving safety and public amenity);*
- *Partnerships with regulatory and enforcement agencies (working closely with these agencies to provide a consistent approach);*
- *Safety and crime prevention (e.g. safety plans, safe playgrounds, adequate lighting);*
- *Support and advocacy for services at the local level to best reach the community to help protect their health and welfare;*
- *Support for fellow councils by sharing good practice and innovative ideas;*
- *Identification of different partnerships that help to reinforce the wellbeing of the community;*
- *Regulate and enforce new and existing development conditions imposed upon licensed premises through the DA process;*
- *Integration of alcohol issues into Social Planning and Crime Prevention Planning;*
- *Review of Community Impact Statements prior to approval of licensed premises (LGSA Alcohol and Other Drugs: a Reference Guide, 2009).*

Councils have been involved in awareness-raising about the negative implications of excessive alcohol consumption and community acceptance of the Australian binge drinking culture for a long time now. One council youth services manager noted *that if responsible alcohol use is a learned behaviour then it follows that irresponsible alcohol use must also be a learned behaviour*. Given the central role that alcohol plays in Australian culture, the challenge for policy makers should be to ensure that programs, policies and interventions seek to modify attitudes and values and not necessarily the attendant errant behaviour (Newcastle City Council submission to Alcohol Summit 2003). While this Summit and submission occurred 10 years ago, today we are having the same discussions on how to address alcohol related issues, emphasising the minimal effect previous efforts have had on the issue and highlighting the need for a holistic approach to this issue. LGNSW would also like the issue of investigating the combination of the abuse of alcohol and drugs be considered at a later date.

Summary of Recommendations:

LGNSW recommendations are based on a whole of government and whole of community approach, where possible, lead agencies have also been included below.

NSW Ministry of Health take a lead role to:

1. Acknowledge the link between advertising and its influence on attitudes and behaviours of young people;
2. Develop key messages targeting the different age groups within the 12 – 18 year age bracket focussing on the real risks and effects of drinking, responsible drinking and appropriate acceptable behaviour;
3. Increase the investment in social marketing strategies by different spheres of government to enable further promotion of key messages;
4. Promote the existence of the Alcohol Advertising Review Board to the community to encourage increased community engagement;

NSW Department of Education and Communities take a lead role to:

1. Work in partnership with the Local Government Youth Advisory Councils across NSW (and their related networks) to assess their representative capacity in addressing local issues affecting young people;
2. Conduct research into the effectiveness of peer-education;
3. Develop age appropriate resources to further encourage peer-education including identifying alternative recreation options;
4. Investigate opportunities for mentoring programs for young people for the ages of 17 and 18 as they prepare to and as they enter licenced environments;
5. Provide appropriate resources using social media to increase the effect of peer education, challenging the myths and assumptions around drinking;
6. Encourage a regional approach for areas with limited resources to identify suitable alternative recreation options that will meet the needs of young people;

Australian and NSW Governments:

1. Support organisations to address alcohol related issues in the workplace;
2. Conduct an evaluation to determine the effectiveness of workplace policy on drugs and alcohol through its uptake and impact;
3. NSW Government to assist community driven programs in gaining access to resources to conduct evaluation to build an evidence base that is accessible by councils and communities;
4. Work across NSW Government Departments, including the Division of Local Government, to align strategies which lead to a reduction in alcohol related harm;
5. Where possible, ensure that there is national alignment in approaches to reducing drink driving to further enable councils bordering two States and Territories and across regions;
6. Australian and NSW Government to provide translatable evidence at the Local Government Area level that can be used for the long term planning of strategies, programs and policies to address alcohol related harm in the community with a focus on young people;
7. NSW Government to increase the capacity of Local Government, as the consent authority monitoring the number of liquor outlets in different communities and the associated impacts, to address the issue of the supply of alcohol as a strategy to reduce alcohol related harm;
8. The Australian Government look into developing a national set of standards for licensed premises where allocated spaces are set up for children and young people's unsupervised recreation purposes
9. Both governments consider the issue of the combination of the abuse of alcohol and drugs and give due consideration into investigating this

a) The effect of alcohol advertisements and promotions on young people, including consideration of the need to further restrict alcohol advertising and promotion

Local Government supports the harm minimisation approach which takes into account three interacting components: the people involved, their environment and the substance itself.

Research shows that currently in Australia alcohol is continually promoted and its usage accepted through the strategic placement of advertisements on television, radio, on billboards and transportation infrastructure (buses/bus stands). Further research shows an increasing need to reduce the level of advertising of alcohol products placed in an environment that young people frequent. The imagery used in advertising is often enticing to young people and acts to normalise the associated ideas and behaviours (mostly idealised versions of beauty and popularity through a presentation of gendered stereotypes). Alcohol is often conveyed in a glamorous way, making it extremely difficult to disassociate the substance with the desired behaviours and attitudes.

The association of alcohol brands with events through the increase in social media usage enables further normalisation, adding to the struggle in changing the accepted binge drinking culture too often linked with sport. Given the increase in social media usage by young people and the inability to limit exposure, alcohol product sponsorship will continue to undermine the efforts of health advocates.

Currently alcohol advertising is conducted through a self-regulating system by alcohol advertisers. In March 2012, the Alcohol Advertising Review Board (AARB) was launched nationwide. The role of the AARB is to review the placement of alcohol advertisements at events, in the community and through mass media as requested by community members and provide a determination on the appropriateness of its placement.

Public Health and community awareness campaigns need to have key messages that ensure young people take heed of the negative effects of alcohol abuse and the inappropriateness of alcohol related anti-social and aggressive behaviour.

Evidence shows that sponsorship of sports & recreation and arts & cultural events (music festivals & exhibition openings) enables the promotion of alcohol brands and the association of the event and the brand ensure that they are meaningfully linked. The strategy where alcohol is no longer a sponsor of major sports events and more recently of targeted sports (via their national peak sports bodies) will filter through to the community. However, further efforts need to be made in the arts & cultural arena (specifically music festivals and exhibition openings) to reduce sponsorship of these events by the alcohol industry.

In Local Government, established youth councils are able to provide feedback on the effectiveness of campaigns. For programs targeted at young people and their consumption of alcohol, often these youth councils provide guidance and/or plan, implement and deliver the youth focussed program. It is important to get clear key messages in to the advertising space that are not ambiguous and promotes responsible usage of alcohol. Local Government is challenging the way in which alcohol is embedded in Australian culture through health promotions, youth focussed events, programs involving partnerships, policies and strategies that carry key messages. Further work needs to be done and further resources to assist these youth advisory councils to be able to enhance a supportive environment of limited alcohol consumption and responsible drinking behaviours.

Byron Shire Council in partnership with Byron Youth Solutions are currently collecting evidence through their 'Cringe the Binge' campaign and responding to what they see as an issue of key concern in their community. It will be important to provide further opportunities for councils to contribute this knowledge in the development of a whole of government approach.

It is worth here concluding with comments from a council youth services manager located in a different region:

"We cannot expect young people to respond to the "just say no" message when our Australian way of life is so infused with alcohol. Rather than eucalyptus being carried on the wind across the length and breadth of the country, it is alcohol fumes which represent the reality of Australian culture. The result is that we stand there like King Canute commanding the waves of underage alcohol consumption to cease while they crash over our heads."

"If we are going to deal with underage drinking, we are going to have to get much more sophisticated in our approach and we are going to have to devote considerable resources to it. But even additional resources will not be sufficient unless and until we accept the fact that while we talk the talk but fail to walk the walk, all strategies will fail."

Recommendations:

LGNSW recommendations are based on a whole of government and whole of community approach, and suggest NSW Ministry of Health take a lead role to:

1. Acknowledge the link between advertising and its influence on attitudes and behaviours of young people;
2. Develop key messages targeting the different age groups within the 12 – 18 year age bracket focussing on the real risks and effects of drinking, responsible drinking and appropriate acceptable behaviour;
3. Increase the investment in social marketing strategies by different spheres of government to enable further promotion of key messages; and
4. Promote the existence of the Alcohol Advertising Review Board to the community to encourage increased community engagement.

b) The effectiveness of alcohol harm minimisation strategies targeted at young people ***Alternative Recreation Options***

As previously stated, the environment is a key component in effective harm minimisation strategies. This has been a recurring theme since the 1970s but one that has proven difficult to tackle with the lack of real funding available for programs rather than the necessary infrastructure.

