

A Guide for the Health Sector on Partnerships to Reduce Intoxication Violence and Injury in the Licensed Environment

Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Services
Queensland Health



Queensland Government
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Safety Action

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This document is intended as a guide for the health sector and is here referred to as *the Guide*. Below is an outline of costs and harms related to alcohol, risks and benefits of consumption, Queensland consumption levels, trends and patterns. The relevance of the Guide to health workers, policy developers, planners and funders is set out, followed by the Guide itself.

Costs and harms

Alcohol use costs to Queensland are estimated to be the order of \$779.4 million annually. Alcohol figures prominently in a range of health harms and is responsible in total for the death of 628 Queenslanders annually. Road injuries (37.9 per cent), suicide (32 per cent), falls (13.9 per cent) and assaults (10.3 per cent) are prominent causes of these deaths. 23.6 per cent of injuries and 27.2 per cent of injuries resulting in death are alcohol-related. Young people suffer disproportionately on the roads. Post mortem results for drivers and riders aged 17 – 24 years who were tested for alcohol, indicate 44 per cent had consumed alcohol before the incident.

Analysis of studies in the fields of alcohol and of violence indicate that alcohol is involved in up to half of all violent crime. A Police study in South East Queensland has revealed that over a third of all incidents in inner city areas are related to alcohol and that the drug is associated with 82 per cent of serious assaults, 64 per cent of attempted suicides, 63 per cent of street disturbances, 53 per cent of domestic disturbances and 46 per cent of less serious assaults. Licensed premises and immediate environs account for 44 per cent of all alcohol-related police incidents. Studies of hotels and clubs in New South Wales and Queensland indicate that intoxication is a significant factor in predicting violence. Other important factors are groups of male strangers, low comfort, high boredom, poor customer flow design, crowding within the venue, aggressive and unreasonable security and floor staff and refusal of service that is too late and inappropriately conducted.

Risks and benefits

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that for low risk, maximum daily consumption not exceed four standard drinks for men and two for women and that there be two alcohol-free days each week. The Council also recommends no consumption when pregnant, driving, operating machinery or engaging in hazardous or potentially hazardous situations.

Much comment has been made recently in the public media regarding safe levels and the beneficial health effects under certain circumstances. What is clear from recent research is that for men under 40 years and women under 50 years, alcohol consumption is linked with increase in the death rate from all causes. However, there is a coronary heart disease and ischaemic stroke protective effect for men over 40 and women over 50 drinking up to about three drinks per day for men and one for women.

Consumption levels

From a peak in the early 1980s, per capita consumption of alcohol in Australia and Queensland has been largely in decline. In 1993, Queenslanders aged 15 and over consumed less alcohol compared to 1989 (11.7 litres of pure alcohol per year down to 10.9 litres, a fall of 6.8 per cent). Nevertheless, a number of areas of the State have figured prominently in international comparison. In 1993, the consumption of residents in the Peninsula and Torres Strait Health Region was significantly greater than that of the citizens of Luxembourg, the world's highest consuming country at that time. While drinking by students in Years 7 and 8 is usually quite limited, by Year 12 (age 17) average weekly consumption rises to eight drinks for males and six for females. Young people's perceptions and use of alcohol are important in setting adult patterns. A greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are non-consumers (37 per cent in 1994) than the general population (22 per cent). However, for those who are current drinkers, there is cause for concern because of their levels of consumption.

Patterns

Recent research indicates that patterns of use are probably more potent predictors of harm levels than consumption level alone. A greater proportion of urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders drink at hazardous or harmful levels than do the general population (82 per cent cf 28 per cent). For young people in particular, consumption is sometimes at binge levels (5 or more drinks on one occasion). For the young and adults alike, overall consumption does not need to have reached hazardous or harmful levels for concern over health and safety to be warranted. Infrequent though binges may be, they greatly increase risk and incidence of injury, assault, road traffic, legal and other problems.

The role of the health sector in minimising intoxication, violence and injury in the licensed environment.

Health workers

The health sector has an important role in minimising intoxication, violence and injury in the licensed environment. Few health workers are experienced in understanding, interpreting and working effectively in the regulatory and commercial enterprise worlds of the alcohol industry. To assist these workers operate in such a complex system, the Guide provides coherent advice for developing partnerships, planning and timely, effective action.

Policy developers, planners and funders

Planners and those setting broad health goals will find the Guide useful in its description of an important path for achieving health gains. Those making decisions on funding at corporate and local levels will be assisted to maximise their targeting, budget allocation and the impact of scarce resources. There is sound argument for funding the kinds of interventions described in the case studies and the evaluated interventions, described in the support material to the Guide, available from the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Services in Corporate Office. Such interventions can produce immediate savings in terms of ambulance and hospital costs as well as police, legal and insurance costs. One example of this approach is the Surfers Paradise Safety Action project.

