

VICTORIA FAILING TO PROTECT WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM ALCOHOL-FUELLED FAMILY VIOLENCE

12 December 2018: 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.

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.

Ends

Dr Wilkinson is available for interview to discuss the report, *Public health arguments in planning and licensing appeal processes: A case study of the City of Casey’s attempt to regulate a new chain packaged liquor outlet*. **Media contact: Anastasia Salamastrakis on 0428 195 464.**

Mr Thorn is available for interview about the policy implications of the report. **Media contact: Clare Ross 02 6122 8600 (A/H Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710)**

The **Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR)** is an innovative, world-class research facility examining alcohol-related harms and the effectiveness of alcohol-related policies. The Centre, which receives funding from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and La Trobe University, is led by Professor Emmanuel Kuntsche and Professor Robin Room. To find out more visit www.capr.edu.au

La Trobe University is an Australian public institute founded in 1964. In 1967, 552 students enrolled at La Trobe University, the third university to open in Victoria. It has grown to accommodate more than 30,000 students including approximately 7,600 international students from over 90 countries. It now has a network of campuses with 21,000 students at our Melbourne campus and over 5,900 at our campuses in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura, Melbourne City, and Shepparton. www.latrobe.edu.au/

The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges. To find out more visit www.fare.org.au.