# "Believing us IS the strategy"

This morning, I joined a group of advocates, community organisations and researchers to talk about the role of alcohol in violence against women and children and the immediate actions that need to be taken to prevent this.

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

Nearly half or [47% of all women who experienced sexual assault](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release) by a man in the past ten years believed that alcohol or another substance contributed to their most recent incident.

In 2021-22, [20% of homicide offenders had used alcohol](https://statics.teams.cdn.office.net/evergreen-assets/safelinks/1/atp-safelinks.html).

There are many more statistics like these.

People have shared with me how they knew as a child when their father was drunk that it was their sign to find a place to hide.

Women have shared with me that the sound of their drunk partner returning home or of the delivery truck is the prompt for them to enact their safety plans to keep their kids safe.

People working in women’s services have shared with me how they brace themselves on nights that involve lots of alcohol – like football grand finals.

Despite all of this, measures targeting the role of alcohol in violence prevention have largely been absent.

Dr Ingrid Wilson has been researching the intersection between alcohol and violence against women and children for 12 years. She says ["By not addressing alcohol as a factor, we are gaslighting women and telling them their lived experience doesn’t matter.](https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/stop-gaslighting-women-facing-alcohol-fuelled-domestic-violence/)"

This morning, we were not just talking, we were committed to pulling together tangible actions. Actions emerged in five areas.

##### 1. Cultural change

We need to listen to children and women when they tell us their father or partner is violent when he drinks.

We need to name men’s alcohol use when we are talking about violence prevention.

We need to challenge the forms of drinking that are tied to notions of masculinity.

We need to acknowledge that when men view women as less than, and use alcohol, it makes things worse.

##### 2. System and legislative change

We need to update our alcohol laws to prioritise the prevention of all harm – particularly violence against women and children – not company profits.

We need to introduce common sense guard rails, like not selling alcohol from bottle shops or via delivery after 10pm, so women don’t have to take on the role of limiting their partners access to alcohol on their own.

We need a 2-hour safety pause between when alcohol is ordered and delivered. We need lower strength alcohol at events of higher risk and more alcohol-free settings.

##### 3. Alcohol industry accountability

We need to name the lobby groups and retailers who are actively undermining and delaying changes to alcohol laws that will help to prevent violence against women and children.

We need to go directly to company boards and shareholders and show them the tactics that companies are engaging in to profile, target and sell alcohol to people who drink alcohol at the highest levels.

We need our governments to hold these companies accountable for the harm that they cause.

##### 4. Responsive and flexible government funding

We need funding for service supports that doesn’t limit services to one sector or one category, acknowledging that these issues are complex and go across alcohol and other drug, mental health, women’s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and family organisations.

We need advocacy funded independent of service delivery so that organisations feel free to speak their truth without being at risk of losing funding.

##### 5. Increased service responses

We need all services that people interact with – alcohol and other drug, women’s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, family, community, general practice – to be well resourced and equipped to support people and meet them where they are at.

We need increased funding for perpetrator programs that also address alcohol and other drug use. We need greater health promotion capacity within services.

Governments can act to do many of these things.

To do this, we need them to prioritise the safety of women and children ahead of alcohol company profits.

Actor and family violence survivor-advocate Kym Valentine shared at the meeting this morning:

"The message from this victim survivor is pretty clear – believing us IS the strategy,"

“We’re telling you… this [alcohol] is a bomb. This is hurting us. This is harmful.”

"Please believe us when we tell you."

There is a chorus of voices now calling for change in this space. It’s time for governments to act.

*If you or someone you know is struggling, there is s*[*upport available*](https://fare.org.au/resources/support/)*.*

[*1800RESPECT*](https://www.1800respect.org.au/) *(1800 737 732) provides 24/7 domestic and family violence support and counselling services.*