

### **RESTRICTIONS ON THE SALE AND SUPPLY OF ALCOHOL: EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES.**

#### **NDLERF Research Summary Series**

**National Drug Research Institute. Perth (2007).**

Plain English summary and implications for police prepared by Roger Nicholas.

#### **Aims and Methodology**

This project examined the issue of ‘what works and where’ in relation to the variety of restrictions that are applied to the sale of alcohol in Australia. Specifically, the research aimed to: determine the effectiveness of past and existing restrictions on levels of alcohol-related harm; identify current best practice in relation to the use of restrictions on the supply of alcohol; identify the key factors that determine whether or not restrictions on the sale of alcohol are, or could be, effective in a range of settings; and, identify the restrictions, or packages of restrictions, most likely to result in improvements in remote communities, particularly in Western Australia. The authors undertook a major literature review on this issue and provided an indication of the measure of confidence that can be given to the effectiveness of each kind of restriction.

#### **Key findings.**

##### ***Measures for which there is strong evidence for positive outcomes:***

- Reducing the consumption of alcohol by increasing its price. This includes measures such as increasing taxation, and has been shown comprehensively to reduce a range of alcohol-related harms.
- Restricting the hours/days of sale for licensed premises.
- Restrictions on the legal drinking age for the purchase or consumption of alcohol are effective, although the extent to which alcohol retailers observe the restrictions is dependent on the level of enforcement by police and licensing authorities.

##### ***Measures for which there is evidence of positive outcomes, but which may need substantial ongoing functional support.***

- Broad restrictions on access to alcoholic beverages which are more frequently associated with negative consequences (such as full strength beer and spirits) and restrictions for particular subgroups of the population under specific circumstances (such as high alcohol content drinks at public events).
- There is strong evidence of a consistent relationship between a high density of licensed premises and increased levels of violence. Restricting outlet density is likely to mitigate this.
- Restrictions on the ownership of liquor licenses by private individuals and having direct government control of liquor outlets. This measure confers a protective effect on levels of alcohol consumption however this is unlikely to occur in Australia.
- Restricting service to intoxicated patrons in licensed premises via responsible beverage service

**Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing  
as part of its commitment to the National Drug Strategy.**

practices is effective but only in the presence of appropriate levels of enforcement.

- Restrictions implemented via liquor accords and community-based programs are effective but only in the presence of appropriate levels of enforcement.
- Mandatory packages of restrictions for remote and regional communities imposed by liquor licensing authorities are effective if they are responsive and adaptive to changes in community opinion, and if they occur in the context of demand and harm reduction strategies (such as the provision of sporting and recreational facilities, housing and employment opportunities).
- Dry community declarations can be effective where there is a combination of Indigenous community control and statutory control. Police enforcement of the restrictions is particularly important for ensuring that dry community declarations reach their potential.

***Measures for which the evidence is unclear or insufficient for conclusions to be drawn.***

- The evidence concerning the impacts of lockouts (restrictions on entry or re-entry for nightclub patrons) is mixed but warrants further investigation.

***Measures which the evidence consistently indicates the absence of reliable positive effects.***

- Local dry area bans (as distinct from 'dry community' declarations discussed earlier) are bans which relate to the consumption of alcohol in designated public places or areas. While these bans can decrease public order problems in the designated areas, they do not lead to overall reductions in public order offences, alcohol-related hospitalisations, or police detentions of intoxicated persons. The result of these bans appears to be a displacement of the problem to other areas.

***Other factors associated with positive change included:***

- effective enforcement;
- considering the possibility of individuals, licensees, or alcohol producers circumventing bans;
- ensuring that any restrictions meet the changing needs of the target population;
- ensuring that restrictions have the support of communities, because restrictions which are imposed on communities are less likely to be effective in the short and long term;
- ensure that the measures implemented are evidence-based so as to avoid 'easy options' such as public education/advertising campaigns or voluntary agreements which are unlikely to be effective;
- the need for an appropriate blend of restrictions for each environment; and,
- effective evaluation.

## **Implications for police**

Police organisations expend substantial resources on responding to alcohol-related problems. They can also play a major role in reducing alcohol-related problems. Many of the strategies discussed in this research are highly dependent on effective enforcement. The authors stressed that the targets of enforcement activities must perceive these as being a real and imminent possibility and that enforcement needs to be frequent, unpredictable, strongly publicised and ongoing. Police can also play a key role in encouraging a proactive approach to alcohol licensing issues which acknowledges the links between alcohol availability and problems, and plans accordingly. Ultimately, supply reduction strategies alone, whilst necessary, are not a sufficient response for reducing alcohol-related harm. Harm and demand reduction strategies are also required.

**Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing  
as part of its commitment to the National Drug Strategy.**

[www.ndlrf.gov.au](http://www.ndlrf.gov.au)