# Alcohol is a trigger for family violence - so why aren't governments acting on it?

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Over the years, many women have shared with me their experiences of violence and how alcohol was a trigger for that violence.

They speak of strategies they put in place to keep their kids safe when their partner had been drinking.

How the sound of the alcohol delivery truck was the warning sign for them to hide.

How their partner coming home drunk was the equivalent of a ticking time bomb.

Alcohol is involved in [between 23% and 65% of all police-reported family violence](https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/links-between-alcohol-consumption-and-domestic-and-sexual-violence-against-women-key-findings-and-future-directions/) incidents.

When perpetrators are drinking, it also increases the severity of violence, leading to higher rates of harm and injury.

The question then is why was alcohol not mentioned once in the outcomes of the National Cabinet meeting on violence against women?

The reluctance to talk about alcohol, not only invalidates the lived experience of these survivors, but creates policy paralysis in an area that has been neglected for too long.

**We know that the accessibility and availability of alcohol is closely linked to violence, the more alcohol outlets there are and the later they trade, the more violence we see.**

For example, when the NSW Government extended alcohol take away and delivery sales by one hour a 10pm to 11pm close in 2016 - there was a [significant increase in family violence assaults](https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publications/CJB/2022-Report-Takeaway-alcohol-sales-and-violent-crime-CJB247.pdf). In 38 months, this is equivalent to a further 1,120 assaults.

Just pause to consider this for a moment.

This decision by a government led to an increase in family violence assaults.

Research commissioned by a government agency reported this.

And no further action was taken.

This is one just example, there are many more.

Despite the large body of evidence recommending the need for change, widespread regulatory change to the way alcohol is sold and marketed has been stymied, largely by intense lobbying from alcohol companies, who wield significant influence in the corridors of power.

For years, we’ve been calling on governments to address gaping holes in their liquor laws, which are meant to protect the community but have remained materially unchanged since the 1970s, despite major advances in technology.

We’re living through an explosion in online retail, rapid home delivery of alcohol, and predatory, data-driven advertising by alcohol companies, targeting the heaviest drinkers and making alcohol unavoidable.

When every phone is a bottle shop and alcohol can be delivered within 20 minutes, without checks and balances, women and children are at greater risk of violence.

Alongside other community organisations from across Australia, [we wrote to the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers](https://fare.org.au/open-letter-to-national-cabinet/#:~:text=Dear%20Prime%20Minister%2C%20Premiers%20and,of%20your%20discussions%20on%20Wednesday.) ahead of the National Cabinet meeting, imploring them to enact common sense regulatory measures, including ensuring delivered or takeaway alcohol is not sold after 10pm, limiting density of alcohol outlets, and cracking down on predatory marketing.

We also urged them to include prevention of gender-based and family violence as a primary object of state and territory liquor acts.

These policy changes are also in line with recommendations made in the recent [White Paper on Primary Prevention](https://jesshill.substack.com/p/rethinking-primary-prevention) by Jess Hill and Professor Michael Salter, which proposes that we must go beyond changing attitudes and address the commercial determinants of violence, including alcohol and gambling.

When we’ve made public health gains in other areas such as road safety, we took a multi-pronged approach – setting speed limits, making seatbelts mandatory, investing in road infrastructure and improved car design, in tandem with swift penalties for breaking laws.

 But when yet another woman dies from male violence, the first call is for attitudes to change, and the focus quickly shifts to amorphous conversations around awareness-raising.

I think we can agree that if we left road safety to education campaigns only, our roads would not be sufficiently safe.

When it comes to preventing men’s violence towards women and children, governments are quick to share responsibility, saying this is a “national conversation” and “we all have a role to play”.

**It’s framing reminiscent of the alcohol and gambling industries’ line that people should drink or gamble “responsibly”, putting the onus on individuals, and allowing industry and government to abrogate their responsibilities.**

Tackling the commercial drivers of men’s violence can help women and children who need our support right now.

National conversations do not save lives. Actions do.

It’s time for governments to stop talking, and start making bold policy changes that put the health and safety of communities above industry profits.