The immediate outlay of costs for young people attending alternative recreational and entertainment activities (for example the cinema, a professional sporting event, and eating out in cafes or restaurants) is more expensive than purchasing alcohol. Many councils are aware of the need to provide alternate recreation options and spaces for young people and are approaching this at a strategic and sustainable level. This lack of options for young people can see exacerbated levels of boredom and increasing levels of alcohol abuse during school holidays. Local Government as the provider of sports and recreational facilities is well placed to support alternative recreational and entertainment activities to young people.

Byron Shire Council has recently established through a nomination process its Byron Shire Youth Council. They have identified the issue of alcohol as one of their strategic focus areas in 2013. The central issue emerging is the lack of alternative recreation activities in and around the Byron Shire. Council has also adopted, and is in the process of implementing priority

actions from their Safer Community Compact which targets non domestic (alcohol related violence) within our community.

Byron Shire Council regularly works in partnership with Byron Youth Service delivering different projects to address issues affecting young people in the community. Recently these have focused on providing an increased number of recreation activities and places throughout the Shire as well as youth lead forums where discussion for young people by young people is taking place raising issues around the effects of alcohol, drugs and mental health. In addition a Youth Theatre has been established which provides outreach to local schools.

In a 2009 survey conducted by then LGSA, 66% of councils responded positively to having an advisory council that focused on the needs of young people. The involvement of young people participating in advisory councils should be encouraged and these advisory councils should be utilised more in the planning and development of strategies where young people are the target population. This would further enhance peer-education and focusing on the different age groups within the 12 -17 year bracket would provide more information.

Partnerships and grants

Partnerships between Local Government and different government agencies are effective as grant programs funded by NSW & Australian governments are implemented by councils. These often focus on one particular program area or population group. The NSW Ministry of Health funded the Healthy Communities Initiative, administered by the then Local Government and Shires Associations (LGSA), offering 20 grants with 6 of these focussing on responsible drinking; three targeted young people.

One of these programs provided outreach and street based youth services to young people who frequent public places. Outreach services are an accessible and flexible approach to youth work. The consistent presence of youth outreach workers provided valuable role modelling and mentoring to young people who could potentially be involved in anti-social activities or engage in risky drinking behaviour.

Youth workers provided factual and accurate information on issues of concern to young people and provided meaningful links via building these relationships, to youth services and agencies. Outreach youth workers are mobile, they are better able to access young people in isolated suburbs and regions, and target 'hot spot' areas.

The program focussed on peer education as identified by UNICEF which is based on the knowledge that many young people make changes not only based on what they know, but on the opinions and actions of their close, trusted peers. *“Peer educators can communicate and understand in a way that the best-intentioned adults can’t, and can serve as role models for change”* (http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_12078.html).

“Peer education is often used to effect changes in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours at the individual level. However, peer education may also create change at the group or societal level by modifying norms and stimulating collective action that contributes to changes in policies and programs” (http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/peer_ed.pdf)

The Australian Government’s National Preventive Health Agency (ANPHA) has provided community level grants focussing on alcohol in communities. Two councils were successful recipients and the information gathered from these initiatives could also assist in building

evidence to determine effective strategies using community based initiatives through Local Government. These are:

- Clarence Valley Council with the aim to bring together young people, local service providers and health agencies in a model responsive to a dispersed population with limited youth services in Grafton and the regional towns of the Clarence Valley (ANPHA website).
- Leeton Shire Council in partnership with other LGAs have developed an interactive, multi-faceted program aimed at reducing binge drinking among young people in the Leeton, Griffith and Narrandera areas (ANPHA website).

