

Family violence services and advocates disappointed with Victorian Government's changes to alcohol law

Today, the Victorian Government released details of changes to the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*. Community, health and family violence advocates have expressed their disappointment with the amendments indicating they do not go far enough to help prevent family violence – with some of these changes having the potential to increase alcohol supply into Victorian homes.

The Bill has been introduced to Parliament five years after the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended that the Government ensure the terms of reference of the review into the Act consider family violence and alcohol-related harms, and that the review consult with advocates and community organisations with expertise in alcohol-related family violence.

Berry Street, Wayss, and the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) are calling on the Victorian Government to immediately engage with advocates and community organisations to ensure the Act contributes to the prevention of family violence.

They want the Government to implement measures that will control the increasing supply of takeaway and delivered alcohol, to help keep families and communities safe from family violence. These measures include not delivering alcohol late at night, when harms like family violence are more likely to happen; and introducing a delay of at least two hours between alcohol order and delivery.

Michael Perusco, CEO of Berry Street, said, "As a provider of support services to victim survivors of family violence, we are very concerned about the increasing flow of alcohol into Victorian homes that has occurred since the pandemic began. Alcohol is a risk factor in family violence, contributing to more frequent and severe violence by perpetrators."

"The review into the state's liquor laws was a window of opportunity for the Government to give serious thought to how they would implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. But they have missed this opportunity to do the right thing," he added.

Liz Thomas, CEO of Melbourne-based family violence support service Wayss, said that the lack of action on alcohol availability will increase the burden on family violence services.

"The pandemic has caused unprecedented demand on family violence services. As Victorians emerge from another lockdown, we know that many people would have been stuck at home and unable to escape abuse. Increasing alcohol supply into homes will only fuel this abuse," she added.

Kym Valentine, an experienced television/theatre actor and member of the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council (VSAC) who advises the Victorian Government on the family violence reform program, said that strong leadership is needed from the government.

"Victorian politicians aren't just changing lines in a piece of legislation – their decision has real impact on people's lives. As an advocate with lived experience of family violence, I hope the Victorian Government shows empathy to families shattered by family violence," she added.

Caterina Giorgi, CEO of FARE, said the reforms significantly fail to hold alcohol companies responsible, who are profiting from the harms caused by pushing alcohol into homes.

“At a time when we should be prioritising family health and safety, it is disappointing to see these reforms allow companies to rapidly deliver alcoholic products to homes late at night, fuelling intoxication and violence,” Giorgi said.

“This reform makes it clear that the Government is not listening to what community and family violence organisations are saying. We are calling on the Government to engage further to keep our families and communities safe from family violence and alcohol harms,” she added.

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About organisations

Berry Street is one of Australia’s largest independent family service organisations, providing specialist family violence services to victim survivors, including LGBTIQ+ people and children, who have experienced any form of family violence.

Wayss provides family violence and housing support services in Melbourne’s south-east.

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is the leading not-for-profit organisation working towards an Australia free from alcohol harms.

Kym Valentine is a member of the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council (VSAC), which represents people with lived experience of family violence, advising the Victorian Government on family violence policy and the implementation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations.