

2014 Victorian Election Scorecard: Preventing alcohol harms



November 2014

fare



About the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

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. More than 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.

FARE is guided by the World Health Organization's *Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol** for stopping alcohol harms through population-based strategies, problem directed policies, and direct interventions.

If you would like to contribute to FARE's important work, call us on (02) 6122 8600 or email fare@fare.org.au.

* World Health Organization (2010). *Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

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Approach

On 2 October 2014, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) wrote to the leaders of the four major political parties contesting the Victorian state election, the Victorian branches of the Liberal Party of Australia (Liberals), the National Party of Australia (Nationals), the Australian Labor Party (Labor) and the Victorian Greens (Greens).

The letter posed ten questions for the political parties on alcohol policy:

1. Will your Party support an alcohol screening and brief intervention program for emergency departments?
2. Will your Party support a ban on alcohol shopper docketts?
3. Will your Party support banning activities and practices which encourage irresponsible drinking, such as bulk discounting?
4. Will your Party support restricting alcohol advertising from places and times where children are exposed, such as public transport?
5. Will your Party support maintaining and extending the freeze on granting new licenses after 1am to Melbourne suburbs outside the inner city and beyond 2015?
6. Will your Party support the introduction of a 3am 'last drinks' for pubs and clubs?
7. Will your Party support the introduction of a 10pm closing time for all packaged liquor sales?
8. Will your Party support tighter controls on the availability of packaged liquor licenses?
9. Will your Party support the development of an action plan to reduce alcohol-related family and domestic violence?
10. Will your Party support a public education campaign aimed at reducing alcohol harms?

Responses were received by all parties. The Coalition provided responses through the Minister for Mental Health, the Hon Mary Wooldridge (Liberals) and the Deputy Premier, the Hon Peter Ryan (Nationals). Labor provided responses from both the Shadow Minister for Health, the Hon Gavin Jennings and the Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for Gaming and Racing, the Hon Martin Pakula. The Greens response was received by the Greens spokesperson for Health, Ms Colleen Hartland.

These responses were used to provide answers against each of the ten questions outlined in the letter. Where answers were not immediately apparent, alcohol policies from each of the parties were examined to determine the extent to which they addressed the ten policy areas. These documents include *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria's plan 2013–2017* and the *Victorian Labor Platform 2014*.

Information relevant to the ten questions is provided against each question in Table 3. Additional information provided by the parties is also included in the *Analysis of responses from Victorian Political Parties* at the end of this report.

Answers were then categorised as demonstrating that the question was 'supported in full', having had 'some action committed' and having had 'no commitment'. Answers were categorised as being 'supported in full' where it was clear that a commitment to the policy was made, while answers were categorised as having 'some action committed' where information was provided relating to the policy area, but it was unclear to what extent it would be fully implemented. Answers were categorised as demonstrating 'no commitment' where a response was received indicating that the policy would not be implemented or no answer was received relating to the question.

Tally of responses from Victorian Political Parties

Table 1 below summarises the total number of responses to FARE’s ten alcohol policy questions, categorised as being ‘supported in full’, having had ‘some action committed’ and having ‘no commitment’.

The Greens were most likely to support the policies outlined in FARE’s ten questions (8/10), followed by both the Coalition (1/10) and Labor (1/10).

Labor was most likely to indicate ‘no commitment’ for policies (7/10), followed by the Coalition (5/10) and the Greens (0/10).

The policies that the Coalition and Labor were most likely to indicate ‘no commitment’ for, were those that related to restricting the promotion and availability of alcohol through reducing trading hours.

	Number of policies supported in full	Number of policies with some action committed	Number of policies with no commitment
 	1	4	5
	1	2	7
	8	2	0

Table 1: Tally of responses from major Victorian Political Parties

Further analysis

The major parties, with the exception of the Greens, were more likely to support health and education measures to reduce alcohol harms, over regulatory measures. Further analysis on the party responses is provided on page 12 in the *Analysis of responses from Victorian Political Parties*.

Overview of responses from Victorian Political Parties

Table 2 below provides an overview of the political parties' responses to the ten alcohol policy questions posed by FARE. Questions that receive a '✓' indicate that the policy was 'supported in full'. Both symbols ✓/✗ indicates that there was 'some action committed', while a '✗' indicates that the party has made 'no commitment'.