Local Government connecting communities

Responsible alcohol use is a learned behaviour, was stated in a report developed by the City of Newcastle entitled *Rites, Rights & Responsibilities* on youth and alcohol abuse highlighting the views of young people. The engagement and involvement of young people and their communities to contribute to and share this learning is maximised through council facilitated programs. Councils play an important role in planning for and responding to the needs of young people. To demonstrate the varying approaches across NSW a number of programs are outlined below:

- Kempsey City Council's alcohol strategy (*Category Winner, Excellence in Alcohol Management, National Awards for Local Government 2012*) was developed to address the issue of young people (and adults) consuming alcohol in public places leading to a high incidence of alcohol related crime (local police statistics and NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)). The issue was identified through the Community Drug Action Team.
 - A youth program called *Your Choice* was rolled out with a focus on youth and under-age drinking in public places. Police officers issue an infringement notice to parents where they can choose to bring their kids to a community education seminar on alcohol to avoid a fine. Kempsey City Council employs a worker from NSW Ministry of Health to present along with NSW Police. These seminars are open to all families in the community.
 - A program for high school students called *Risk: Targeting Year 11* students this program goes into schools using a number of key strategies including peer facilitators, role play, and road safety (presented by NSW Roads and Maritime Services). A council officer sits on the Committee which covers schools in the north coast of NSW. The council officer was responsible for linking schools in the Kempsey area into this program.
- Lachlan Shire Council used funding through their Community Drug and Alcohol Team (CDAT) to run a competition through their schools to create a logo and slogan around alcohol abuse. The winning entry was *Don't Kill Your Skill* which appeared on drink bottles, wrist bands and balloons and was reporting to be a very successful process.
- Campbelltown City Council's Strategic Youth Development Officer participates in a Drug and Alcohol network that develops strategies and activities to raise awareness with young people of the risks involved in alcohol use. There are a number of youth organisations involved in the network including Traxside, Mission Australia, D.A.W.N and Youth Off The Streets. All these agencies have specific drug and alcohol portfolios within their broader service delivery.
- Campbelltown City Council's Strategic Aboriginal Development Officer is currently supporting Youth Solutions (whose specific brief is around drug and alcohol use and misuse for young people) with the development of a Young Aboriginal Reference Network (YARN). This network has a focus on drug and alcohol issues and will encourage

members to participate in key Aboriginal events across Macarthur and take a mentoring and leadership role for other young Aboriginal people in the region. A team member of Youth Solutions sits on Council's Campbelltown Aboriginal Community Reference Group.

- Byron Shire Community Grants Program continues to receive a significant number of applications from groups in the community seeking to implement programs to address alcohol related issues in diverse ways according to the particular needs and features of their social and physical environment.
- Byron Shire Council also has a program is targeted at young people through the Schoolies Safety Response Working Group: a group of representatives of various community organisations, whose aim is to provide a safe and secure environment in Byron Bay during the end of year school leaver celebrations ('Schoolies'). Participants in the Schoolies Safety Response Working Group include: Byron Youth Service, NSW Police (Byron Bay), Byron Liquor Accord, North Coast Area Health Service, INTRA/The Buttery, BUDDI, Byron United, Holiday Letting Organisation Byron Inc. (HLO), Byron Visitor Centre, Byron Shire Council, Red Frogs and Youth With a Mission (YWAM). A number of strategies have been put in place by the Working Group, including the Schoolies Hub, which provides safe support for the local community, local young people and those young people involved in Schoolies in Byron Bay.

It is also important to highlight parental involvement and their needs, to be provided with support and resources including choices around affordable, safe, family friendly recreation and entertainment activities along with access to facilities and health promoting education.

In the LGSA publication, *Your council in your community*, 43% of respondents indicated they had a *Tobacco, alcohol and other drugs policy*. As mentioned earlier, a number of councils also have youth advisory councils with a separate strategy focussed on young people and related initiatives that are promoted on their websites. A brief list can be found at Appendix A.

Recommendations:

LGNSW recommendations are based on a whole of government and whole of community approach, and suggest NSW Department of Education and Communities take a lead role to:

1. Work in partnership with the Local Government Youth Advisory Councils across NSW (and their related networks) to assess their representative capacity in addressing local issues affecting young people;
2. Conduct research into the effectiveness of peer-education;
3. Develop age appropriate resources to further encourage peer-education including identifying alternative recreation options;
4. Investigate opportunities for mentoring programs for young people for the ages of 17 and 18 as they prepare to and as they enter licenced environments;
5. Provide appropriate resources using social media to increase the effect of peer education, challenging the myths and assumptions around drinking; and
6. Encourage a regional approach for areas with limited resources to identify suitable alternative recreation options that will meet the needs of young people.

c) Measures to minimise the impact of alcohol in the workplace

Previously the LGSA provided guidelines to assist and encourage councils to establish clear and consistent procedures for addressing risks to health and safety in the workplace associated with the inappropriate use of alcohol and/or other drugs. These guidelines were developed in close consultation and partnership with Work Cover Australia to improve the health and safety of people in their workplace. LGNSW will continue this approach.

