

Monday, November 16, 2015

Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy Team
Mental Health, Drugs and Regions Division
Department of Health
Level 17 / 50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy Team

Metropolitan Councils submission to whole of government Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy

As Chief Executive Officers of metropolitan Melbourne-based local governments, we are pleased to be able to respond to the '*Whole of government Victorian Alcohol and Drug strategy*'. The State is to be commended on its consultative approach.

We are eager to work in partnership with State Government to develop its new alcohol and drug strategy. As CEOs, we believe that local government has a strong understanding of the impacts of alcohol and drug misuse in our communities and can share its expertise from addressing on-the-ground issues that differ considerably across municipalities.

The use and misuse of alcohol and drugs, whilst variable, often follows predictable and consistent patterns. Local councils understand where these trends most evidently occur.

Alcohol related harm

Alcohol harms continue to contribute to security and safety concerns, family violence, assaults, serious injuries and vandalism and also indirectly through drink driving.

Consequences include damaging effects on amenity and the community's lowered perception of public safety, which in turn can impact negatively on economic vitality.

A lack of systems coordination between the State and councils' planning and regulatory controls results in pressure on local authorities to balance the demand for vibrant entertainment precincts with public safety.

Many mechanisms influence alcohol consumption and more analysis is needed about its 'cumulative impact' i.e., the links between misuse, point-of-purchase, accessibility, outlet density, health and social harms.

Recommendations

To assist to identify, monitor and manage alcohol harms, as CEOs we recommend that the new strategy works to achieve the following key outcomes:

- Reduce alcohol related harms through improved management of alcohol availability.
- Build on the evidence based health care and support available for people who consume alcohol at excessive levels.
- Incorporate the recommendations of the National Preventative Health Strategy.
- Support initiatives that reduce the harmful impacts of alcohol on communities

We believe that a more coordinated and collaborative approach using evidence-based solutions between State and local government will support us to achieve such outcomes.

Drug-related harm

People who generally use drugs do so in similar ways and locations and councils are acutely aware how drug sales and use occurs or changes in their municipalities. An issue for particular inner city councils is mainly heroin, which is largely sold in open street based markets. Public drug dealing and use is sensitive to police operations which, combined with the urban environment, often results in the displacement of use and dealing to new areas in the same or other municipalities.

In some popular entertainment precincts the most common drugs are cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and cocaine, often in combination with alcohol.

In response we have developed informal strategies with few resources by using place based approaches and collaborating with State funded service providers to ensure the amenity and public health of our suburbs. However, as we do not manage the policy development that guides local service delivery, we are often restricted to providing advice and minimal ad hoc funding.

Further with the withdrawal of drug hot spot funding from the *Municipal Drug Strategy*, this further restricts local government’s ability to maintain and improve amenity and services.

Recommendations

To assist to identify, monitor and manage drug harms, as CEOs we recommend that the new strategy works to achieve the following key outcomes:

- Provision of health care and support to people with an addiction to drugs, both illicit and licit.
- Support for evidence-based prevention and recovery measures.
- Support initiatives for communities to understand that addiction is a health issue.
- Support initiatives that reduce the impacts of drugs on communities’ public health, safety and amenity.

These outcomes will be achieved by using evidence based solutions which are already taking place within our municipalities and working elsewhere, and engaging in public discourse on successful new initiatives.

Summary

We strongly recommend that the whole of government Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy incorporates the outcomes outlined above. Through engaging in ongoing public discourse about ways to achieve such outcomes, we encourage the community to be part of the solution. We are eager to partner with the State Government.

Effective and sustainable outcomes are more evident when there is clear alignment between the State Government’s legislative and policy framework and local government’s place based approaches to reducing harms linked to alcohol and other drug misuse.

As CEOs of the below signed councils, we welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with the State Government and take an intergovernmental approach to managing alcohol and other drug-related impacts.

Yours sincerely

CEO X	CEO X	CEO X	CEO X
Logo X	Logo X	Logo X	Logo X