

Submission
No 1

INQUIRY INTO ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN PUBLIC PLACES (LIBERALISATION) BILL 2024

Organisation: Alcohol and Drug Foundation

Date Received: 12 July 2024

12 July 2024

Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

To the members of the Committee,

Re: Alcohol Consumption in Public Places (Liberalisation) Bill 2024

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) thanks the committee for the opportunity to comment on this bill. The ADF delivers evidence-based approaches to minimise alcohol and other drug harm. We recognise the power of strong communities and the important role they play in preventing problems occurring in the first place. A community-centric approach is at the heart of everything we do.

The ADF is supportive of health-based, rather than criminal responses to alcohol and other drug use and harm in the community. Current responses to alcohol consumption in public places vary in NSW based on council by-laws, with police in some instances having the opportunity to issue infringement notices. The use of infringement notices may lead to individuals at greater risk of contact with police experiencing financial harms, which may be exacerbated if an individual is experiencing other challenges like lack of stable accommodation, or alcohol dependence. As with our support for the recently expanded police drug diversion scheme, we would instead support opportunities for referrals to health supports where appropriate for individuals consuming alcohol in public.

However, we do not support the object of this bill to allow alcohol consumption in public places. Individuals can currently consume alcohol in many licensed venues around the state, and in private places. Alcohol causes significant harm to the community in NSW every year and causes real costs to the health system. Existing measures to minimise harm from alcohol include RSA on alcohol sales in both on and off-premises outlets. Allowing public consumption may have the effect of removing the ability to manage intoxication by limiting the supply of alcohol, while heightening the risk of an individual being intoxicated in public. Recent research has shown that more than 1 in 3 Australians experienced harm from others alcohol use in 2021.¹ The research showed that women bear a higher burden of harm in the community. Given significant social concern about gender-based violence and harm to women in the community, we are concerned that this bill could accelerate these harms. Additionally, the research showed that men also experience harm from others due to their drinking and are more likely to experience it from strangers. This risk of harm may also be exacerbated where restrictions on public drinking are removed.

Allowing unfettered consumption of alcohol in public spaces can have the effect of normalisation of alcohol consumption outside of licenced or private settings, which may in turn lead to higher rates of consumption. This in turn may place higher demand on alcohol and other drug treatment services in NSW, leading to delays in access to treatment and further harms experienced within the community. This bill may also have the effect of exposing more young people to drinking and to alcohol branding from a young age. Research is clear that exposure to alcohol consumption is a predictor of risk for alcohol harm later in life.^{2,3} Additionally, we know that exposure to alcohol branding is also a driver of risk for harm from alcohol later in life.^{4,5} Both of these established causes for heightened risk of harm would be present in scenarios where drinking in public is normalized. While we do not want to see criminalisation as a result of this approach, the ADF supports existing restrictions on alcohol consumption in public in order to minimise the already significant public health impacts of alcohol use in NSW.

Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Sincerely,

Robert Taylor

Manager – Policy & Engagement

References

1. Laslett A-M, Room R, Kuntsche S, Anderson-Luxford D, Willoughby B, Doran C, et al. Alcohol's harm to others in 2021: Who bears the burden? *Addiction*. 2023;n/a(n/a); Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/add.16205>.
2. Voogt C, Smit K, Kleinjan M, Otten R, Scheffers T, Kuntsche E. From Age 4 to 8, Children Become Increasingly Aware About Normative Situations for Adults to Consume Alcohol. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*. 2019;55(1):104-11 [cited 2/11/2022]; Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/alcalc/agz093>.
3. Voogt C, Beusink M, Kleinjan M, Otten R, Engels R, Smit K, et al. Alcohol-related cognitions in children (aged 2–10) and how they are shaped by parental alcohol use: A systematic review. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. 2017;177:277-90; Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0376871617302363>.
4. Jernigan D, Noel J, Landon J, Thornton N, Lobstein T. Alcohol marketing and youth alcohol consumption: a systematic review of longitudinal studies published since 2008. *Addiction*. 2017;112(S1):7-20; Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/add.13591>.
5. Hastings G, Anderson S, Cooke E, Gordon R. Alcohol marketing and young people's drinking: A review of the research. *Journal of Public Health Policy*. 2005;26(3):296-311.