# Packaged liquor in Victoria 2001-2016

## Researcher

1. Michael Livingston, Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR), La Trobe University.

## Summary

This study investigated the packaged liquor market in Victoria between 2001 and 2016, examining changes in availability, ownership patterns and the socioeconomic distribution of outlets. The data used relate only to outlets specifically licensed as 'packaged liquor' outlets and thus substantially underestimate the actual availability of packaged liquor due to the significant number of bottle shops currently trading under general licences.

## Outcomes

The study found that there were 2,023 active packaged liquor licences in Victoria, including 294 (14.5 per cent) owned by Woolworths, 216 (10.7 per cent) by Wesfarmers, 127 by ALDI (6.3 per cent) and 754 (37.3 per cent) operating under one of the Metcash brands. There were a further 632 (31.2 per cent) independent packaged liquor outlets.

The overall number of packaged liquor outlets increased from 1,354 in 2001 to 2,023 in 2016, an increase of 49.4 per cent. Over the same period, the Victorian population increased by 26.5 per cent, meaning that the rate of packaged liquor outlets per 100,000 residents has increased from 28.7 per 100,000 in 2001 to 33.9 in 2016 (an increase of 18.2 per cent). The per capita rate of packaged liquor outlets was stable between 2006 and 2016, potentially due to the increasing prevalence of big-box format stores.

The number of ‘big-box’ format stores in Victoria increased dramatically over the study period, from three in 2001 to 68 in 2016. The majority of these (43, or 63 per cent) were Dan Murphy’s stores. On a per capita basis, the number of big-box liquor stores per 100,000 population grew steadily from 0.06 to 1.14 (an increase of nearly 2,000 per cent, although this is from a very small base).

The increases in availability were not evenly distributed geographically, with per capita rates of packaged liquor outlets more than doubling in Benalla (S), Colac-Otway (S), Golden Plains (S), Hobsons Bay (C), Mount Alexander (S) and Warrnambool (C). There were no clear patterns in the socioeconomic distribution of changes in packaged liquor outlet numbers.

Exploratory hotspot analyses identified a number of small areas with disproportionately high numbers of packaged liquor outlets. Future research should examine the factors that underpin the formation of these hotspots and their relationship with rates of alcohol-related harms.

## Recommendations

The growth in packaged outlets, and particularly in chain and big-box style outlets, has important implications for alcohol-related harm. Previous studies have identified longitudinal relationships between packaged liquor outlet numbers and rates of family violence, injury, assault and chronic disease, while a number of cross-sectional analyses have suggested that chain outlets (or outlets with high levels of sales) are particularly problematic. The recent stabilisation of packaged liquor outlet numbers (on a per capita basis at least) is a promising sign, although it may merely reflect the switch towards larger outlets with higher volumes of sales. Regardless, Victoria still has a high level of packaged liquor availability (roughly the same per capita rate as New South Wales, but higher than other Australian states and territories), and updated research into the local-level variation in harm rates and outlet numbers is necessary to ensure appropriate planning and policy controls are implemented.

[view the report](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Packaged-liquor-in-Victoria-2001-to-2016.pdf)

[view the media release](https://fare.org.au/big-box-liquor-boom/)