

# Melton City Council Alcohol Harm Minimisation

Review Report

April 2023



## Executive summary

Melton City Council recognises that alcohol is widely and safely used by a large proportion of Australian society. There is also a substantial amount of evidence which highlights the harm of excessive alcohol consumption. This report presents evidence on alcohol harm through the provision of local data, as well as current legislation, policy, and strategy from different levels of government and advocacy groups.

The City of Melton is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Victoria. It has a diverse population spread across a large outer-metropolitan area. Compared to the Greater Melbourne area there are a higher proportion of some population cohorts who are at higher risk of alcohol related harm, this includes a higher proportion people with socio-economic disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, young people, people working in industries with an 'alcohol culture', and carers. While there is limited evidence on the correlation between education levels and people born overseas on the overconsumption of alcohol, these factors can impact comprehension of alcohol advertising and promotion.

Legislation which relates to Council's role in the regulation of alcohol supply and consumption in Victoria includes the:

- *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Local Government Act 2020*

Melton City Council reflects its own commitment to alcohol harm minimisation through the development and implementation of the *Community Vision 2041*, and the *Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025*. It also aligns with the relevant policy from the State and Federal governments. Organisations which are influential in the area of alcohol harm minimisation include VicHealth (particularly their Alcohol Cultures Framework).

While the City of Melton has a relatively low number of liquor licences currently, the level of growth indicates that it can expect a growing number of establishments. There is a need to provide evidence to support Council's relationship with licence and permit holders and emphasise the need for integration of harm minimisation strategies.

The short- and long-term effects of the over consumption of alcohol have been proven to have a detrimental effect on physical and mental health. Harms caused by over consumption impact the individual as well as their immediate and extended networks, along with the broader community. There needs to be greater awareness raising and education to support the community to make healthier choices, such as being able to identify a standard drink. This is important for young people, who are recognised as being particularly vulnerable.

Alcohol harm minimisation strategies in community health promotion and primary prevention include education initiatives, policy change, activity facilitation, role modelling and improved support services. The *VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework* and the *Common Cause Values Map* provide insights on key messaging which can assist local government to implement these strategies effectively. The City of Melton can work towards addressing harm minimisation more broadly by working closely with regulatory bodies and applying evidence in decision-making.

The minimisation and prevention of alcohol-related harm in the City of Melton require a collective effort that involves various stakeholders. Council has a role in liquor regulation through planning and the enforcement of local laws, as well as an influence through submissions to the Victorian Liquor Commission (VLC), advocacy to government bodies and health promotion within the community. There are a variety of factors which the Council may consider when making decisions in this area, such as the location, operating hours, capacity and safety around liquor establishments. The VLC, a subset of the newly formed Liquor Control Victoria, is responsible for the regulation of liquor licences and permits across the state, including enforcement. Liquor licence and permit holders have a key role in managing the supply and consumption of liquor through their establishment, and there are significant penalties for breaching these obligations. Lastly, the broader community plays a role in harm minimisation by creating an environment that supports safe and responsible drinking.

The report concludes by explaining that the evidence presented highlights the need to prioritise health and wellbeing in the City of Melton. It emphasises the need for a policy that provides clarity and transparency to liquor licence and permit holders and demonstrates clear guidance for decision-making within Council. It recommends that Council's policy:

1. Aligns with the VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework
2. Defines harm minimisation as the main objective
3. Provide clear guidance for licence and permit holders
4. Outlines Council's own commitment to harm minimisation through modelling
5. Supports evidence-based community initiatives and advocacy in harm minimisation

# Table of contents

Executive summary .....	1
Table of contents .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Purpose .....	4
Background and Scope .....	4
About the City of Melton.....	5
Policy and Legislative Context.....	16
Legislative requirements .....	16
Policy alignment.....	23
Strategic alignment.....	25
Alcohol in the City of Melton.....	30
Health impacts .....	32
Stakeholders.....	35
Melton City Council .....	35
Community .....	38
Licence and permit holders.....	39
Stakeholder engagement .....	43
Conclusion .....	44
Recommendations.....	44
Glossary .....	46

# Introduction

Alcohol is widely and safely used by a large proportion of Australian society. However, it is over-consumption has been a source of concern due to the impact on public health, safety, and the well-being of individuals and families. As a result, the regulation and control of alcohol has been a complex issue for government bodies.