Other sectors and partners

The Guide will also be of interest to local authority project officers, planners and community groups. Accordingly, useful contributions which these groups can make are outlined. Such information will assist health workers to better understand the world of their inter-sectoral partners in these interventions.

The Guide

to partnerships to minimise intoxication, violence and injury in the licensed environment

Partners

The Guide outlines the types of contribution each organisation or level in the partnership can make in order to minimise alcohol-related harm. Key partners are:

- State government departments
- Local government authorities
- The research community
- Licensed venues
- District and local public sector and non-government services
- Community organisations

Supportive actions by each partner

Whole of government level

Coordination at this level is usually directed at major issues and priorities. Strategic policies and priorities at the whole of government level can play an important part in assisting departments and business partners to develop appropriate legislation and procedures respectively, to minimise alcohol-related harm. Support at this level will depend in part on where alcohol-related harm minimisation initiatives fit in the overall mix of priorities. There will be many competing issues such as the state's economic development, the perceptions of business and the costs to police, emergency services and hospitals.

State government departments - corporate office

Key contributions at this level will occur where corporate offices of departments:

- Ensure consistency between legislation within their jurisdiction and agreed national and state strategic directions on minimising harms
- Keep policy and practice up to date in terms of research findings
- Develop sound guidelines and projects consistent with research-based best practice to minimise intoxication and alcohol-related violence and injury
- Ensure that procedural guidelines, staffing capacity and enforcement procedures provide informed support for harm minimisation

- Maintain appropriate levels of consultation and collaboration with other departments and partners at industry, community and consumer levels
- Foster collaboration and partnerships by their district and local service providers with local officers of all relevant departments, industry and community organisations
- Ensure policy and field staff receive training support and operational direction consistent with harm minimisation
- Ensure information systems appropriate for monitoring progress, impacts and outcomes are in place
- In particular, Queensland Health corporate office seeks to build healthy public policy. In so doing, Health plays a facilitation role with partner organisations by: providing resource/guideline documents and frameworks for action based on research, funding pilot projects and their evaluation, and promoting sustainability through legislative and operational support by partner organisations such as local government authorities, Liquor Licensing, Police and venues.

Local government authorities

These are well placed to facilitate and to support public health and safety by providing input to the licensing process and by developing supportive council by-laws, taking on the *Healthy Cities and Shires* framework and developing community health and safety plans and provisions. The contributions by local authorities to the minimisation of alcohol-related harm will be enhanced when they:

- Keep abreast of local concerns and priorities in the development of council programs and budgets
- Develop policies, health plans, safe city priorities and administrative provisions within an overall *Healthy Cities and Shires* framework that support minimisation of harm in the licensed environment
- Develop sound by-laws in relation to wet and dry areas
- Collaborate with all relevant state departments, industry associations and managers, community organisations and partners. It is often helpful for local authorities to provide local coordination between the various partners in these projects

The academic research community

This partner has a central place in informing such activities. Evaluation and review of existing strategies and trialing of new models is essential if we are to progress harm minimisation strategies in the licensed environment setting. Academic partners can assist us to:

- Ensure projects are informed by current research on what works best
- Maintain contacts with similar centres in Australia and further afield
- Maintain scientific independence with respect to measurement and evaluation of outcomes

Licensed venues

Particular areas of policy and practice have been identified as crucial to minimising harm and maximising public health, related to alcohol use. These have also been found to assist in attracting moderate drinking patrons, thereby improving image and profitability. Licensed venues and events will contribute to the minimisation of alcohol-related harm if they take the following measures:

