

Fact sheet: Strategies to reduce alcohol-related assault in entertainment precincts

What does this strategy involve?

There is a growing body of evidence from both Australia and overseas that shows that community-based strategies can reduce alcohol-related assault in entertainment precincts.¹ The evidence shows that there is no single approach to preventing alcohol-related assault and successful strategies are those that involve a combination of measures that are tailored to the local circumstances.

Effective strategies can involve some combination of the following:

- *Rules and regulations for licensed premise operators:* This involves establishing a code of practice for licensees that is endorsed by key project stakeholders. The code of conduct sets out rules and regulations relating to issues such as serving intoxicated or underage patrons, alcohol promotions (e.g. 'happy hours') and pub-hopping, where these issues are not addressed in relevant liquor licensing legislation or regulations.
- *Education:* Aside from mandatory requirements to provide responsible service of alcohol (RSA) training to licensees, bar staff and security, additional training can be provided to ensure that standards are maintained. Training can also be provided to licensed premises operators around premise management and design, and other issues that may impact on the risk of alcohol-related violence. Training can also be provided to security providers and crowd controllers around issues such as dealing with intoxicated and aggressive patrons.
- *Community engagement and mobilisation:* Community participation, support and responsibility for the strategy can be encouraged by inviting community members to be involved in project committees. Consultation with community members, including key interest groups, can be used to gain input from locals into the development of interventions, as well as raise awareness and ownership of the strategy.

¹ The development of these strategies has been informed by a combination of the best available evidence, a strong theoretical crime prevention framework and practitioner experience. There is strong evidence underpinning many of the strategies that are described in the fact sheets. However, in some of the fact sheets, the evidence in support of the strategies and the case studies used to illustrate them are not particularly recent, which reflects the lack of recent evaluation activity. The evidence in support of some of the strategies is also not as strong as for others and in these cases, the strategies draw more heavily from theory and practice. There is significant scope to improve the evidence base by increasing the amount of crime prevention activity that is rigorously evaluated.

- *Awareness campaign (targeted at patrons and the community)*: Media campaigns, community forums etc can be used to raise awareness of the problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption, promote the strategy and spread a harm minimisation message throughout the community, particularly targeted at patrons.
- *Awareness campaign (targeted at licensees)*: Safety audits (focused on the wider precinct) and risk assessments (targeted at individual premises) can help to raise awareness of the risk factors for alcohol-related violence. This can help to inform improvements to the physical design and maintenance of premises, including improved lighting, accessible bars and cleaner venues.
- *Access control*: This involves patron 'lock-out', where security staff prevent patrons from entering licensed premises after a certain time.
- *Enforcement*: Effective strategies are supported by strong enforcement of liquor licensing legislation by police and regulatory authorities, as well as police presence in areas around licensed premises, particularly in known hot spots for violence.

Other promising interventions that can be delivered as part of a comprehensive strategy to address alcohol-related violence in entertainment precincts include:

- providing late night transport options to prevent intoxicated patrons congregating outside licensed premises;
- establishing secure taxi ranks to ensure patrons queue for taxis in an orderly fashion;
- undertaking assessments of the physical environment around licensed premises and making improvements in accordance with the principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED); and
- the regulation of security providers. Further research into the effectiveness of these strategies is required.

The development of an appropriate combination for the local area should be overseen by a committee made up of representatives from the local council, police, health agencies, licensing authorities, licensees, other business operators or groups, security providers, public transport bodies and in some cases, local residents. This committee can identify the major risk factors for alcohol-related violence in the area and tailor the package of interventions accordingly.

Table 1 lists a range of strategies that may be suitable for different types of alcohol-related violence problems. This list is provided as a guide for some different scenarios, rather than being prescriptive, as the design and combination of strategies need to be tailored to the local problem and context.