It is anticipated that the Healthy Worker Initiative through the Australian and NSW Government may be able to provide resources on further research to support Local Government NSW in this preventative measure to further minimise the impact of alcohol in council workplaces.

Cancer Council NSW have also produced a resource kit, in partnership with other key stakeholders including then LGSA, which includes an information sheet on how to address alcohol in workplace policy in council settings and in the community more broadly.

Recommendation:

1. Australian and State Governments to support organisations to address alcohol related issues in the workplace;
2. Australian and State Governments to conduct an evaluation to determine the effectiveness of workplace policy on drugs and alcohol through its uptake and impact;

d) The effectiveness of measures to reduce drink driving

Local Government NSW is working closely with the Australian Drug Foundation NSW on the Good Sports program through sports clubs in communities by providing these clubs with appropriate resources to deliver the key messages around responsible drinking and as a result responsible driving. The Good Sports program is also funded by Transport NSW's Centre of Road Safety. Partnering with the NSW Department of Sports and Recreation has provided further access to the community through the Department's contact with local sporting communities. The program's focus on young people is inclusive and considers the diversity in cultures and engaging with young Aboriginal people and their communities.

Funding through NSW Department of Attorney General & Justice has also provided an avenue through council's crime prevention plans to target alcohol related assault by assisting in alternative transport options which again addresses the issues around drink driving.

Kempsey Shire Council trialled a night ride bus for 3 months between 8pm-12.30am costing \$1200 each week as alternative transport to reduce levels of alcohol related assault and drink driving. However this was not successful or financially viable because people did not want to travel alongside others under the influence of alcohol and the bus was unable to provide drop-offs to individual residences. As a result, a Taxi Voucher Scheme was introduced which is ongoing. Supported by the RMS Plan B initiative, the Local Liquor Accord was able to use RMS promotion material along with funding \$10 vouchers for taxi fares that are distributed and logged by licensed premises between 8pm – 12.30pm. At this stage there have been no complaints received by taxi drivers (any incidence of anti-social behaviour can easily be tracked back to a particular licenced premise in the regional town context). These vouchers can be distributed wherever council approves e.g. special events such as race day.

Byron Shire Council has supported the creative development of the Byron Youth Solutions auspiced Byron Youth Theatre in Education (BYTE), which enables youth delivered theatre performances and discussions addressing young people's drug and alcohol abuse, violence, drink driving and mental health. This program is actioned within the schools in Shire, garnering positive responses from young people engaging in the performances and discussions, many citing in their feedback a greater awareness of facts around drug and alcohol abuse.

Recommendations:

1. NSW Government to assist community driven programs in gaining access to resources to conduct evaluation to build an evidence base that is accessible by councils and communities;
2. Work across NSW Government Departments, including the Division of Local Government, to align strategies which lead to a reduction in alcohol related harm;
3. Where possible, ensure that there is national alignment in approaches to reducing drink driving to further enable councils bordering two States and Territories and across regions;
4. Australian and NSW Government to provide translatable evidence at the Local Government Area level that can be used for the long term planning of strategies, programs and policies to address alcohol related harm in the community with a focus on young people;

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

Local Liquor Accords

Liquor Accords are formed on a voluntary basis with Local Government as a key stakeholder along with local police, local licensees and community members. This approach reinforces a strong emphasis on partnerships within a community, to effectively address the issue of alcohol related violence. It is absolutely essential that all liquor licensees are active members of the locally established Liquor Accords.

