# Victoria failing to protect women and children from alcohol-fuelled family violence

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| **Author** | Fare\_Admin |
| **Date** | 2018-12-12 00:01:56 |
| **Categories** | Media releases |

### A new report shows the alcohol industry freely exploits Victoria’s weak liquor licensing and planning laws, despite objections by local authorities attempting to curb family violence.

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The report by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) at La Trobe University details how a local government– backed by community and police – failed to stop a ‘big box’ Dan Murphy’s store being built in a “family violence hotspot” in the City of Casey in outer suburban Melbourne.

The study, commissioned by FARE, is being launched today at the *City of Casey* *Preventing Alcohol Related Harm Forum.*

Lead researcher Dr Claire Wilkinson says the report underscores that new liquor licence applications are approved ‘by default’, with 97 per cent of applications given the green light under Victoria’s existing planning and licensing systems.

“We were able to unpack why local government attempts to refuse or restrict new alcohol outlets are futile,” Dr Wilkinson said.

“Our research examining reasons why the City of Casey was unsuccessful against Woolworths, found two key shortcomings in the existing laws,” Dr Wilkinson said.

“Firstly, Casey’s objections on the basis of increased risk of domestic violence and alcohol harms were largely considered ‘out of scope’ in planning decisions, and, secondly, harm minimisation was not adequately considered in the liquor licensing process,” she said.

“The City of Casey outcome has had a chilling effect on local governments attempting to refuse or object to new packaged liquor licences in the future,” Dr Wilkinson said.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says the City of Casey story is an alarming example of the failure of Victoria’s narrow, inadequate legislation to help protect women and children from alcohol-fuelled harm.

“This is a municipality where the rate of family violence outstrips its rapid population growth,” Mr Thorn said.

”The local government was not only hamstrung in fighting the new licence application, which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, it was also powerless to retain its own protection measures – despite the support of Victoria’s Chief Commissioner of Police,” he said.

There is indisputable evidence that increasing the density of alcohol outlets is associated with higher rates of violence and chronic health conditions.

“This strong correlation was made evident during the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence. And despite the Victorian government investing more than $1 billion, no action has been taken to address this glaring problem of alcohol outlet overload,” Mr Thorn said.

The FARE Chief Executive said the Andrews Government’s re-election was an opportunity to renew efforts to stop alcohol-related family violence.

“It’s pleasing the Premier has again declared that family violence remains Victoria’s number one law and order issue, but he needs to direct meaningful action that will save lives.

“It is time for the Government to strengthen the Liquor Act to give local government the power to stop one of the principal causes of alcohol-related family violence - too many packaged liquor outlets trading for too long,” Mr Thorn said.

“Two years on from the Royal Commission it is disappointing that the state government has not taken this very simple, low cost step, which would give local communities a fair voice in the licensing of big box liquor stores in their municipalities.”

“It is time to end the undue influence of big business and put the rights and safety of women and children first,” Mr Thorn said.

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