This report provides an overview on the role of Melton City Council (Council) in alcohol control and harm minimisation to inform the development and implementation of an effective alcohol policy. The paper explores the influences impacting Council's decision making in relation to the sale and consumption of alcohol across the municipality.

It will first provide a profile of the population in the City of Melton, highlighting specific factors which may make cohorts in the community more vulnerable to alcohol harms. The paper will then outline Melton City Council's legislative responsibilities in alcohol control, and its alignment to policy on a local and state-wide level. Evidence on the impacts of alcohol consumption and the need for harm minimisation will be examined, along with its role in cultural contexts. Lastly it will consider the interests and roles of various stakeholders in the City of Melton, looking at how we can work together to balance the needs of the community.

## Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a foundation for informed decision-making in the update of the Melton City Council and Community Alcohol (Liquor) Policy. This is to ensure it takes an effective, evidence-based approach that balances the interests of all stakeholders.

## Background and Scope

This report and the associated policy is intended to supersede the *Council and Community Alcohol (Liquor) Policy* adopted by the City of Melton in 2017. The previous policy was developed to align with the *Council and Community Alcohol (Liquor) Policy Framework* and outline Council's key policy decisions in relation to the sale and consumption of alcohol in the municipality.

These updated versions take into account new evidence which has become available since 2017, along with relevant legislative changes and the state-wide strategic direction. The main changes and the rationale behind them will be highlighted in the report.

The report aims to provide transparency and further context on the position of the *Council and Community Alcohol (Liquor) Policy*, supporting stakeholders in understanding the rationale behind Council's strategic position. It is not, in itself, intended to be the sole basis of Council decision-making, nor is it to be viewed in isolation from the adopted Policy as an official position of Council

Both the report and policy apply to Council's role in regulatory approvals, community education and advocacy. With this in mind, it is the setting and intention to serve or supply alcohol which this report is addressing, whether this be in residences or public events and locations.

## About the City of Melton

There are certain characteristics which impact both Council's ability to manage alcohol supply and the vulnerability of some cohorts in the community to alcohol harm. Being aware of these factors will support Council-decision making and enable more targeted messaging where needed. It also helps Council to identify priorities for its work in this area. This section provides some information about the City of Melton community, highlighting the implications for the supply and consumption of alcohol. VicHealth examined the impact of a broader range of attributes in their 2015 report on the social determinants of inequities in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related health outcomes<sup>1</sup>.

### Population and growth

The City of Melton is located in outer western metropolitan Melbourne, approximately 40km from the Melbourne CBD.

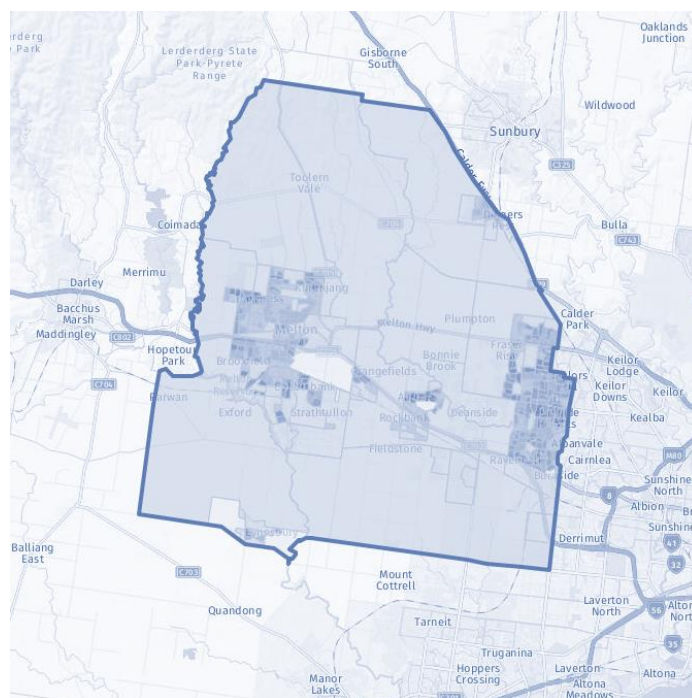


Figure 1: Map of the City of Melton shaded to represent population density (ABS, 2021)

With a land area of 527km<sup>2</sup>, the population has traditionally been spread across settlements to the far east and far west of the municipality, with large swathes of farmland and small townships making up the 20 kilometres in between. This has resulted in two quite distinct populations. Growth and development are changing this landscape. There are now several growth fronts to the north, south and centre of the municipality. It is expected that in time the population centres will merge into one large and connected residential area.