Some examples of Local Liquor Accords & associated projects:

- Kempsey Shire Council - Membership includes the Local Area Command Licensing Sergeant, Council Community Development Officer, RMS Officer and Licensees. Meetings are held quarterly with reports tabled by the Police and Council. Projects of the Kempsey LLA include: responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) course funded by the LLA and run through TAFE NSW where 180 students participated in the course with a component about binge drinking taught in addition to standard course content.
- Blue Mountains LLA. A new project is being developed and yet to be finalised, initiated by the licensees to encourage (target) young people to have a good time while they are in licensed premises. Aspects included in this project include: what a venue expects from their patrons, ensuring that a venue supports all people to have a good time, responsible service of alcohol and getting the message across that people do not have to consume alcohol just because they are in a licensed venue – there are other options.

Alcohol Free Zones and Alcohol Prohibited Areas

Alcohol Free Zones (AFZ) and Alcohol Prohibited Areas (APA) are key tools used by councils to control the presence of alcohol in public open spaces including on footpaths, in parks and on beaches. They are implemented to promote and ensure community safety as part of a crime prevention strategy via the removal of alcohol affected behaviours. AFZ and APA are commonly enforced by local police through a vital partnership approach with councils, in some areas council enforcement officers monitor and enforce these restrictions.

Council identification of priority areas for AFZ and APA often occurs through community consultation along with knowledge of the local areas where people gather. Hotspots often include malls, CBDs, and areas near licenced premises. An additional issue is created by holiday environments with councils using time restrictions in parks/BBQ areas allowing alcohol during socialising hours.

It was reported in the then Department of Local Government's (DLG) *Evaluation on Alcohol Free Zones* that young people were not aware of the existence of AFZs. As highlighted, AFZ have been established throughout councils across NSW where in some cases the whole town has initiated this approach as an early intervention measure to reduce alcohol related harm in their communal areas.

Assessment and planning

Councils are consent authorities under the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (currently under review). They have the responsibility to regulate the environmental and social impacts of licensed premises through the development application process.

As the consent authority, councils advocate for more opportunities to work with the NSW and Australian Governments to ensure that an appropriate number of liquor outlets exist in each community. LGNSW call for increased power at the Local Government level, through legislation, to enable councils to regulate the environmental, health and social impacts of licensed premises. Further to this, the LGNSW recommend that the control of hours of licensed premises should also revert to councils.

The over-arching premise on which the majority of local, state and national alcohol harm reduction actions plans are based recognise that alcohol is a significant and in many cases legitimate aspect of Australian culture. Alcohol holds a prominent position in our diverse communities with a number of different sectors invested in its supply, promotion, service, regulation, harm minimisation and enforcement measures.

The density of outlets and the negative social and health impacts these can have on different communities is important to consider in relation to the availability, supply and consumption of alcohol by minors. Councils in some areas including Sydney's fringe, have reported the difficulty of taking into consideration the social and health factors in order to challenge a successful development approval. The NSW Government's response to these concerns is that planning regulations should not be used to restrict competition; the benefits of restrictions should outweigh the costs of the planning objectives.

Limiting the supply of alcohol by limiting the number of liquor outlets is an important step to reducing the incidence of alcohol related harm. Councils are well placed to support a competitive retail environment that includes licensed venues in the best interests of their local communities.

A number of metropolitan and regional councils have been identified in the media expressing their concerns regarding another supermarket chain's plans to sell alcohol in over 100 of its NSW stores. Community stakeholders including councils are concerned that many of these outlets are targeting low socio-economic areas and could exacerbate alcohol related harm increasing demand on hospital, emergency and community health services.

In 2011 the then Local Government Association Executive resolved to approach the Australian Government and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) with concerns regarding the possible detrimental impact on local communities of the proposal by the Australian Association of Convenience Stores to sell alcohol in local petrol stations where there is an attached convenience store. This resolution identified the exception for communities where there is only one outlet.

LGNSW recognises the importance of commercial investment, expansion and competition for the purpose of providing communities with a healthy and vibrant economy. We are concerned however that there is increasing research emerging regarding the negative health impacts on individuals and communities due to the level and frequency of alcohol supply, consumption and related harms. It is vital that an approach to harm minimisation in this area, with particular emphasis on children and young people, takes into account the availability of alcohol in a community and treats the number of liquor outlets as an important risk factor in increasing the availability of alcohol to minors.

