Alcohol harm

The NSW community is affected by alcohol in many ways including preventable chronic disease, family violence, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), road traffic accidents, child maltreatment and neglect, vandalism and lost productivity in the workplace.

Increased availability of alcohol results in increased consumption and increased risk of harm.

Alcohol is responsible for more than 37 emergency department presentations, 147 hospitalisations and three deaths every day in NSW.

The late night measures

The late night measures introduced by the O’Farrell Government in 2014, were introduced in response to the exceptionally high rates of alcohol-related violence in the Sydney CBD and Kings Cross which resulted in the tragic and preventable deaths of Daniel Christie and Thomas Kelly. The suite of alcohol harm reduction policies came into effect on 24 February 2014 include:

- No high strength drinks or shots from midnight up to 7am to be served (except small bars)
- Per-person drink sale limits during late trading (except small bars)
  - No more than four alcoholic drinks or one bottle of wine at one time between midnight and 2am
  - No more than two alcoholic drinks at one time from 2am onwards
- 1.30am one-way door where new patrons are not allowed to enter the venue after 1.30am
- 3am last drinks where all venues must cease liquor sale or supply at 3am.
- Live entertainment venues may apply for a later one-way door time of 2am and/or last drinks time of 3.30am
- Venues may remain open as long as their development consent and license conditions allow but they may not sell alcohol after 3am (3.30am for live entertainment venues).
Support

There is tremendous community support in NSW for the alcohol harm-minimisation policies. The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education’s (FARE) Annual Alcohol Poll conducted by YouGov Galaxy has found:11

- 84% support a closing time for pubs, clubs and bars of no later than 3am
- 63% support placing a limit of four drinks on the number of drinks a person can purchase at one time after 10pm
- 55% support introducing a 1am lockout for pubs, clubs and bars

There is also widespread support for the policies among young people with 90% of 18-34-year-olds supporting a closing time for pubs, clubs and bars of no later than 3am.

Safety

- Since the introduction of the measures there have been dramatic reductions in non-domestic violence, with substantial reductions observed in entertainment precincts, and no evidence of geographical displacement of assaults to proximal or distal areas.12
- Systematic reviews of international literature have found that the evidence is overwhelmingly supportive of restricting trading hours for late-night venues as a key approach to reducing alcohol-fuelled violence.13
- International research has found that increasing the trading house of licensed venues in entertainment precincts increases harm. An evaluation of extended trading in two entertainment precincts in Amsterdam found a 34% increase in alcohol-related ambulance attendances compared to the control precincts with early closing times.14

Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research15

- Non-domestic alcohol-related assaults in the Sydney local government area have decreased by 23.5% since the measures were introduced, from 1868 assaults in the 12 months prior to their implementation (year to March 2014) to 1429 assaults in the year to March 2019.
- In the Kings Cross Police Area Command there has been a 61% reduction in alcohol-related non-domestic assaults in the five years since the measures were introduced (408 to 159 assaults).
Health

Last drinks impacts

- In the 12 months following their introduction there was a 24.8% relative rate reduction in alcohol-related serious injury presentations to St Vincent’s Hospital, Darlinghurst.16

- In the 2 years following their introduction, orbital fracture presentations (most commonly occurring from assault) saw significant decreases at St Vincent’s Hospital. Additionally, the number of fractures requiring surgery decreased and more cases were able to be managed conservatively. This resulted in an estimated savings of approximately $0.5million in hospital and ambulance costs. 17

- The total number of serious facial trauma surgeries at St Vincent’s Hospital reduced by 60% in the 2 years post introduction of the measures, with 145 facial trauma patients receiving operations in 2012/2013 and only 58 patients from 2014/2015.18,19

HealthStats NSW20

- The City of Sydney still experiences significantly higher levels of alcohol-related harm compared to the NSW average.

- While assaults and emergency presentations have decreased, alcohol-related hospitalisations remain exceptionally high. This is due to the broader and long-term health impact of alcohol consumption including cancer and other chronic diseases.

- Alcohol-related hospitalisations in the City of Sydney were 30% higher than the state average from 2015-2017.

Alcohol’s broader health impact

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), alcohol consumption is a causal factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions.21

- Alcohol is a group one carcinogen, as classified by the WHO’s International Agency for Research on Cancer.22

- Alcohol is one of four modifiable risk factors for chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, mental health and cancer, the other three risk factors being poor diet, physical inactivity and tobacco use.23

Business and economics

The night time economy is about more than alcohol, it is arts and culture, food and sport. Sydney attracts millions of visitors per year.

- According to Destination NSW, the top activities for Sydney visitors are ‘Eat out, dine at a restaurant or café’ (70.7%), ‘visit friends and relatives’ (45.6%) and ‘sightseeing or looking around’ (21.8%).24 Sydney's night time economy should support and promote these activities.

- The measures have not stopped business growth or tourism. They are in place to protect our workers, our communities and our visitors, and to promote a more diverse night time economy.
Lord Mayor’s report

- Sydney has the strongest and most concentrated night time economy in Australia, with year-on-year growth since 2011.

- In 2016-2017 the drinks sub-sector saw increases in the number of establishments (4.9%), employment (8.7%) and turnover (6.5%).

- The number of establishments in Sydney’s night time economy grew in 2014 (4,756 businesses, up 6.2%), saw a temporary decrease in 2015 (4,607 businesses, down 3.2%), reached an all-time high in 2016 (4,784 businesses, up 3.8%) and again in 2017 (4,872 businesses, up 1.8%).

- Sydney saw its biggest decrease in the number of establishments between 2012 and 2013, before the measures were even introduced (down 4.5%).

- Employment and revenue in the Sydney night time economy has not once decreased since 2011.

- There are more jobs and more choice in Sydney’s night time economy than ever before with increased growth in drinks, entertainment and food options. It is clear from the Council of Capital City Lord Mayor’s report that business is booming in the City of Sydney.
References

20 NSW Combined Admitted Patient Epidemiology Data and ABS population estimates (SAPhARi). Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, NSW Ministry of Health.