			
1. Development of an alcohol screening and brief intervention program for emergency departments.	✓/✗	✓/✗	✓
2. Introduction of a ban on alcohol shopper docket.	✗	✗	✓
3. Adoption of a ban on activities and practices which encourage irresponsible drinking, such as bulk discounting.	✗	✗	✓
4. Introduction of greater restrictions on alcohol advertising from places and times where children are exposed, such as public transport	✗	✗	✓
5. Maintain and extend the freeze on granting new licenses after 1am to Melbourne suburbs outside the inner city and beyond 2015.	✓/✗	✗	✓
6. Introduction of 3am 'last drinks' for pubs and clubs.	✗	✗	✓
7. Introduction of a 10pm closing time for all packaged liquor sales.	✗	✗	✓
8. Implementation of tighter controls on the availability of packaged liquor licenses.	✓/✗	✗	✓/✗
9. Development of an action plan to reduce family and domestic violence, including alcohol-related incidents.	✓/✗	✓/✗	✓/✗
10. Development of a public education (social marketing) campaign to reduce alcohol harms in Victoria.	✓	✓	✓

Table 2: Overview of responses from major Victorian Political Parties

Detailed responses from Victorian Political Parties

Table 3 below provides each of the political party's responses to the alcohol policy questions.

Verbatim extracts from correspondence from the political parties or from policy documents developed by the parties are provided against each of the questions.

Again the responses are categorised as being 'supported in full', having had 'some action committed' and having 'no commitment'



1. Will your Party support an alcohol screening and brief intervention program for emergency departments?

Some action committed

'providing funding for emergency departments in hospitals to improve responses to people affected by alcohol and drugs' *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria's plan 2013–2017*

'ensure that people with alcohol and drug problems are better assisted and supported within mainstream health services and that health services improve their capacity to address substance misuse issues within hospital emergency departments and better connections with primary health services'. *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria's plan 2013–2017*

Some action committed

'We will also work with the sector to develop innovative models of service delivery to reduce the number of alcohol-related hospital admissions' Response from Shadow Minister for Health Gavin Jennings

Supported in full

'The Greens support trial of screening, brief intervention and referral program for emergency departments. Thousands of people end up in emergency departments due to alcohol related conditions. Ensuring these people get the support they need, if they need it, is an important strategy to reduce alcohol related harm.' Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.

2. Will your Party support a ban on alcohol shopper dockets?

No commitment

'The Nationals do not believe a regulatory approach such as banning alcohol shopper dockets, banning bulk discounting of alcohol or further restricting alcohol advertising are effective in reducing alcohol harm.' Response from Deputy Premier Peter Ryan.

No commitment

Supported in full

'The Greens support a ban on shopper dockets.' Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.



3. Will your Party support banning activities and practices which encourage irresponsible drinking, such as bulk discounting?

No commitment

'The Nationals do not believe a regulatory approach such as banning alcohol shopper dockets, banning bulk discounting of alcohol or further restricting alcohol advertising are effective in reducing alcohol harm.'
Response from Deputy Premier Peter Ryan.

No commitment

Supported in full

'The Greens support review of liquor licencing in Victoria. As part of that, we will be considering the need to tighter restriction on bulk discounting and other practices that encourage irresponsible drinking.' Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.

4. Will your Party support restricting alcohol advertising from places and times where children are exposed, such as public transport?

No commitment

'The Nationals do not believe a regulatory approach such as banning alcohol shopper dockets, banning bulk discounting of alcohol or further restricting alcohol advertising are effective in reducing alcohol harm.'
Response from Deputy Premier Peter Ryan.

No commitment

Supported in full

'The Greens have announced our commitment to phasing out alcohol advertising on public transport, billboards and youth-targeted advertising on licenced venues. To read the full policy go to: <http://greens.org.au/initiatives/vic/safe-advertising-children>' Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.



5. Will your Party support maintaining and extending the freeze on granting new licenses after 1am to Melbourne suburbs outside the inner city and beyond 2015?

Some action committed

‘On 9 June 2013, the Coalition Government extended the freeze on the new late night liquor licences in the inner city municipalities of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Yarra, for a further two years. The extension means that until 30 June 2015, the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation will not grant any new licences for bars, pubs and nightclubs operating after 1am unless the applicant can show exceptional circumstances. Liquor licensing is an important balancing act and this commitment responds to evidence of correlation between alcohol-related harm and licensed premises trading after 1am’. Response from Deputy Premier the Hon Peter Ryan.