For example in *Kempsey Shire Council* - Development Applications (DA's) received by council for liquor outlets and licenced premises are automatically referred to the Community Development Council Officer as well as the LAC Licensing Sergeant to work through and assess. These officers can make an appropriate recommendation and also canvas views from people in the community. Effective community engagement is important when addressing the issue of alcohol levels of supply and resulting social impact, and therefore requires appropriate resourcing. It can be difficult for councils to challenge a liquor license DA which increases liquor supply in an area, without community support.

Recommendation:

1. NSW Government should increase the capacity of Local Government, as the consent authority monitoring the number of liquor outlets in different communities and the associated impacts, to address the issue of the supply of alcohol as a strategy to reduce alcohol related harm;

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

"One day someone is going to sit down and weigh up the benefit in terms of taxes to government from the sale of alcohol, against the detriment or the cost to governments of servicing the consequences of violence." (Four Corners, ABC website and screened on Mon 25 Feb 2013)

The NSW Health Student Behaviours Survey in 2008 reported that 56.1% of students aged 12 – 17 years had reported that they had consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months and 20.4% had consumed alcohol in the last 7 days. Of those who had consumed alcohol in the last 7 days, these were consumed at a party (30.3%), at home (27.9%), at a friend's place (19.5%). Again highlighting the role parents play in educating children on alcohol consumption and appropriate behaviours as well as Government and community's roles in providing alternative recreational activities and supportive and safe environment.

The ABC's Four Corners program aired on Monday 25 February revealed that the latest figures show that each year as many as 70,000 people are involved in alcohol-related assaults having a huge impact on Australia's hospital, police and emergency services staff. The program estimated that alcohol-related violence costs the community \$187 million each year.

Several Local Government Areas (LGAs) that reveal significant rates of hospitalisation due to alcohol abuse are also areas with low socioeconomic status as well as being categorised as remote or very remote in the context of service availability (LGSA, 2009). It is important to acknowledge the issue of social disadvantage in the context of providing support and targeting resources toward young people at additional risk of alcohol related harm.

Councils are increasingly diverting their own resources to address the incidence of mental health issues in the community. Councils are frequently partnering with community

organisations to adequately and appropriately address these issues. Given the recent establishment of the NSW Mental Health Commission, LGNSW will be looking for increased NSW government leadership on tackling these far reaching issues.

Byron Shire Council's issue of alcohol related violence is not a new one for Byron Bay. Recent media has once again identified the town centre as a hotspot for assaults identifying a rise of 20% in incidents since 2009-2010. Byron Shire Council is taking on a lead role in addressing not only the issues around alcohol and drugs, but broadening the set of factors to include mental health with a focus on young people.

g) Other related matters

Children's play spaces in licensed premises

Currently under the present licensing laws in NSW a minor can remain on licensed premises while they remain under the care of an adult. It is concerning that a situation is occurring where in licensed premises there is an area set aside which is designed to entertain minors and may include television and game consoles where children are left while their parents participate in the club's activities and services.

This may lead to parents staying at the club for longer periods of time along with their children who remain in an unsupervised environment within a licensed premise. This situation can also contribute to a normalising of the culture within a family and a community. The question needs to be revisited in this context as to what point should children be removed from licensed premises.

Combination of the abuse of alcohol and drugs

Local Government are becoming concerned with the **combined** abuse of alcohol and drugs that is growing in some of the communities. Given the continued stretch on limited resources to address the issue of alcohol abuse alone, LGNSW would like consideration be given to investigating this.

Recommendation:

1. The Australian Government look into developing a national set of standards for licensed premises where allocated spaces are set up for children and young people's unsupervised recreation purposes;
2. The NSW and Australian Government consider investigating the matter of the abuse of combined alcohol and other drugs that is increasing.

Conclusion

This submission brings to light the role of Local Government, its capacity as a sector, to respond to the issue of alcohol abuse in young people. We recommend that a whole of government and multi-sector approach is needed to address these issues in order to ensure that as a community and a society we recognise our responsibility in the care and protection of younger generations.

The ABC's Four Corners program *Punch Drunk* aired an interview with a representative from the Australian Hotels Association (AHA) who argued that alcohol was not the only cause of violence and its increasing intensity, pointing the finger instead at the issue of explicit drug use. We are concerned by a distinct lack of engagement and recognition of the seriousness of the issue of alcohol abuse by this sector leader.

