

Personal Submission

# **Inquiry into Alcohol and Other Drugs**

Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sports

Name

*Kym Valentine*

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Kym Valentine. I write to you as a victim survivor of family, domestic and sexual violence and an advocate for the voice of lived experience.

Thank you for the valuable opportunity to contribute to the *Inquiry into the health impacts of alcohol and other drugs in Australia*.

In my advocacy, I represent the voice of lived experience and highlight the ways alcohol intensifies family violence. In particular, I amplify the voice and perspective of children and young people who don't have a voice and don't have a choice when it comes to alcohol harm in their home.

As a Survivor Advocate, I have heard so many stories of harm. While everyone's story is unique, there are commonalities, and there are immediate levers governments can access to address each of these – including alcohol.

Alcohol intensifies and exacerbates domestic, family and sexual violence. This link has always been categorically undeniable.

For victim survivors it is unequivocal. Our real-life experiences cannot be ignored, suppressed or denied.

### **Alcohol delivery**

Through rapid delivery, alcohol can flow freely into our homes, in as little as 20 minutes, requiring just a few taps on a phone. This can intensify violent outbursts in already abusive homes.

Victim survivors know only too well that the sound of the alcohol delivery car pulling up in our driveways is a signal to enact a safety plan.

The children hiding in closets and bathrooms hearing furniture thrown and adults screaming - they know the role alcohol plays in intensifying violence.

Victim Survivors and most importantly, children, should not have to mitigate the influx of alcohol into our homes. Governments have the responsibility and the power to implement changes that will effectively protect and minimise our exposure to harm.

We are expected to be the bouncers. We are expected to uphold the responsible service of alcohol within our own home, and that is completely and utterly unrealistic. That is assuming there is a protective parent in the household, if not (and is often the case) that burden falls on the children to carry.

### **Amplifying children's voices**

Children are the most important voice, and too often missing in the conversation about alcohol's role in family and domestic violence.

Research shows [one in six children have experienced harm from the alcohol use of adults around them](#), with two-thirds of harm being attributed to an adult in their home.

These children don't have a choice and don't have a voice. Every child who is a victim of alcohol-related violence is calling out for the adults to put out this bomb because children have rights, and adults have responsibilities.

### **Predatory marketing**

Alcohol companies target their advertising around major sporting events such as AFL and NRL grand finals and State of Origin.

We know on State of Origin game night, [there is an almost 40 per cent increase](#) in domestic and family violence.

We know on nights of major sporting events, family violence worsens. We know there is a huge influx of alcohol into homes. We know alcohol intensifies and exacerbates violence.

Despite this, alcohol companies deliberately target the marketing of their harmful products to people specifically on those nights. Products are spruiked in team colors, and [companies even boast about their increased sales](#).

We know for women and children experiencing violence, these are the most horrific nights. This is predatory and abusive marketing that intentionally increases harm and suffering in exchange for financial gain.

### **Recommendations**

In August, [Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner, Micaela Cronin](#) told the National Press Club that better regulation of harmful industries, like alcohol, *must* be part of the approach to prevent gendered violence.

That month, an expert panel, appointed by the Federal Government to conduct a review into approaches to prevent domestic and family violence, released their final report. It stated family, domestic and sexual violence is "more than a national crisis, but a national emergency" and that it should be an ongoing priority for National Cabinet.

And then, each First Minister - including the Prime Minister - acknowledged alcohol's role in intensifying violence and the need to act to address this. [Every state and territory leader agreed to](#) "review their alcohol laws and its impact on family and domestic violence victims to identify and share best practice and reforms".

My recommendations to the committee:

- Fully implement the recommendations relating to alcohol in [Unlocking the Prevention Potential: accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence](#) the report from the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches to End Gender-Based Violence.
- Ensure every state and territory meets its commitment in National Cabinet to review their alcohol laws;
  - That the voice of lived experience is embedded throughout the review process in each jurisdiction;
  - Ensure there is a process to hold each state and territory accountable for the progress of this review, including a timeframe for implementation;
  - Ensure each state and territory conducts an evaluation of the review with a particular focus on the family violence perspective, including alcohol delivery within the home.

We have all the evidence, research and data. The focus now *must* be on putting it all into action, by pulling every lever you can and using everything available in the toolkit to prevent harm to women and children.

It is incumbent upon us to pull every lever that is within our reach, because we don't have a second to wait.

We've seen governments move quickly to curb alcohol-related violence in the past. We know they can, and they must. Our lives are literally depending on it.

Thank you for this opportunity.