‘The Government will evaluate the effectiveness of the freeze on late-night liquor licences to determine the merit of extending the freeze or expanding it to cover other municipalities in order to combat alcohol-related harm in late night entertainment precincts.’ *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria’s plan 2013 - 2017*

No commitment

Supported in full

‘The Greens are committed to maintaining and extending the freeze on granting new licences after 1am in Melbourne’s suburbs outside the inner city.’ Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.

6. Will your Party support the introduction of a 3am ‘last drinks’ for pubs and clubs?

No commitment

No commitment

Supported in full

‘The Greens support introducing evidence based measures to reduce the harm of alcohol. 3am end of service in late night venues was successful in Newcastle and it can be effective here in Melbourne. The Greens support joining NSW in implementing 3am last drinks.’ Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.



7. Will your Party support the introduction of a 10pm closing time for all packaged liquor sales?

No commitment

No commitment

Supported in full

‘The Greens feel that late night sales of take away liquor from bottle shops are inappropriate. No one needs more alcohol after pubs and clubs close. The Greens support 10pm closing times for packaged liquor sales as a harm minimisation measure.’ Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.

8. Will your Party support tighter controls on the availability of packaged liquor licenses?

Some action committed

‘The Victorian Coalition Government has already implemented... increased licensing fees for liquor outlets with over 1,000m2 floor space dedicated to liquor retail, with additional revenue reinvested in alcohol treatment programs.’ Response from Minister for Mental Health the Hon Mary Wooldridge.

No commitment

Some action committed

‘The Greens are committed to reviewing the Victorian liquor licencing system, together with evidence related to rates of alcohol misuse and alcohol related violence in the community. Based on this we will consider the availability of liquor from bottle shops, including limits in licence numbers by local government areas, with a view to harm minimisation.’ Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.

9. Will your Party support the development of an action plan to reduce alcohol-related family and domestic violence?

Some action committed

‘Family violence is a major issue in our society and this is recognised by the Coalition Government through ‘the [recently announced \\$150 million package](#) to reduce the incidence of family violence across Victoria.’ Response from Deputy Premier the Hon Peter Ryan.

‘The Government will strengthen the partnership between alcohol and drug services and family violence services and Victoria Police to address alcohol and drug use as a risk factor in family violence as part of Victoria’s action plan to address violence against women and children 2012–2015’ *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll. Victoria’s plan 2013 – 2017.*

Some action committed

‘In relation to family violence, Labor will establish Australia’s first Royal Commission into Family Violence. It will investigate criminal law, corrections, courts, community services, alcohol and drug services, health services, refuges and housing, the school curriculum and tools available to Victoria Police’ Response from Shadow Minister for Health Gavin Jennings.

Some action committed

‘The Greens have announced a Family Violence Action Plan and will invest \$400 million over 4 years in better prevention, crisis and housing support services, justice support, and men’s behaviour change services. The Greens also support increasing investment in alcohol and drug support services. For more information go to: <http://greens.org.au/initiatives/vic/en-d-family-violence>’ Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.



10. Will your Party support a public education campaign aimed at reducing alcohol harms?

Supported in full

‘The Victorian Government has recently announced a number of innovative programs aimed at addressing the harms of alcohol and drugs. We have invested \$2.6 million in a two-phase culture change campaign, *Name that Point and No Excuse Needed*, which aim to change young people’s attitudes towards binge drinking. These campaigns have had strong engagement with the target audience of 18-25 year olds. The Premier also announced a \$1 million expansion of the *Prevention Alcohol and Risk-related Trauma in Youth (P.A.R.T.Y.)* program, which educates young Victorians about the potential harms of risky drinking through excursions to emergency departments and intensive care units. The Government’s investment will enable this program to expand into regional Victoria.’ Response from Minister for Mental Health, the Hon Mary Wooldridge.

‘The Government will also implement new alcohol and drug curriculum for years 7, 8 and 9, to be available to all Victorian secondary schools in term 4, 2012 and fully implemented in 2013. The Drug Education in Victorian Schools program for students in these years brings together findings from recent research in a single comprehensive approach’ *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll. Victoria’s plan 2013 – 2017.*

Supported in full

‘Labor will work in partnership with health promotion bodies to deliver education and support programs that promote healthier attitudes to alcohol’ Response from Shadow Minister for Health Gavin Jennings.

