



REDUCING HARM FROM ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS POLICY



Introduction

Local governments play an important role in balancing the contribution that licensed premises make to the vitality of our local areas, with management of the social, economic and health impacts of alcohol and other drug misuse in local communities.

The responsibilities of Council in regards to the management of alcohol and other drugs issues are defined within various State legislation, including the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Victorian Local Government Act 2020, the Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 (in relation to licensed premises) and the Tobacco Act 1987.

Maribyrnong City Council has a strong history of taking action on the harms caused by misuse of alcohol and other drugs, beginning with the first strategic policy response in 1998. By implementing the Reducing Harm from Alcohol and Other Drug Policy, Council contributes to the work of other levels of government and local stakeholders to reduce the supply, demand and harm of alcohol and other drugs.

Further work and strong partnerships between federal, state and local governments, Victoria Police, community health providers, drug and alcohol service providers, research institutes, health promotion agencies, the education sector, sporting clubs, the hospitality sector and the community will be required to see positive change in this area.

Definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD)	A term encompassing alcohol and various substances, both legal and illegal, with potential for misuse and health risks.
Harm reduction	A public health approach aiming to reduce the negative consequences of risky behaviours, such as substance abuse, without insisting on complete abstinence.
Intersectionality	Intersectionality is the concept that our social identities (like race, gender, and class) overlap and influence our experiences of privilege and oppression in complex ways.
Health inequality	Differences in health status and access to healthcare among different population groups, often influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors.
Equity	The principle of fairness and justice in which resources, opportunities, and benefits are distributed to individuals or groups based on their specific needs and circumstances to achieve equality of outcomes.
Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)	Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is the legislated peak body for providing support to councils and councillors in Victoria.
Public drunkenness	Being visibly intoxicated by alcohol or substances in a public place, often involving disruptive behavior and subject to legal regulation
Pill testing	Pill testing is a harm reduction strategy that allows people who are already in possession of drugs to test it at a facility or booth to find out how safe the drug is before taking it.
Drug decriminalisation	Removing criminal penalties for the possession of small quantities of drugs for personal use, with a focus on public health and harm reduction rather than punishment.
E-cigarettes	Electronic devices that vapourise a liquid solution, often containing nicotine, for inhalation, simulating the experience of smoking without burning tobacco.
Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA)	Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) is training is compulsory in Victoria, for anyone serving alcohol under General, On premises, Late Night and Packaged Liquor licences.
Medically supervised injecting room	A medically supervised injecting room is a safe and hygienic place where people can inject drugs in a supervised health setting.
Social determinants of health	Social, economic, and environmental conditions and factors, such as income, education, employment, housing, and access to healthcare, that significantly influence an individual's or a community's overall health and well-being.



Purpose

The purpose of the Reducing Harm from Alcohol and Other Drugs Policy (the Policy) is to prevent and minimise harm from alcohol and other drugs in the City of Maribyrnong community.

Scope

The Policy applies to all Council departments, relevant to the principles and policy commitments detailed in the policy section.

Council has a limited role in regulating alcohol through Maribyrnong's Licenced Premises Policy and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998.

- Under Section 40 of the Liquor Control Act 1998, Council can object to the granting, relocation or variation of a packaged liquor licence or late night (packaged liquor) licence, if it would be conducive to or encourage harm. Council is however reliant on the Victorian Liquor Commission referring Liquor License applications currently with them for Council comment and it is rare that this occurs.
- Maribyrnong's Licenced Premises Policy is part of the Maribyrnong Planning Scheme at Clause 22.08. This policy has a focus on assessing amenity impacts taking into account existing amenity conditions and the role of licensed premises in the city's activity centres.

This policy takes account recent changes to State and Federal policies and legislation relation to Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) including:

- The Victorian Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness Act introduced in 2021.
- The establishment of an ongoing Medically Supervised Injecting Room in Richmond in Melbourne following a two year trial of the facility.
- Changes to State and Federal drug laws to allow the cultivation and use of medicinal cannabis in Australia.

This policy also considers other areas of Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) harm minimisation reform including:

- Pill testing for festivals, nightclubs and dance parties.
- The further expansion of safe injecting facilities in metropolitan Melbourne and across Victoria.
- Drug decriminalisation

Alcohol and Other Drugs within scope:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco and E-cigarettes
- Prescription drugs including medicinal cannabis
- Illicit drugs including heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, cannabis, GHB, hallucinogens and synthetic drugs.

Background

Council's approach to managing the impacts of harm from alcohol and other drugs is based on a social justice and harm prevention and minimisation approach. This approach aligns with the Council Plan 2021-2025, which incorporates the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHP). Reducing harms from Alcohol and other Drugs is a key municipal public health and wellbeing priority for Council. This framework provides a foundation for Council's commitment and actions to protect human rights, promote social justice and health and wellbeing in the City of Maribyrnong.

A recent legislative change that has a significant impact on public health responses to alcohol is the decriminalisation of public drunkenness in Victoria. The Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Bill 2020 seeks to remove public drunkenness as an offence in Victoria, coming into effect on 7 November 2023.



Policy

Council is committed to social justice and equity for all and has a vital role to play as a leader, partner, advocate and planner in developing and implementing strategies to protect and promote health, now and into the future. Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan has a focus area dedicated to promote a harm minimisation approach to alcohol and other drug use in the City.

