

FARE submission to the Queensland Government's Draft Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2025



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About the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

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. More than 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy.

In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.

FARE is guided by the World Health Organization's *Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol*¹ for stopping alcohol harms through population-based strategies, problem directed policies, and direct interventions.

If you would like to contribute to FARE's important work, call us on (02) 6122 8600 or email info@fare.org.au.

¹ World Health Organization (2010). *Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

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Summary

Family violence is a violation of human rights. It largely occurs in the home, where we should feel safest, perpetrated by those we should feel safest with. Family violence is rarely one-off and may persist for years, often involving multiple forms of abuse and multiple victims. Recently, the abhorrence of this crime and the need for action to eliminate it has rightfully shifted to the forefront of Australia's collective conscience, with governments initiating strategies designed to reduce the incidence of family violence.

Alcohol is a significant contributor to family violence in Queensland. Unfortunately, the role of alcohol has not been sufficiently recognised in national or state and territory strategies to address family violence. This oversight means that the efficacy of such strategies will be limited.

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) commends the work that the Queensland Government has done to progress the elimination of family violence, including establishing the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland which produced the report *Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an End to Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland* (Taskforce report). FARE also acknowledges that the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2025* (Strategy) is a timely and important document that provides a useful framework to address family violence in Queensland.

However, neither the Taskforce report nor the draft Strategy place enough focus on the role of alcohol. It is also a concern that the recommendations from both documents are heavily weighted towards the later stages of prevention (support and interventions after violence has already occurred), with insufficient attention to the earlier stages of prevention (before the violence occurs).

In order to provide comprehensive solutions to eliminate family violence in Queensland, it is imperative that the final Strategy include actions that specifically address the role of alcohol and a greater focus on primary and secondary prevention.

FARE developed the *Policy options paper: Preventing alcohol-related family and domestic violence*, and this was used to inform the final *National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence* (Framework). This Framework outlines actions that various levels of government can take that will contribute to the reduction of family violence.

The recent Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee's final report, *Domestic Violence in Australia*, acknowledged the role of alcohol and endorsed FARE's Framework in one of its 25 recommendations to the Commonwealth Government. This recognition from the Commonwealth Parliament is a significant step forward in ensuring that alcohol policies are considered part of the solution to prevent family violence. Implementing alcohol availability controls and other policies that reduce alcohol-related violence are vital to preventing and reducing the severity of family violence and associated harms.

FARE welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Strategy and has outlined a number of recommendations to ensure that alcohol is sufficiently recognised as part of the solution to reduce and prevent family violence across Queensland. FARE has also provided comment to the Queensland Government's *Violence Against Women Prevention Plan* with recognition that this plan is intended to complement the Strategy.

List of recommendations

1. That the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2025* acknowledges that alcohol is a significant contributor to family violence.
2. That the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2015* includes a greater focus on primary and secondary prevention.
3. That the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2025* addresses the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee's recommendation to consider the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education's *National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence*.
4. That the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2025* includes tangible policies to address alcohol-related family violence as outlined in the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education's *National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence*.

The role of alcohol in family violence

Alcohol is a significant contributor to family violence in Australia. In just one year, there were 29,684 incidents of alcohol-related family violence in the states and territories that collect this data (New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory). This equates to between 23 per cent and 65 per cent of all family violence incidents reported to police involving alcohol.^{1,2} Between 2002-03 and 2011-12, 36 per cent of perpetrators of intimate partner homicides had used alcohol.³ Alcohol is also a factor in between 15 and 47 per cent of child protection cases, with 24 per cent specifically in Queensland.⁴

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises that alcohol misuse and family violence are major public health issues that demand urgent attention.⁵ The WHO has identified that alcohol is implicated in intimate partner violence in the following ways:

- Alcohol contributes to the incidence and the severity of intimate partner violence.
- Heavy alcohol use may cause or exacerbate relationship stress which increases the risk of conflict.
- Alcohol use affects cognitive and physical function and may result in perpetrators of intimate partner violence using a violent resolution to relationship conflicts, rather than a non-violent resolution.
- Excessive drinking by at least one partner can aggravate existing relationship stressors such as financial problems, thus increasing the probability of violence.
- Alcohol is often used by perpetrators as a justification or excuse for the violence.
- Experiencing intimate partner violence can result in increased alcohol consumption by the victim as a coping mechanism.
- Intergenerational effects may occur, with children who witness intimate partner violence being more likely to develop heavy drinking patterns and alcohol dependence later in life, often as a way of coping or self-medicating.⁶

WHO also explains the links between alcohol and child maltreatment:

- Alcohol affects physical and cognitive function, which may reduce self-control and increase the propensity to act violently, including towards children. Alcohol may also incapacitate the parent from protecting the child from abuse by others.
- Harmful alcohol use can impair responsible behaviour and decrease the amount of time and money that can be spent on a child.
- Harmful parental alcohol use is associated with other factors that increase the risk of child maltreatment such as mental health issues and anti-social personality characteristics.
- Experiencing child maltreatment is associated with problematic alcohol use later in life, to cope or self-medicate.⁷

Recommendation

1. That the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2025* acknowledges that alcohol is a significant contributor to family violence.

Gaps in the Taskforce report and the draft Strategy

Inadequate attention to alcohol

Both the Taskforce report and the draft Strategy fail to adequately address the role of alcohol in family violence. The Taskforce report's view is that while alcohol can be a factor in family violence, it does not in itself cause violence, therefore (by implication) justifying its lack of inclusion in the report's recommendations. Correspondingly, there is also a lack of attention to alcohol in the draft Strategy.

