



RESEARCH: NORSEMAN VOLUNTARY LIQUOR ACCORD SUCCESS

11 February 2016: Restrictions on the sale of alcohol, such as those currently in place in the Norseman community in Western Australia's Goldfields region, can have a long-term impact on local alcohol problems.

New research funded by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University, uses years of quantitative data on alcohol consumption and associated harms in the region, coupled with qualitative observations from members of the community to assess the effectiveness of the town's intervention.

In the early 2000s, members of Norseman's Indigenous community became increasingly concerned that heavy alcohol consumption was the main cause of chronic health problems in their town. There was also a clear recognition that certain types of packaged liquor were particularly associated with this problematic drinking.

As a result of extensive community consultation, the Norseman Voluntary Alcohol Agreement was implemented in 2008 and remains to this day.

Lead researcher Professor Richard Midford, of the Menzies School of Health Research and Charles Darwin University, says this provided a unique opportunity to examine the long-term impact of Alcohol Accords.

"The people of Norseman determined that the best way to tackle the issue was to reduce the availability of packaged alcohol and reduce access to the preferred beverages of heavy drinkers. The Indigenous community was the driving force for introducing these restrictions in Norseman, and the agreement is still talked about with pride because of the manner of its genesis," says Professor Midford.

The agreement restricted alcohol sales from the town's liquor outlet to between midday and 6pm, and placed a cap on cask wine limiting purchases to one cask per person per day. In 2009, this was extended to also include a limit of one 750ml bottle of fortified wine and full strength beer a day.

"The analysis showed improvements in the patterns of alcohol consumption and harm data after the introduction of these voluntary restrictions – including significant decreases in Indigenous rates of burglary, domestic violence and assaults and a slight decline in the rate of hospital emergency department admissions. And there was almost universal agreement that the behaviour of drinkers, the amount of alcohol consumed and alcohol-related harms has all changed for the better – with less public drinking and less obvious drunkenness," says Professor Midford.



Foundation for Alcohol
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FARE Chief Executive Mr Michael Thorn says that, given the extensive evidence linking alcohol's availability to increased levels of harm, it is encouraging to see such strong community support and engagement for addressing an alcogenic environment.

"The Norseman case study demonstrates the power of grassroots community-led initiatives to combat the harm caused by alcohol. While the unique conditions of the Norseman voluntary agreement might not necessarily be suited to the needs of other populations, it has clearly made a significant and welcome difference to this town and has helped to change alcohol attitudes and behaviours. It is encouraging to see such an empowered community which has not only identified that alcohol is a causing harm, but has taken proactive steps to address this social issue and to reduce preventable alcohol-related violence, crime, disease and deaths," Mr Thorn said.

ENDS

Media notes

Professor Richard Midford will present this research at a free public seminar held at the Curtin University Health Research Campus in Western Australia at 1pm Thursday 11 February 2016. For further information on the event visit <http://ndri.curtin.edu.au/events/seminars.cfm>

The full report *Long-term evaluation of the Norseman Voluntary Liquor Agreement* is available online at www.fare.org.au

Professor Richard Midford is available for interview.

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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. Over 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.