# You can't argue with the facts: our lockout laws are saving lives

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| **Date** | 2019-08-20 11:00:54 |
| **Categories** | Policy |

### After years of working as a police officer in Kings Cross, Pat Gooley illustrates why we must not wind things back to the blood-stained days before the late-night measures.

On New Year’s Eve 2013, I was working as a police officer in Kings Cross. At 9.20pm I was standing on Victoria Street at Potts Point, being briefed by the team who had just done all they could to save the life of a young man whose name would soon become synonymous with alcohol-related violence: [Daniel Christie](https://www.smh.com.au/national/teenager-daniel-christie-dies-from-king-hit-20140111-30ntp.html).

As we put the crime scene tape up, it was lost on no-one that we were using a light-pole to secure the tape bearing a tribute to [Thomas Kelly](https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/four-years-for-a-life-kelly-familys-outrage-20131108-2x7ca.html), who died after a drunken one-punch attack in Kings Cross.

While we were standing there, we were alerted to a brawl just around the corner. With their uniforms still stained with Daniel Christie's blood, my colleagues sprinted to the scene where they prevented another tragedy, before returning to their post.

Unimaginably, some of our time at the scene was spent stopping intoxicated people from using the crime scene tape as a pretend finish line to a running race. If you ever wanted to see the example of personal responsibility being drowned by grog, this was it.

Almost on the stroke of midnight, as fireworks exploded over the city, the crime scene officers finished their grisly work, pulled down the crime scene tape, secured their exhibits and very solemnly wished each other a happy new year. They returned to the station, changed their blood-stained clothes and went back to work.

I, too, continued dealing with the drunken masses.

At about 4.15am, I had to attend St Vincent’s emergency department. I checked on some cops who had an agitated mental health patient in the back of their van because there was no suitable ambulance available.

As we entered the emergency department, I can only describe the scene as a zoo. I spoke to some of the doctors and nurses who had worked hard to save Daniel Christie. They were angry, and run off their feet. Daniel was one of many young, predominantly male, patients who had been assaulted and brought in that night with serious head injuries. They were angry because they knew there was a way to significantly reduce alcohol-related violence but, as they put it, the NSW Government at the time hadn’t had the guts to do anything about it.

While I was there, the doctor in charge of the ED told my police colleagues that there simply wasn’t enough room to bring in the patient they had in the van and that they’d have to keep him there for a while longer. I don’t know how long he was there for, but I do know he was waiting there because of the massive drain on emergency services due to alcohol-related violence.

After my shift finished, I caught up with some mates briefly. I noticed that one police friend had a lump on her cheek and a black eye. She had been punched in the face in Darling Harbour. She shrugged it off and had a laugh, but I didn’t. She was one of many emergency service workers assaulted that night.

When I got home, I hugged my family before trying to get a few hours’ sleep. When my wife asked how my night was, I simply told her to watch the news; it had happened again, I said. She knew not to ask anything more.

This is what life was like prior to modest alcohol laws being introduced in Sydney. This happened on New Year’s Eve, but it could have easily been any Saturday night. Unfortunately, my repertoire of similar stories is long. Every weekend was chaotic. Prior to the introduction of the alcohol laws, 40 additional police officers were being brought in from other areas every weekend to deal with the drunken violence in Kings Cross. Those cops have now been freed up to undertake important policing work in their own communities.

The statistics are stark and indisputable. Assaults in the Cross have decreased by almost 94 per cent between 3am and 6am; St Vincent’s has seen the number of patients admitted with serious head injuries reduced by 50 per cent between 8pm and 8am; incidences of indecent and sexual assault in Kings Cross have also both reduced by almost 50 per cent. And it’s not because no one is going out; it’s just the way people go out that has changed.

You can’t argue with those facts. Lives are being saved; fewer families are being torn apart.

The current alcohol measures in place are working. Could some changes be made around the edges to iron out some teething issues? Sure, but we simply cannot wind things back and put lives at risk. Not after everything that has been achieved.

I remember the pre-alcohol law days vividly - too vividly - and I can’t bear to imagine going back there. Sydney deserves a dynamic, enjoyable and safe nightlife. Rolling back the modest alcohol laws and reviving a time when families couldn’t walk the streets safely won’t give us that.

Our Government has a responsibility to keep people safe. We know the current alcohol measures work. Rolling them back and putting lives at risk again would be the height of irresponsibility.

### Metadata

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| **Views** | 1264 |