



## "HEY KID...WANT A BEER WITH YOUR SCHNITTY?" CRAZY LAW LETS VICTORIAN PUBS SERVE ALCOHOL TO CHILDREN

**10 February 2017:** A review of Victoria's liquor laws has highlighted a number of outlandish deficiencies and serious health concerns, including an archaic provision that allows underage children to legally drink alcohol in pubs and clubs.

Under the current legislation, licensees can legally serve liquor to minors with a meal if they're accompanied by a guardian or spouse who is over the age of 18; a provision that runs counter to Australia's national drinking guidelines.

Victoria is the only state or territory in the country with such a peculiar oversight – an indication that the 18-year-old *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* is in dire need of an overhaul, with critics arguing it has failed to adequately protect Victorians from alcohol harm.

Chief among their concerns is the Victorian Government's failure to address alcohol's significant contribution to family and domestic violence – with research released late last year showing alcohol is involved in almost half (44.2 per cent) of all family violence incidents in Victoria.

Victoria has the dubious honour of having one of the highest rates of liquor outlets per capita in Australia, and the state is now reaping the negative consequences of a Liquor Act that for too long has elevated business interests ahead of harm minimisation.

Alcohol-related emergency department presentations in Victoria have more than doubled, rising 58.6 per cent from 2003-04 to 2012-13. Alcohol-related hospital admissions are also up 13 per cent in the same period.

Alcohol was involved in more than 12,000 family violence incidents in Victoria in 2012-13, an increase of 41.3 per cent since 2003-04.

With the link between alcohol and family violence now firmly established in the research evidence, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education's (FARE) Chief Executive Michael Thorn has called for the Andrews Government to take much-needed action to address this known risk factor.

"The evidence is very clear – the more alcohol outlets, the greater their density and the longer they trade, the greater the risk of alcohol-related family violence in the community. That's what we're witnessing in Victoria and it's the government's weak alcohol policy settings that are directly responsible," Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says the review of the Liquor Act must serve as an opportunity for the government to continue to lead and build on the work of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which acknowledged the impact of alcohol and the need to address the issue.



Foundation for Alcohol  
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“Here we have an opportunity that should not be squandered, the chance to treat the review as ‘phase two’ of the Royal Commission and the opportunity to implement immediate harm reduction measures directed at tackling alcohol-related family and domestic violence in Victoria,” Mr Thorn said.

FARE’s *Submission to the review of the Victorian Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* contains a number of key recommendations that would address alcohol’s availability and reduce associated family violence.

FARE is calling for the government to protect Victorian kids from alcohol harm, beginning with removing the outdated provision that allows children to legally drink alcohol in pubs and clubs.

The submission recommends amending the Act to allow the Commissioner to declare ‘alcohol harm zones’ to prevent future licence applications in areas where alcohol harm is deemed significant. It also calls for the introduction of a risk-based licensing system that would see outlets charged annually with fees based on the risk the outlet presents, and changes to provide for communities to have a greater say about the introduction of new alcohol outlets in their neighbourhoods.

Mr Thorn says that adopting the recommendations contained in FARE’s submission would ensure that future licensing decisions were in line with the harm minimisation object.

“The primary aim of the Liquor Act must be to regulate what is a dangerous and harmful product in such a way as to minimise the harm to the people, especially families of Victoria. Yet, for almost two decades now the legislation has only served the interests of the alcohol industry in a state already burdened with a high level of alcohol harm,” Mr Thorn said.

**ENDS**

### **Media notes**

FARE’s *Submission to the review of the Victorian Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*, as well as those made by the Alcohol Policy Coalition and other health organisations, can be viewed online at: <http://www.alcoholpolicycoalition.org.au/our-work/liquor-act-review>

Mr Thorn is available for interview.

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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 preventive health challenges. To find out more visit [www.fare.org.au](http://www.fare.org.au).