Table 1 Local strategies to reduce alcohol-related violence

Type of alcohol related violence problem	Possible responses
There is evidence (e.g. based on walkthroughs and audits) that certain licensed premises are engaged in operating practices that are encouraging patron intoxication and other problems associated with alcohol consumption.	<p>Develop a code of conduct that sets out rules and regulations relating to issues not addressed in relevant liquor licensing legislation or regulations.</p> <p>Provide additional training to ensure that mandatory levels of responsible service of alcohol (RSA) training are maintained, targeted at problematic premises.</p> <p>Targeted and proactive enforcement of liquor licensing legislation by police and regulatory authorities, focusing on the conduct of licensed premises.</p>
There is a high level of community concern around the levels of alcohol-related violence in local entertainment precincts.	<p>Invite community members (including community representatives, business representatives, licensed premise representatives and other stakeholder groups) to be involved in project committees and to provide input into the development and implementation of interventions to address alcohol-related violence.</p>
Certain licensed premises experience high levels of violent and aggressive behaviour inside or within the immediate vicinity of their premise (e.g. around the bar, on the dance floor or in queues).	<p>Provide education to licensed premises operators (e.g. workshops and seminars) around premise management and design and other issues that may impact on the risk of alcohol-related violence.</p> <p>Conduct risk assessments or distribute risk assessment toolkits to help raise awareness of the risk factors for violence and other alcohol-related problems and inform improvements to the physical design and maintenance of premises.</p> <p>Provide training to security providers and crowd controllers around issues such as dealing with intoxicated and aggressive patrons inside or awaiting entry to licensed premises.</p>
Patrons visiting the entertainment precinct engage in risky drinking behaviour, including pre-loading, underage drinking and excessive alcohol consumption.	<p>Run a media campaign, community forums and develop and distribute various promotional materials to raise awareness of the problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption and spread a harm minimisation message.</p> <p>Provide training to security providers and crowd controllers around issues such as dealing with intoxicated and aggressive patrons trying to enter licensed premises.</p> <p>Targeted and proactive enforcement of liquor licensing legislation by police and regulatory authorities, focusing on the conduct of patrons.</p>
The number of violence incidents peaks at closing times, or there is a problem with intoxicated patrons leaving premises that close and then trying to enter premises that remain open.	<p>Establish patron lock-outs.</p> <p>Provide additional training to ensure that mandatory levels of RSA training are maintained, targeted at problematic premises.</p> <p>Provide training to security providers and crowd controllers around issues such as dealing with intoxicated and aggressive patrons trying to enter or re-enter licensed premises.</p>
Violence occurs in areas around licensed premises, in pedestrian thoroughfares and among patrons waiting for public transport (including but not limited to at closing times).	<p>Provide additional late night transport options for patrons, such as a nightrider bus service.</p> <p>Establish and operate secure taxi ranks, as well as any other major public transport facilities.</p> <p>Undertake assessments of the physical environment around licensed premises and make improvements in accordance with the principles of CPTED.</p>

How does the strategy work?

The specific mechanisms underpinning a comprehensive strategy to reduce alcohol-related violence will depend upon the interventions that are being delivered.

- The development of a code of conduct, risk assessments and education for licensed premise management, staff and security encourages operators to consider the implications of their management practices and discourages practices that may create opportunities for crime to occur (i.e. by minimising the potential for provocation or conflict between intoxicated patrons). These interventions also aim to prevent or discourage potentially aggressive patrons from being able to purchase and consume alcohol to the point of intoxication, which can impair their decision-making ability and increase their risk of becoming involved in an alcohol-related incident.
- Interventions targeted at patrons promote responsible attitudes to alcohol and drinking behaviour.
- Patron lock-outs prevent potentially intoxicated and aggressive patrons from being able to access locations (including crowded venues) where there are potential victims or where provocation may occur. This minimises the risk of conflict between patrons.
- The strict enforcement of liquor licensing laws increases the perceived risk that breaches of the Liquor Act will be detected and prosecuted. This, in turn, increases the perceived cost associated with breaching legislative provisions.

What does the evidence say?

Ten studies were reviewed that involved multifaceted community-based strategies to address alcohol-related violence. Eight of these showed a decline in the number or rate of assaults within the target area following implementation of the planned intervention. One study showed no effect and for another project, the effect was uncertain.

The quality of these studies varied. Evidence from a number of high quality overseas studies showed community-driven strategies to be effective in reducing violence. Evidence from Australian studies were more circumspect, but were generally positive. Positive outcomes included a reduction in physical and verbal assault in and around licensed establishments, and a decrease in antisocial or aggressive behaviour.

There was some evidence from these studies that the initial reductions in alcohol-related assault may not be sustained over time, particularly where support for and involvement in the project by key stakeholders is not maintained. One study showed some evidence of displacement to adjacent areas, however, further research is necessary to determine the displacement effects of strategies targeting entertainment precincts. Some of the studies also found an increase in public disorder offences around licensed premises, which was generally attributed to an increased police presence.

Where will the strategy work best?

- In entertainment precincts with high rates of alcohol-related violence and other harms, during peak periods for alcohol consumption.
- In metropolitan and regional locations characterised by a high number of licensed premises that attract large numbers of patrons, particularly on weekend nights.
- Where there is significant concern among the community and local businesses about the level of alcohol-related harm in the precinct.
- Where there are motivated and dedicated practitioners present who have the capacity (including both the skills and resources) to develop and implement evidence-based interventions.

What will you need to implement this strategy?

