



Missed Opportunity – Victorian Government tinkers with reforms to reduce alcohol-driven harm

August 2021

There is a strong association between the provision of alcohol people have delivered to their homes and the level of family violence in an area. While alcohol consumption does not cause family violence, alcohol acts as a fuel for family violence. The excessive supply of alcohol increases both the likelihood and severity of family violence. The World Health Organization, the Council of Australian Governments and the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence have recognised the association.

We are all made equally in the image of God, and God desires hope-filled lives for all of us. Our faith reminds us that to love God is also to love others as well as ourselves. When violence takes place in the home by trusted people, the violence has a deeper impact on those things that are foundational and life-giving in relationships; trust, respect, and a sense of being loved.

I married an abusive man who had a severe drinking problem. He would take days off of work and drink terribly. When he would drink, he would become particularly abusive.

I became pregnant, and it didn't stop him. He would still knock me down, shake me, and push me into walls.

Testimony by 'Lena' to the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria,
<https://www.dvrcv.org.au/stories/true-stories/stories-women/lenas-story>

Around 80 per cent of all alcohol consumed in Australia comes from bottle shops and places that allow people to take alcohol home or have the alcohol delivered. Victoria, along with New South Wales, has the highest level of take-home availability of all states.

The Victorian Government has introduced the *Liquor Control Reform Amendment Bill 2021* into Parliament. While the Bill contains some worthwhile reforms to stem the growth in alcohol-related harm, the Bill is a missed opportunity to introduce necessary reforms. If nothing is done, there will continue to be growth in the number of businesses pushing alcohol out into communities already saturated with alcohol outlets. In addition, there will continue to be growth in poorly regulated home delivery. The current Bill offers some light touch reforms to curb the increase in family violence and other harms fuelled by the massive growth in rapid home delivery businesses.

The Bill gives the green light to fast food outlets seeking to supply alcohol and provide home delivery. The increased liquor outlets will mean existing alcohol businesses will need to aggressively market their products to try and hold market share. The result will drive up harmful drinking in the process.

There have been huge increases in hospital presentations and ambulance attendances for alcohol-fuelled injuries and violence over past years:

- Ambulance attendances for alcohol intoxication in metropolitan Melbourne increased by 339 per cent between 2007-08 and 2019-21, and by 81 per cent in regional Victoria between 2012-13 and 2019-20.
- The number of hospital admissions due to alcohol use in Victoria increased by 72 per cent from 2007-08 to 2018-19, from 21,239 to 36,480.

The number of liquor licences in Victoria has increased six-fold over the past 35 years. They have grown from fewer than 4,000 licences in 1986 to more than 24,500 licences and permits in 2021. New liquor licences continue to be granted at a rate outstripping population growth.

There is strong local evidence that the more liquor stores there are in an area, the higher the incidence of alcohol-fuelled violence, family violence, injuries and diseases in the local community. Victorian research has also shown that packaged liquor licences are disproportionately located in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.



Research has found that rapid alcohol delivery services are used regularly by high-risk drinkers and enable people who are already intoxicated to keep drinking. A 2020 VicHealth study of Victorians who use on-demand alcohol delivery services (before COVID-19 restrictions) found:

- nearly three-quarters of people who used on-demand delivery services weekly were very risky drinkers, consuming 11 or more alcoholic drinks in a session at least once a week;
- 40 per cent of people who used an alcohol delivery service weekly said they would have stopped drinking if the delivery service was not available; and
- more than 20 per cent of weekly users of alcohol delivery services (other than Airtasker) regularly received their alcohol orders despite already being intoxicated.

Currently, when an alcohol business breaches advertising restrictions about harmful advertising, it receives a notice from the regulator asking it to stop weeks after the advertising commences. In other states in Australia, such breaches attract a fine to deter harmful advertising.

What You Can Do

We need the Victorian Opposition to push the Andrews Government to embrace putting more reforms in their Bill. Write polite and respectful letters to:

Ms Steph Ryan

Shadow Minister for Gaming and Liquor
Regulation
25 Bridge Street East
Benalla, VIC 3672

Ms Emma Kealy

Shadow Minister for Prevention of Family
Violence
PO Box 41
Horsham, VIC 3402

Salutation: Dear Ms Ryan

Salutation: Dear Ms Kealy

The Hon Michael O'Brien

Leader of the Opposition
313-315 Waverley Road
Malvern East, VIC 3145

Salutation: Dear Mr O'Brien

Points to make in your letters:

- Express concern at the increase in alcohol-fuelled harm in the Victorian community, especially the contribution that the growth in-home delivery has on family violence.
- Ask that the Victorian Liberal and National Parties seek to amend the *Liquor Control Reform Amendment Bill 2021* to stem alcohol-fuelled harm in Victoria further.
- Ask specially for them to seek to include in the Bill measures to:
 - Require a delay of two hours between order and delivery of home delivery alcohol (except with a meal) to stop rapid alcohol supply to people who may be intoxicated or dealing with alcohol dependence.
 - Limit alcohol deliveries to between 10 am and 10 pm to reduce family violence and suicide risks, which peak late at night in the home.
 - Require online age verification through digital ID checks when alcohol is ordered online to ensure alcohol is not sold to children.
 - Ban any further fast food outlets from becoming de facto bottle shops, selling packaged alcohol and doing home delivery.
 - Give local councils, police and community members the right to apply to the Minister for a freeze on new liquor outlets in a local area with a high risk of alcohol-fuelled harm.
 - Ensure alcohol businesses will receive a significant fine when they breach advertising restrictions.
 - Ensure alcohol retailers cannot target their online advertising based on past purchases or website browsing data to prevent targeting people with vulnerabilities such as those with alcohol dependence.

For the research and evidence to back the recommended reforms go to <https://www.alcoholchangevic.org.au/our-work/position-statements>