The Strategy currently only mentions alcohol in two contexts:

- Alcohol misuse as a potential consequence for children who grow up with domestic and family violence.
- Alcohol as an issue in domestic and family violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

While not incorrect, confining the involvement of alcohol in family violence within these two contexts dangerously overlooks the fact that alcohol-related family violence can affect Australians of any background, with consequences that are wide and enduring. Furthermore, framing alcohol-related family violence as an Indigenous issue unfairly stigmatises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

By downplaying alcohol's role in family violence, the Taskforce report and the draft Strategy fall prey to the same shortcomings as other family violence strategies around Australia. A review undertaken by FARE of existing family violence frameworks found that while the majority of these strategies acknowledge alcohol as a contributing factor in family violence, they fail to recommend initiatives to reduce or prevent alcohol-related family violence. Where specific alcohol harm reduction initiatives are listed, these are often targeted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities only.

The draft Strategy does acknowledge the need to have a "Policy to tackle alcohol-fuelled violence" as a partner strategy. However, the recent policies announced by the Queensland Government to reduce alcohol-related violence are directed towards addressing street violence, with a focus on pubs, clubs and bars. While these policies will have some impact in reducing the incidence and severity of family violence, they lack sensitivity to the complex interplay between alcohol and family violence. For

example, the association between off-licence premises (such as bottle shops) and family violence has not been addressed in the Queensland Government's recent policy announcements.

A study from Melbourne has found that there is a strong association between domestic violence and the concentration of off-licence liquor outlets in an area, in that a ten per cent increase in off-licence liquor outlets is associated with a 3.3 per cent increase in domestic violence.⁸ Increases in domestic violence were also apparent with an increase in general (pub) licences and on-premise licences.⁹ A study in Western Australia found that for every 10,000 additional litres of pure alcohol sold at a packaged liquor outlet, the risk of violence experienced in a residential setting increased by 26 per cent.¹⁰

Therefore, given the lack of attention to alcohol policies that are tailored to family violence, reliance on the policies recently announced to address alcohol issues in family violence is not advised.

Insufficient emphasis on primary and secondary prevention

Prevention can be conceptualised across three levels:

- Primary prevention: Strategies designed to reduce risk across a whole population.
- Secondary prevention: Strategies that target individuals or segments of the population showing early indications of risk or vulnerability.
- Tertiary prevention: Strategies targeting people already affected by violence that aim to reduce the harm or damage associated with the violence and prevent the recurrence of violence.

The draft Strategy places more emphasis on tertiary prevention (after the violence has occurred) compared to the earlier stages of prevention (before the violence has occurred). The efficacy of strategies to reduce family violence will be maximised if further attention is placed on primary and secondary prevention. Primary and secondary prevention are designed to stop violence from happening in the first place, meaning that individuals, their families and the wider community are spared the physical, psychological and economic costs of violence.

Examples of primary prevention include promoting reduced alcohol and drug consumption, promoting gender equality, and promoting healthy child development.¹¹ Examples of secondary prevention include targeted interventions at environments where the likelihood of gendered violence is higher, for example, sports clubs where there is often a culture of sexism.¹²

Recommendation

2. That the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2015* includes a greater focus on primary and secondary prevention.

FARE's National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence

In recognition of the alcohol gap in Australia's family violence discourse, FARE developed its *Policy options paper: Preventing alcohol-related family and domestic violence*, which detailed the evidence around alcohol and family violence and proposed a broad range of policies and programs to aid in the prevention of alcohol-related family violence.

After extensive consultation with public health, child protection and family violence professionals, FARE launched the *National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence*.

FARE's Framework is prevention-focused and proposes 20 actions that Australian governments can implement in order to have a tangible impact on preventing and reducing incidents of alcohol-related family violence. Many of these interventions can be enacted swiftly and at low cost, resulting in immediate improvements for family violence. State and territory governments have the capacity to implement a number of actions, including:

- Reducing the physical availability of alcohol through policies that prevent the proliferation of alcohol outlets
- Supporting the development of family sensitive practice for parents with alcohol and other drug problems
- Facilitating collaboration between alcohol and other drug services and family violence services to ensure holistic care
- Investing in data collection and public reporting of alcohol's involvement in family violence.

The Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee's final report on *Domestic Violence in Australia* acknowledged the role of alcohol in family violence and endorsed FARE's Framework in one of its 25 recommendations to the Commonwealth Government, stating:

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government consider the framework developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) as part of the cross-jurisdictional work it is leading through COAG to ensure the development of an integrated and focused effort to reduce the role of alcohol as a contributing factor in cases of domestic violence.

Recommendations

3. That the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2025* addresses the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee's recommendation to consider the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education's *National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence*.
4. That the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2015-2025* includes tangible policies to address alcohol-related family violence as outlined in the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education's *National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence*.

Conclusion

To help inform the Queensland Government's efforts to prevent family violence, FARE has included with this submission FARE's *Policy options paper: Preventing alcohol-related family and domestic violence*, FARE's *National framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence*, and a copy of FARE's submission to the Queensland Government's *Violence Against Women Prevention Plan*.

We can no longer afford to ignore the role of alcohol in family violence. In order to combat family violence, the Queensland Government's *Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2015-2025* must emphasise prevention and include specific strategies that address alcohol. Doing so will have immediate and positive impacts on the incidence of family violence, while enhancing the safety and wellbeing of children and families affected by family violence.

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