LGNSW acknowledges that there is already an extensive research base to draw on in the area of alcohol and drug related harm issues and strategies to reduce this harm. We acknowledge that there is evidence to support strategies including: restrictions on trading hours of licenced premises, restrictions on outlet density, restricting the services and sale of alcohol to intoxicated persons and increased taxation on alcohol purchases. Local Government is certainly a key stakeholder in identifying the problems and designing and implementing strategies, and LGNSW believes that with significant support from other spheres of Government along with the community sector and the liquor industry we help to address these issues at a local level.

This submission highlights the work that is being conducted in councils across NSW and we have provided examples. It is important to note that there is still a long way to go to adequately address the issue of alcohol abuse in young people and create the necessary and lasting social change. Engaging with youth, through youth advisory councils where they exist, will extend the coverage and success of these programs.

LGNSW recommends a framework be developed involving all stakeholders as identified in this submission including young people and their families most importantly. We believe that if addressed at a whole of government and whole of community level the positive effect will be felt by our health system and its workforce.

References:

Newcastle City Council

Safe Newcastle: Alcohol Management Strategy for The City of Newcastle 2010-2013

http://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/138284/Alcohol_Management_Strategy_V2.pdf

Local Government and Shires Association of NSW

Alcohol and Other Drugs: A reference. 2009

A reference guide to provide councils, regardless of their current level of involvement with community drug and alcohol issues, as a practical resource.

Punch Drunk, ABC Four Corners, Monday 25 February 2013

<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2013/02/25/3695353.htm>

Unicef: Life skills – peer education

http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_12078.html

Population Council: Peer Education and HIV/Aids

http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/peer_ed.pdf

Additional resources:

Alcohol Advertising Review Board website: www.alcoholadreview.com.au

The Foundation of Alcohol Research and Evaluation www.fare.org.au

Appendix

This is a sample of different approaches to providing programs targeting young people and highlighting the differing levels of council resourcing in this area of community service. Links provided below

1. Auburn City Council – [Youth Strategy 2013-2016](#)
2. Blue Mountains City Council – Youth Services in the Blue Mountains
[Options to Reduce Youth Alcohol Related Harm](#)
3. Byron Shire Council – [Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2015](#)
4. Caronne Council – [Youth & Volunteer Services](#)
5. City of Sydney – [Young people](#)
6. City of Lake Macquarie – [Youth Services](#)
7. Coolamon Shire Council – [Youth Services](#)
8. Dubbo City Council – [Youth Services](#)
9. Fairfield City Council – [draft Strategy for Young People in Fairfield City](#)
10. Gilgandra Shire Council – [Youth Services](#)
11. Holroyd City Council – [Youth](#)
12. Kempsey Shire Council – [Youth Services](#)
13. Kiama Municipal Council – [Youth Centre and Services](#)
14. Kogarah City Council – [Youth Strategy Identifies the National Binge Drinking Strategy in Youth Policy Context](#)
15. Ku-ring-gai Council – [Youth](#)
16. Lane Cove Council – [Synergy Youth Centre](#)
17. Leichhardt Municipal Council – [Youth Initiatives](#)
18. Liverpool City Council – [Liverpool Youth Strategy 2012-2017 and Action Plan 2012-2013](#)
19. Marrickville Council – [Youth Strategy 2009-2011](#)
20. Newcastle City Council – [Commitment to Youth & The Loft Youth Service](#)
21. North Sydney Council – [Lower North Shore Youth Resources](#)
22. Orange City Council – [Community Services, Young People](#)
23. Port Macquarie-Hastings Council – [Youth Services](#)
24. Richmond Valley Council – [Youth & Children](#)
25. Shoalhaven City Council – [Youth Services](#)
26. Strathfield Council – [Children and Youth Services](#)
27. Sutherland Shire Council – [Young People](#)
28. The Hills Shire Council – [Youth website](#)
29. Tumut Shire Council – [Youth Council](#)
30. Wollondilly Shire Council – [Youth Development and 2010 Youth Area Action Plan](#)
31. Wollongong City Council – [Young programs and support](#)