The current population of the City of Melton is 181,223<sup>2</sup>, which is expected to grow to 416,106 by 2051. The City of Melton is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia with a growth rate almost

<sup>1</sup> Roche, A., Kostadinov, V., Fischer, J. and Nicholas, R. (2015), Evidence review: The social determinants of inequities in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related health outcomes, [HealthEquity-Alcohol-review.pdf \(vichealth.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/HealthEquity-Alcohol-review.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021

four times that of Victoria. The largest component of population change has been internal migration – that is, people moving into the municipality from other areas of Victoria and interstate.

The rapid growth of the City of Melton indicates that we can expect to see an increase in the number of liquor licences in the municipality. As it manages this growth, Council will have a key role to play in ensuring the increase is proportionate to the population, and that there is a diverse offering without causing harm to the community.

There also is an emerging trend that more Australians are reducing their alcohol intake or abstaining completely. The National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019 report showed that between 2016 and 2019, the proportion of people saying they had stopped drinking increased from 7.6 per cent, to 8.9 per cent<sup>3</sup>. Another 31 per cent said they had reduced their intake of alcohol, compared to 28 per cent in 2016<sup>4</sup>. This may be a sign that the demand for businesses serving or providing alcohol is slowing. The main reason people cited for reducing or stopping their alcohol consumption was to improve their health (for example, weight loss or avoiding hangovers)<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, it appears that as more Australians become aware of the health impacts of alcohol, the more likely they will reduce or stop their consumption of alcohol all together.

## Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

It would be remiss to disregard the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on alcohol consumption both in Australia and around the world. The Alcohol and Drug Foundation has reported that during lockdowns, around 20 per cent of Australian adults increased their alcohol consumption<sup>6</sup>.

Many were drinking on a daily basis (around 14 per cent during COVID-19, compared to 5.4 per cent prior to COVID-19)<sup>7</sup>. The increase was more commonly reported by Australians aged 18-35 compared to middle-aged and older Australians<sup>8</sup>.

Studies found that females were also more likely to report an increase in alcohol consumption than males, with many attributing it to stress generally or stress relating to their role in caring<sup>9</sup>. There was a slightly smaller increase for males, which was attributed to psychological distress and boredom<sup>10</sup>. They also identified a co-morbidity between increases in alcohol consumption and use of illicit drugs.

The pandemic also had a significant impact on the way Australians can obtain alcohol, with a sharp rise in alcohol takeaway and delivery services – many of which did not exist prior to 2020 (as will be identified later in this report, this led new to a new category of liquor licences). At the same time,

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019*, [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/10-national-drug-strategy-household-survey-2019/summary)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) *Reducing alcohol and other drug harm post COVID-19*, [Alcohol and Drug Foundation - 2021-22 Pre-Budget Submissions \(treasury.gov.au\)](https://www.adf.org.au/2021-22-pre-budget-submissions)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2022), *Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia: Impacts of COVID-19 on alcohol and other drug use*. [Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia, COVID-19 - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/10-national-drug-strategy-household-survey-2019/summary)

<sup>10</sup> Biddle, N., Edwards, B., Gray, M. & Sollis, K. (2020), *Alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 period: May 2020*, <https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/alcohol-consumption-during-covid-19-period-may-2020>

spending on alcohol via hospitality venues fell sharply due to social distancing measures and business operating restrictions.

It is unclear at this stage whether the habits which commenced during the pandemic will continue, but this evidence does highlight the significant effect the pandemic had on the alcohol culture in Australia and establishes the need for policies or initiatives which will enable us to be prepared for any future pandemics or other world events. However, Council should be wary of applications which enable the ongoing service of take-away and alcohol delivery services.

### SEIFA index of disadvantage

The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) measure the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage and/or advantage based on a range of characteristics captured in the Census. A higher score on the index means a lower level of disadvantage. It should be noted that while the SEIFA indexes provides a valuable indication of the general level of disadvantage in an area, there may be other factors or underlying characteristics of different areas which are not considered in the model.

The City of Melton as a whole has a SEIFA index score of 994, placing it slightly under (or more disadvantaged than) the Victorian average of 997. However, there is a significant variation within the City of Melton itself. For instance, the suburbs of Rockbank (884.2), Melton (875) and Melton South (866.9) are considered to be in the lowest 8<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> percentile across Australia respectively in terms of disadvantage. This is significantly lower than the Greater Melbourne average of score of 1021 and western regional average score of 989. In comparison, the suburb of Eynesbury has a SEIFA index score of 1102, placing it in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile.