The accompanying handbook provides more detailed information on how to implement this strategy but briefly:

A good understanding of your local problem

Effective strategies were targeted at relatively well-defined entertainment precincts with high rates of recorded offences and were based upon a thorough analysis of the local problem to identify the factors contributing to the high rate of alcohol-related violence. In order to tailor the strategy to your local circumstances, you will need a good understanding of the hotspots, the high risk premises, the peak offending times, the characteristics of the victims and offenders and the circumstances leading up to the assaults. This information can be obtained from recorded crime data, as well as other sources, including hospital or emergency services data, data from security agencies, surveys of local residents and business operators, information from licensees and complaints made to the local council or police. Information may be recorded in a dedicated database.

Strong enforcement

The effectiveness of strategies to reduce alcohol-related assault in entertainment precincts depends upon the presence of a strong and reliable enforcement component. Strict enforcement of legislation relating to the responsible service of alcohol and management of licensed premises has been shown to have an impact upon compliance with these policies. This will require the continued involvement of police and the liquor licensing authorities (e.g. Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing) in the strategy.

Stakeholder commitment

Stakeholder commitment is also important. Where projects involve multiple interventions requiring input from a range of different stakeholders, effective partnership arrangements can be created early on and maintained through the formation of a committee, including representatives from stakeholders such as council, police, health agencies, licensing authorities, licensees, other business operators or groups, security providers, public transport bodies and residents.

Commitment from licensed premise operators

The effectiveness of many interventions is dependent upon a high take-up rate among licensees. It is necessary to establish appropriate consultation mechanisms at the commencement of the project to seek input from licensees into the development of strategies that are likely to require their involvement.

Community involvement and support

Strategies appear to be most effective when they are instigated by the local community and maintain a strong focus on community involvement throughout the life of the strategy. It is also important to generate support among the wider community for the project through publicising the strategy and any success through appropriate media channels.

CASE STUDY 2: Stockholm Prevents Alcohol and Drug Problems (STAD)

STAD was developed in response to escalating levels of late-night bar violence in Stockholm's (Sweden) central entertainment district. Formed in 1996, STAD was a community-based program that aimed to reduce alcohol-related violence in and around licensed establishments by mobilising the community, introducing stricter and comprehensive responsible service practices education, and enforcing existing alcohol regulations. Interventions delivered as part of the strategy included:

- the development of a more comprehensive RSA education curriculum that was delivered to all staff working in licensed establishments in the intervention site;
- stricter enforcement of existing alcohol regulations; and
- a media campaign that aimed to increase community awareness and support of the program, and knowledge about the problems caused by excessive alcohol consumption and serving intoxicated patrons.

The implementation of these key interventions was overseen by an advisory group comprised of representatives from the community, hospitality industry, local council and police.

An evaluation found that during the three year post-intervention period, alcohol-related violence fell by 29 per cent at the intervention site. The evaluation design included a control site that was chosen due to its similar outlet density and profile. Although located in the same municipality, the sites were not adjacent to one another. During the post-intervention period, alcohol-related violence increased slightly in the control area, which reflected national crime trends at the time. This suggests that the increase was not the result of a displacement of crime effect and that the strategy had been effective.

CASE STUDY 3: Tackling Alcohol-Related Street Crime (TASC)

The TASC strategy was implemented in Cardiff's central business district and Cardiff Bay (Wales) in response to escalating rates of alcohol-related violence and disorder occurring in and around licensed establishments, particular on Friday and Saturday nights. Interventions introduced as part of the strategy included:

- the development of more comprehensive RSA training for staff working in licensed premises in Cardiff;
- the development of a two day training program for door staff working at licensed establishments and a more efficient and centralised registration system for door staff; and
- the development of an education program targeted at school age children, focusing on the dangers of binge drinking.

During the initial project implementation stages, the program developers created a database that recorded data from the local hospital and police, and assisted in the identification of high-priority areas in Cardiff. Further, the project manager performed regular inspections of premises to identify high-risk areas. This allowed the project developers to target their resources effectively at problematic premises, which was found to be more effective than targeting streets as a whole.

An evaluation of TASC found that after one year, there was a four per cent reduction in alcohol-related assaults, which was equivalent to 100 assaults being prevented. During the same period, the number of licensed premises in Cardiff increased, as did the assault rate across the rest of Wales. While there was a significant reduction in violence and disorder in and just outside premises, there was an increase in public disorder offences. This increase was attributed to increased police presence and changes to recording practices.

Endnotes

Case Study 1: Homel R, Hauritz M, Wortley R & Clark J 1994. *The impact of the Surfers Paradise Safety Action Project*. Brisbane: Centre for Crime Policy and Public Safety, Griffith University.

Case Study 2: Wallin E, Norstrom T & Andreasson S 2003. Alcohol prevention targeting licensed premises: A study of effects on violence. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 64: 270–277.

Case Study 3: Maguire M & Nettleton H 2003. *Reducing alcohol-related violence and disorder: An evaluation of the 'TASC' project*. London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

Further reading

For further reading in this area, refer to the accompanying handbook and literature review.

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