

Community organisations call on Victorian Parliament to prioritise preventing alcohol harm

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The health and wellbeing of our communities will be at risk from increasing alcohol harm if the Victorian Parliament fails to amend the Liquor Control Reform Amendment Bill 2021 later this month.

At a time when alcohol harm in the home is increasing in Victoria, a collaboration of health and community organisations are urgently calling on the Victorian Parliament to amend the Bill to prioritise the health and safety of the community, by introducing:

1. Online age verification for alcohol purchases, to ensure alcohol isn't sold to children
2. A commitment to further review and monitor the growth in online alcohol sales and delivery to Victorian homes,
3. A delay of two hours between online alcohol orders and home delivery, to stop the rapid supply of alcohol to people who may be intoxicated or dealing with alcohol dependence, and
4. Greater community input on liquor store developments, particularly for big alcohol warehouses in local communities.

In the past year, there have been concerning increases in alcohol harm:

- The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) reported that seven out of ten alcohol and other drug treatment agencies had seen an increase in both people presenting for alcohol as the primary drug of concern, as well as the severity of alcohol related presentations with waitlists for treatment increasing by 50 per cent since 2019,
- The number of ambulance callouts to the home for alcohol intoxication in Victoria between January and September has increased during 2020 compared with 2019 – from 13,554 to 14,717,
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released data showing an 8.3 per cent increase of alcohol-induced deaths in Australia between 2019 and 2020. In addition, in Victoria during 2020, alcohol contributed to the fatal overdose of 50 women, this being the highest figure among this cohort since the Coroner's Court has been collecting fatal overdose data (2010); and
- A report by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) found that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been an increase in alcohol sales into Victorian homes of \$800 million between 2019 and 2020 – that's an extra \$15 million in sales each week.

Alcohol Change Vic Spokesperson Sarah Jackson called on the Victorian Parliament to strengthen the Bill by introducing safeguards for alcohol delivery and help prevent alcohol-related family violence and other harms.

“The increased supply of alcohol into homes is causing harm, leading to more people seeking help, more people ending up in hospital, and tragically, more people dying from harmful alcohol use,” Ms Jackson said.

“The Victorian Parliament has an opportunity to prevent further harm and devastation to our families and communities by introducing common-sense measures such as a two-hour delay between order and delivery of alcohol.”

Andrew Bruun, CEO of Youth Support + Advocacy Service (YSAS) that provides alcohol and other drug services for young people, said that young Victorians and their families should be kept safe through harm minimisation.

“If the Liquor Reform Amendment Bill passes in its current form, it will create ID loopholes for liquor apps that put young people at risk.”

“Young people are going to take risks, we know that, and it’s our responsibility as a society to minimise harm.”

Michael Perusco, CEO of one of Victoria’s largest child and family services providers, Berry Street, said alcohol is a risk factor in family violence, and the Bill needs to be strengthened.

“We must prioritise the health and safety of Victorian families. This legislation is an opportunity to minimise the harm alcohol can cause to families. If this Bill isn’t amended, our communities will continue to be at risk from increasing alcohol harm,” Mr Perusco said.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) CEO Caterina Giorgi, said that now is the time to act, given the concerning increases in harm since the pandemic began.

“We should prevent alcohol harm before it happens, but when that opportunity is missed, and harms are increasing right before our eyes, we must urgently act,” Ms Giorgi said.

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