‘Labor will build new partnerships with health promotion organisations to deliver cultural change and education and support programs that promote healthier attitudes to excessive drinking and drug abuse. – *Victorian Labor Platform 2014*

‘Labor will develop and adopt a best practice, comprehensive education campaign [on safety in our streets and neighbourhoods] with a focus on school-aged students at primary and secondary levels. This campaign will include detailed information and discussion about alcohol-fuelled violence and illicit drugs.’ – *Victorian Labor Platform 2014*

Supported in full

‘The Greens support greater investment in education and awareness about a range of preventable health conditions, including alcohol related harm. To find out more detail about our policies, go to:

<http://greens.org.au/policies/vic/substance-abuse-and-dependency>

Keep an eye out for our election commitments here:

<http://greens.org.au/vic/health>

Response from Greens spokesperson for Health Ms Colleen Hartland.

Table 3: Detailed responses from major Victorian Political Parties

Analysis of responses from Victorian Political Parties

The purpose of this analysis is to provide an overview of the approach taken by each of the parties in their responses. This provides further information on the approach of the parties to addressing alcohol-related harms and also includes information that does not directly address the above questions.

Summary of Coalition response to alcohol policy questions

The Coalition responded to the letter through the Minister for Mental Health, the Hon Mary Wooldridge and the Deputy Premier, the Hon Peter Ryan. The Coalition supported one policy in full, made some commitment to four of the policies and made no commitment to the remaining five policies.

The policies that the Coalition were more likely to support were those that related to health and education. There was a commitment to evaluate the freeze on granting new licenses after 1am in the local government areas of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Yarra. There was also a commitment to increase in fees for larger retail liquor outlets. With the exception of these two policy areas, there was no commitment to policies that regulated the promotion and availability of alcohol.

The Deputy Premier and Leader of the Nationals the Hon Peter Ryan addresses the issue of regulation directly in his response to FARE's letter by stating: 'Your letter seeks a response to a number of specific questions. In the main these questions propose a tighter regulatory regime controlling the sale of alcohol. In general, The Nationals do not believe a regulatory approach such as banning alcohol shopper dockets, banning bulk discounting of alcohol or further restricting alcohol advertising are effective in reducing alcohol harm. Rather The Nationals support the approach to alcohol harm minimisation as outlined in the Government's strategy [Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria's plan 2013-2017](#). A future Coalition Government will continue the approach outlined in this plan.'

This is counter to the evidence that demonstrates that restricting the availability of alcohol both through regulating trading hours and outlet density are integral to reducing alcohol-related harms.

The Minister for Mental Health (Liberal) indicated that 'The Victorian Coalition is committed to reducing the harm caused by alcohol abuse. The *2014-15 Victorian Budget* allocated a record \$165 million in funding for programs addressing alcohol and drug use. These programs support the Victorian Government's comprehensive plan for alcohol and drugs, *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria's plan 2013-2017*.' The response went on to say that the Plan 'encourages social change to reduce excessive drinking and drug use, supported by actions across education, law, regulation, police, health and social services'.

This view was reinforced by the Deputy Premier, who indicated that 'The Victorian Coalition Government shares your concern about alcohol-related harm, and is committed to delivering a responsible liquor licensing framework that strengthens the prevention of alcohol-related harm and contributes to a vibrant and safe community in Victoria.'

In the Deputy Premier's letter, a significant focus was placed on increased powers to 'tackle public drunkenness', with penalties being 'more than doubled' for 'drunk and disorderly behaviour'. A further focus was on rewarding licensees with 'good compliance history' and introducing a 'demerit points system' for licensees who 'repeatedly flout the law'.

Other measures in liquor licensing that have been introduced, and were raised by the Minister for Mental Health include:

- ‘Strengthened powers for local councils to regulate liquor licences;
- Laws introducing a range of new offences and increased penalties for existing offences that relate to the consumption of liquor, including new fines and prohibition around the secondary supply of liquor to minors without consent;
- A new offence for remaining in the vicinity of, or attempting to re-enter, a licensed premises from which the person has been refused entry or requested to leave;
- Powers enabling Victoria Police to ban people from licensed premises and from designated areas for up to 72 hours;
- A new Advanced Responsible Service of Alcohol training; and
- Increased tip-out powers for police officers, gaming & liquor inspectors and Protective Services Officers’.

