# Too often, alcohol and family violence go together. Now, we need to separate them

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One of the hardest things about experiencing violence is being robbed of your voice.

When your safety is threatened and you’re forced into silence, there’s nobody to speak up for you or your children. But this week, it feels like we are finally being heard.

For years, I have been asking policy-makers to recognise the role that alcohol plays in family violence.

To hear Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin [say publicly](https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/study-every-death-tackle-alcohol-dv-commissioner-s-urgent-advice-20240506-p5fpd6.html) last week that alcohol is “undeniably a factor” in these crimes, and that it can lead to more serious violence, was a huge relief for those of us who have lived through that reality.

As Cronin recognised, there has previously been a reluctance to acknowledge the role of alcohol in case it “excused” or “justified” the offender’s behaviour. But our political leaders can no longer ignore the fact alcohol is involved in between [23 and 65 per cent](https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/links-between-alcohol-consumption-and-domestic-and-sexual-violence-against-women-key-findings-and-future-directions/) of all police-reported family violence incidents across Australia.

It was a massive relief to hear someone in a position of power, like the commissioner, acknowledge the link between alcohol and family violence.

For victim-survivors like me, the link has always been clear and unequivocal. The kids who have hidden in closets and bathrooms – hearing furniture being thrown and adults screaming – know that when drinking is involved, it’s like pouring petrol on a bonfire. But these children can’t leave. That’s why we must be their voice.

The first step is admitting that alcohol increases the risk of violence, and acknowledging that alcohol and harm go hand-in-hand. The next, is to take meaningful action.

Children living in fear in their own homes deserve a sense of urgency to help keep them safe.

It was encouraging to hear the commissioner heed our calls to have “serious evidence-based discussions about the role of alcohol and other drugs in violence and what levers the government may have.”

There are some simple actions that state and federal governments can take, which would help to make women and children immediately safer within their own homes.

Firstly, we need to address outdated liquor licensing laws, which have been left largely unchanged for 50 years, despite huge shifts in the way alcohol is sold.

In a digital age, alcohol has never been more accessible, with round-the-clock, home-delivered booze available at the click of a button, and often heavily discounted when sold in bulk.

Alcohol companies have been allowed unfettered advertising rights, leading to predatory and high-risk marketing, which uses consumer data insights to target the most vulnerable people. We saw this at the height of the COVID lockdowns, with [aggressive advertising](https://fare.org.au/alcohol-ad-every-35-seconds-during-covid-19/) for online delivery services that encouraged people to drink excessively to cope with the stress of isolation. But while these alcohol companies were making bumper profits, women and children were being harmed.

We also need to address trading hours and the number of outlets selling alcohol. The [research is clear](https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publications/CJB/2022-Report-Takeaway-alcohol-sales-and-violent-crime-CJB247.pdf) that the more outlets there are and the later they stay open, the more violence increases. Many victim-survivors will tell you how they fear for their safety more after the sun goes down, particularly when their abuser has been drinking.

Guard rails could include stopping the sale of alcohol by delivery and takeaway after 10pm, and introducing a two-hour safety pause between the time the alcohol is ordered and the time it’s delivered, to prevent the rapid flow of alcohol into homes.

We’ve seen governments act swiftly in the past to improve public safety and crack down on alcohol-related violence. What we’re asking for now are relatively modest changes, but ones that would play a huge part in reducing the rate and severity family violence.

We are on the cusp of making generational change in tackling the crisis in gender-based violence and violence against children.

Politicians now have to decide whose voices they choose to hear – the alcohol corporations profiting from the problem, or the women and children who just want a safe place to call home.

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**Support is available from the**[**National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service**](http://www.1800respect.org.au)**at 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732).**