



ALCOHOL HARM PREVENTION ICED AS FOLEY ABANDONS WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH INSTITUTE

17 June 2015: The Victorian Government looks set to cut off funding for Australia's world-leading alcohol policy research centre, threatening the future of the centre and raising concerns that the Andrews Government is no longer committed to preventing alcohol harms.

Alcohol continues to cause more harm throughout Australia than all illicit drugs combined, and in Victoria it is responsible for over ten times as many deaths. While New South Wales and Queensland policymakers embrace proven measures to reduce alcohol harms, the Victorian Government is dismantling any commitment that it had to addressing alcohol policy and appears to be singularly focused on its drug of choice: ice.

Established in 2006 and based in Melbourne, the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) is a unique research facility. CAPR's sole focus is on building the evidence base on alcohol and alcohol-related issues, and the centre's work has been recognised globally and endorsed by the World Health Organization.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says the Victorian Government's decision is a backward step that runs counter to Labor's pre-election promises and flies in the face of the state's increasing alcohol harms, with the latest data showing that in ten years alcohol-related hospital admissions have risen 53 per cent, and alcohol-related family violence has increased by 85 per cent.

"At a time when New South Wales and Queensland are leading the way in alcohol reform, the Victorian Government isn't just following a few steps behind, it's going in the complete opposite direction, first by watering down the freeze on late-night trading, and now with its decision to defund Australia's leading alcohol policy research institute; a move that runs counter to its pre-election promises to invest in medical research, to be a global leader and to support independent research in universities," Mr Thorn said.

One of the reasons given for not continuing funding for the Director was because of the government's focus on ice. Mr Thorn says efforts on combatting ice cannot be at the expense of the state's most pressing public health issue, and says with alcohol harms on the rise the Victoria Government should be doubling down on alcohol harm prevention, not slashing funding.

"We seem to have a government that is incapable of dealing with more than one public health problem at a time and that's a grave mistake. Alcohol is responsible for three deaths, 18 assaults and 81 hospital admissions every single day, and the problem is only getting worse. Now is the time to invest further in measures to reduce the harms, but instead this government sees fit to kick the nation's preeminent alcohol policy research institute to the curb," Mr Thorn said.

Since 2006 the Victorian Department of Health has provided funding for the position of director at the centre.



Foundation for Alcohol
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CAPR Director Professor Robin Room has worked in the drug and alcohol field for over 40 years. He has been an advisor to the World Health Organization since 1975, and in 2012 received the prestigious 2012 Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Drug and Alcohol Endeavours.

Mr Thorn says last year Labor promised the people of Victoria that it wanted to attract Australia's most talented scientists by implementing a funding model that recognises and respects the valuable work they do.

"It's extremely disappointing that, far from fulfilling its election promises to attract Australia's most talented scientists and further strengthen the state's research base, the Victorian Government is making decisions that threaten the world-renowned leadership and staff at an existing world-class institution," Mr Thorn said.

CAPR released ground-breaking research earlier this year exposing the full extent of alcohol-related family and domestic violence in Australia. The study, *The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families*, examined the prevalence and effects of heavy drinking on families and children, and followed the release of the internationally renowned report *The range and magnitude of alcohol's harm to others* (2010), which was the first to examine the harms from alcohol consumption on people other than the drinker.

Mr Thorn says CAPR's invaluable on-going work in the area of family violence is being jeopardised by a government supposedly seriously focused on family violence prevention.

"There's been an eight per cent increase in family violence across Victoria in the year 2013-14, and rightly so, the Premier saw fit to establish a Royal Commission into Family Violence in December last year. Six months on, it is baffling for the Victorian Government to withdraw funding from an institute that is leading the world in research examining the links between alcohol and family violence and exploring policy measures that would prevent such harms," Mr Thorn said.

Michael Thorn is available for comment.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.