Finally, Minister Wooldridge also mentioned that the Victorian Coalition Government has committed to ‘requiring liquor licensees to report wholesale alcohol sales information’ as ‘This will provide a clearer understanding of alcohol consumption in the community and help inform the further development of policies aimed at minimising alcohol related harm’. This is a measure that has been welcomed by the public health academics and non-government organisations.

Summary of Labor response to alcohol policy questions

Labor responded to the letter through both the Shadow Minister for Health, the Hon Gavin Jennings and the Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for Gaming and Racing the Hon Martin Pakula. Labor supported one policy in full, made some commitment to two of the policies and made no commitment to the remaining seven policies.

The policies that Labor were more likely to support were those that related to health and education, while the policies that they were most likely to oppose were those that related to the regulation of alcohol through restricting the promotion and availability of alcohol.

The Shadow Minister for Health indicated that Labor was aware of the extent of harms that results from alcohol and ‘recognises the devastating effect misuse and overuse of alcohol has on many people in our community, their families and the broader public through poorer health, increased violence, and avoidable injuries and deaths’. The Shadow Minister for Health also specified that ‘Labor believes that a comprehensive and multi-layered approach needs to be taken to address the issues, including education, alcohol regulation and criminal justice responses’. However, the Labor Party did not directly respond to any of the questions posed about the regulation of alcohol, including those relating to the promotion of alcohol, trading hours and the density of liquor outlets.

Both letters from Labor indicated they would be releasing a ‘Liquor and Gaming policy’ prior to the election. At the time of publication, this policy had not been released and no further information about the policy was provided, despite calls to the Shadow Attorney General’s office. FARE is concerned that the policy will prioritise business interests of the liquor and gaming industries, with little regard for the potential social and health impacts of alcohol.

The response from the Shadow Attorney General’s office provided information on the Labor Party’s ‘broad principles’ regarding Liquor and Gaming, including a focus on the business interests in alcohol and gaming ‘Labor recognises that the gaming and liquor industries are an important part of our community and provide significant jobs, entertainment and tourism opportunities’.

Following this statement, there was an acknowledgement from the Shadow Attorney General that alcohol does contribute to harm in the community, with the Shadow Minister stating that ‘With respect to alcohol, Labor recognises that the community must confront a myriad of social problems that arise from excessive alcohol consumption’.

The Shadow Attorney General provided strong views on the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation and Liquor Licensing (VCGLR), stating that ‘The Coalition Government is fundamentally failing in its responsibilities to provide a strong regulatory environment in both these industries. It has botched the merger of the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation and Liquor Licensing Victoria into one body, the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation (the VCGLR)’.

In relation to alcohol, the Labor Party indicated in the [Victorian Labor Platform 2014](#) that it will:

- ‘Fix the disastrous VCGLR merger
- Reinstating the vital role of regional inspectors
- Allow VCGLR inspectors to get back out on the beat, visiting venues and enforcing strong codes of conduct in both liquor and gaming.’

Summary of Greens response to alcohol policy questions

The Greens provided a response to FARE’s letter through their spokesperson for Health, Ms Colleen Hartland. The Greens supported eight policies in full and some commitment was made to the two remaining policies. The Greens did not oppose any of the policies.

The Greens supported in full all health policies and the majority of policies addressing the regulation of alcohol. The Greens have released a policy on restricting the promotion of alcohol promotions to young people, which indicated that the Greens would restrict outdoor advertising of alcohol on public transport and billboards and restrict alcohol advertising outside licensed venues.

The two policy areas where the Greens demonstrated some commitment were in developing an action plan to reduce alcohol-related family and domestic violence and introducing tighter controls on packaged liquor. In relation to reducing alcohol-related family and domestic violence, the Greens indicated that they would commit to developing an action plan to reduce alcohol-related family and domestic violence, however information on the plan did not mention alcohol. In relation to introducing tighter controls on packaged liquor, the Greens indicated that they would review the liquor licensing system and consider the availability of alcohol from bottle shops.



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