Health inequalities exist in our community mean that some groups may experience poorer health outcomes based on their identity and experiences. When developing strategies to minimise the harms associated with alcohol and other drugs use, Council is committed to taking an intersectional approach. This approach considers the unique needs and challenges of priority communities, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, people experiencing homelessness, unemployment, mental illnesses, young people, people living with a disability, LGBTIQ+ community and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

As the level of government closest to the community, councils have a mandate to create healthy, safe and inclusive environments. The harm minimisation and reduction approach to managing the impacts of alcohol and other drug use is based on the social determinants of health. These determinants of health include gender, income and social status, education, physical environment, social support networks and access to health services (World Health Organisation 2013).

Policy commitments

Council is committed to the principles of advocacy, partnership, and research throughout the life of this policy, with the aim of reducing harm from alcohol and other drugs. These principles and associated commitments are guided by evidence, the role that local government is best placed to play in addressing the harms caused by alcohol and other drugs.

POLICY COMMITMENTS

Advocacy

The services and programs that address drug misuse are funded and delivered by Federal, State and the community based sector. To maintain and improve programs it is crucial that Council and local stakeholders adopt a proactive advocacy role to ensure local needs are met. Advocacy opportunities include:

- Participate in regional advocacy efforts for improved AOD service coverage in the Western Metropolitan Region.
- Advocate for AOD harm prevention programs, particularly for parents, children and young people. This includes specific programs for alcohol, e-cigarettes, illicit and prescription drugs.
- Advocate for the development of AOD alternative programs and activities, particularly for at risk groups in the community.
- Advocate for the introduction of pill testing for festivals, nightclubs and dance parties across Victoria.
- Advocate to the State government for sustained investment in assertive outreach programs and responsive health services, including the Medically Supervised Injecting Room.
- Advocate for increased government investment in research on the health and wellbeing impacts of AOD including research into family violence, and mental and physical health impacts.
- Continue to assess referred packaged liquor licence or late night (packaged liquor) licences that could be conducive to or encourage harm and under the Maribyrnong's Licenced Premises Policy continue to assess amenity impacts taking into account existing amenity conditions and the role of licensed premises in the city's activity centres using an intersectional approach.

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POLICY COMMITMENTS CONT'D

Partnerships

Stakeholders and all levels of government are working towards dealing with the problems of alcohol and drug use. Council will strengthen its current partnerships, and work to build new partnerships through the following:

- Council will provide training to community facing teams, to support staff who may interact with community affected by AOD or seeking support.
- Participate in the Western Metropolitan Region AOD network, the MAV AOD Issues Forum, the northern and north-western region health and wellbeing planner's network, community safety forums in partnership with Victoria Police and other multidisciplinary steering groups to support prevention efforts.
- Partner with festival organisations to promote responsible drinking messages and promote the responsible service of alcohol occur including the availability of food and non-alcoholic drinks.
- Partner with community, businesses and festival organisations to deliver alcohol-free events.
- Seek grants in partnership with local services and neighbouring municipalities to strength collaborative harm minimisation approaches to AOD.
- Support the provision of Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) training for organisations such as sporting clubs, bars and clubs.
- Continue to work with community health organisations to promote local AOD harm minimisation programs.
- Prioritise comprehensive cultural safety training for staff with localised input from and delivery by Community Controlled Organisations.

Research

Council has an important role in undertaking research and providing data and information about prevention, harms, services and programs. Council will work to strengthen the following:

- Research and evaluate evidence-based information that will assist in responding to AOD-related issues, using an intersectional lens and disseminate to internal and external stakeholders.
- Develop factsheets on AOD issues to go on Council's website, and apply an intersectional lens to data collection and analysis.
- Monitor local implications of State Government legislation changes such as lock out laws, medicinal marijuana and the regulation of e-cigarettes.

Policy statement

The Policy supports Council to take a public health and harm-minimization approach to alcohol and other drugs in the City of Maribyrnong. It take a collaborative and local approach to the principles of advocacy, partnership and research.

The Policy guides and outlines the important role of local government in addressing and preventing harm from alcohol and other drugs.

Key stakeholders

Council will work collaboratively and contribute to the work of all levels of government, local organisations, businesses and stakeholders to reduce the harms associated with alcohol and other drugs. Council will work alongside a range of stakeholders to drive positive change across the municipality and continue to seek out new partnerships. Our partners in this work includes:

- Federal, State and other Local governments
- Victoria Police
- Community Health
- Drug and alcohol services
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Research institutions
- Health promotion agencies
- Education
- Sporting clubs and associations
- Hospitality sector

Consultation

- Research and literature review
- Community engagement:
 - Council department engagement
 - Stakeholder engagement
 - Community engagement

Implementation and monitoring

The monitoring and reporting of the Policy is supported by Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP).

POLICY OWNER

Manager Community Services and Social Infrastructure Planning

DIRECTORATE

Community Services

Review of policy

This policy will be reviewed June 2028

References

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Gender Equality Act 2020
- Liquor Control Reform Act 1998
- Local Government Act 2020
- Maribyrnong Planning Scheme 22.08 Licenced Premises Policy
- Maribyrnong City Council Plan 2021-2025
- Maribyrnong Social Justice Framework 2023 (draft)
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021



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