- **Discounting:** low and non-alcohol drinks and snacks are discounted, with no extensive happy hours and other discount incentives for binge drinking
- **Promotions:** promotional materials and activities encourage responsible, rather than excessive drinking
- **Pricing:** low alcohol beer is substantially cheaper than regular strength
- **Information for staff:** written, responsible house policies are well communicated to staff
- **Information for customers:** signage features responsible promotions, legal requirements and standard drinks information
- **Underage policies:** instructions are given and enforced for identifying of underage patrons and refusing their admission and service
- **Low and non alcohol products:** a good range of low and non alcohol drinks is available and promoted
- **Intoxication/drunkenness:** instructions to refuse entry or serve are enforced. Strategies are in place to help patrons avoid excessively rapid consumption and to deal with shouts/rounds that are contributing to undue intoxication
- **Food:** a range of snacks or meals is available whenever the venue is open
- **Entertainment:** entertainment is varied attracting a mix of clientele and promoting a responsible atmosphere. (Loud, frantic music is associated in Australian licensed venue studies with increased violence by intoxicated patrons)
- **Transport policies:** transport is facilitated for intoxicated patrons regardless of time of day or night. Particular care is taken in the case of intoxicated patrons who are alone and therefore more vulnerable to attack, falls and pedestrian injuries
- **Serve size:** size restrictions apply – no large glasses, jugs or double/triple strength drinks
- **Staff drinking:** no staff drinking at the venue, particularly before or during their rostered hours
- **Problem drinking patrons:** a firm but respectful approach is used for dealing with patrons who are referred on for possible assistance
- **Community relations:** venue managers recognise the standards sought by the surrounding community and maintain good links with other community organisations and facilities. Venue managers collaborate with relevant departments and community organisations in strategies to minimise harm related to alcohol and the licensed environment

- **Personnel:** recruitment, communication, management, training and support all focus on responsible hospitality
- **Security:** recruitment, presentation, demeanour and training of staff all foster maintenance of a courteous and professional security team who are vitally involved in the responsible venue strategy
- **Cultural:** signage, entertainment and promotions are culturally sensitive. Good relations are maintained with key cultural group leaders. Issues are well managed
- **Environmental design:** internal venue layout provides adequate and unhindered patron movement between key parts of the facility such as entrance, bar, dance floors, toilets and emergency exits. Adequate space and seating is provided for the numbers admitted. (Crowding and poor design force disparate groups of young males into space competition and physical contact, with increased likelihood of violence)

Public sector and non-government services at regional and local levels

Community-based public and non-government sector alcohol and drug agencies can play an important part in generating healthy change within local communities and at regional levels. They are part of the local systems that can have a positive influence on marketing, promotion, licensed venue practices, hours of operation, alcohol consumption norms, and effects on the individual, family, social and work groups. They can be potent representatives of the perceptions and expectations of a wide range of professional groups and consumer populations. Public sector and non-government programs that engage in community facilitation, development and advocacy will enhance their effectiveness in minimising intoxication, violence and injury related to the licensed environment when they incorporate the following steps into their regular operations:

- Ensure ongoing liaison with other licensed environment partners including the local government authority, liquor licensing, police, health, tourism, transport, education, family, youth and community services, licensed venue associations (such as hotels association, nightclubs/cabarets association), sobering up centres, and organisations such as sexual assault centres and alcohol and drug action groups
- Participate in local and regional projects to minimise harm related to the licensed environment
- Local health promotion and/or district prevention services provide population health input and support to specific initiatives such as safety action projects
- Maintain current knowledge and application of best practice interventions in minimising harm related to the licensed environment
- Ensure local ideas, progress and concerns are communicated to appropriate local and regional forums and authorities, as well as to corporate offices within departments
- Ensure appropriate information systems are in place for monitoring progress, impacts and outcomes of projects in which they participate

Community partner organisations

A number of community organisations will have a stake in ensuring effective procedures are in place to minimise harm related to licensed environments. Some will be at the forefront of informed public support and critical comment. Such organisations have an opportunity to be cooperatively involved with the other agencies listed above, in the process of addressing their members' or interest groups' issues. The impact of these organisations will be enhanced if they:

- Maintain current knowledge of best practice interventions in minimising harm related to the licensed environment
- Ensure regular liaison with other licensed environment partners including the local authority, liquor licensing, police, transport, licensed venues associations (such as hotels association, nightclubs/cabarets association), health and other partner community agencies such as sobering up centres, organisations such as sexual assault centres, alcohol and drug action groups, Lions and other service clubs
- Develop an informed position on key public health and safety issues related to the licensed environment
- Maintain an informed position on the proposals and initiatives of the main governmental bodies concerned
- Ensure the views and recommendations of their organisation and its members are regularly communicated to the public and promoted to the other main organisations involved, ie. to appropriate local and regional forums and authorities as well as to corporate offices within departments
- Participate where appropriate in activities to minimise harm related to the licensed environment
- Liaise with authorities involved in licensed environment projects to develop procedures for setting up and maintaining a register of incidents and issues to better assist the authorities in their work and in monitoring outcomes

Further Information

For further information on this *Guide* contact Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Services (see below).

A further document to this *Guide*, *A Support Resource incorporating the Guide to partnerships to minimise intoxication, violence and injury in the licensed environment* includes relevant case studies, what the research tells us, the history and future scan for the drinks industry, health and licensing as well as relevant legislation and policy.

The *Support Resource incorporating the Guide* is available from

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