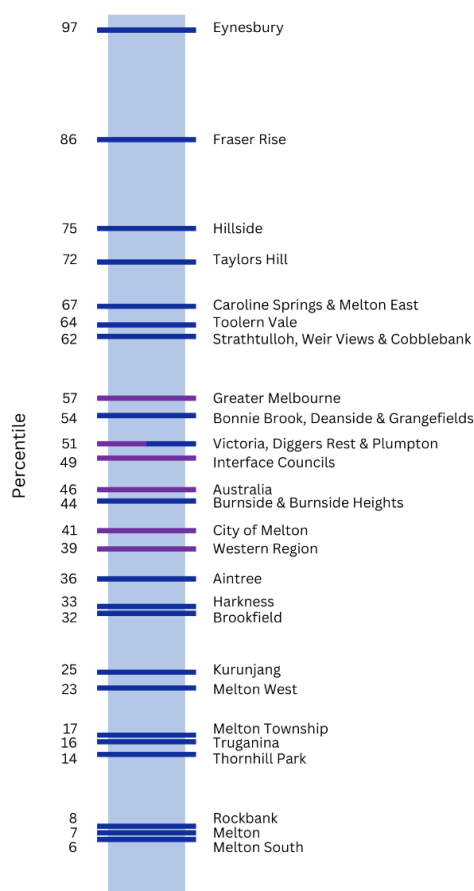


Figure 2: Percentile of City of Melton suburbs on the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage (ABS, 2016)



Evidence shows that socio-economic disadvantage can be associated with heavier drinking in higher income countries such as Australia<sup>11</sup>. There is also a strong association with comorbidity of alcohol and mental health disorders<sup>12</sup>. Given the diversity in the level of disadvantage across the City of Melton, the locality of specific liquor licence applications will need to be a consideration for decision makers.

## First Nations

The City of Melton has a rich Aboriginal heritage which goes back over 40,000 years. Three different but related language groups, each made up of a number of individual clans, lived in the areas now covered by the Melton Local Government Area. These three language groups are the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung, Wadawurrung and Bunurong peoples. First Nations people make up 1.2 per cent of the population in the City of Melton, nearly double that of the Greater Melbourne area (0.7 per cent)<sup>13</sup>. It is important to recognise the impact of the prison population on this data, where First Nations people are significantly overrepresented.

Despite what has been portrayed in the media, statistics show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are less likely to drink alcohol than other Australians. In fact, around 55 per cent of non-indigenous people drink at low risk, compared to 36 per cent of Aboriginal people<sup>14</sup>. However, those First Nations people that do drink are more likely to drink at dangerous levels and go to hospital for alcohol related conditions<sup>15</sup>.

Harmful consumption for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is considered in the social and historical context of colonisation, dispossession and economic exclusion<sup>16</sup> when delivering alcohol harm prevention measures.

## Cultural diversity

The City of Melton welcomes people from around the world and is enriched by cultural and linguistic diversity. Around one-third (35.7 per cent) of people living in the municipality were born overseas, representing more than 161 different nations from around the world. Collectively, residents speak more than 167 different languages.

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<sup>11</sup> Huckle, T., Romeo, J.S., Wall, M., Callinan, S., Holmes, J., Meier, P., Mackintosh, A., Piazza, M., Chaiyasong, S., Cuong, P.V. & Casswell, S., (2018), *Socio-economic disadvantage is associated with heavier drinking in high but not middle-income countries participating in the International Alcohol Control Study*, *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 37(52), pp. 563-571.

<sup>12</sup> Salom, Williams, G.M., Najman, J.M., & Alati, R. (2014). *Does early socio-economic disadvantage predict comorbid alcohol and mental health disorders?* *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 142, pp. 146–153.

<sup>13</sup> .id.Community (2021) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander profile - Key Statistics*, <https://profile.id.com.au/melton/first-nations-keystatistics>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Department of Health and Aged Care (2020), *Alcohol and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, [Alcohol and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

<sup>16</sup> Boffa, J., Tilton, E. & Ah Chee, D. (2018), *Preventing alcohol-related harm in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: The experience of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service in Central Australia*, *Australian Journal of General Practice*, 47(12).

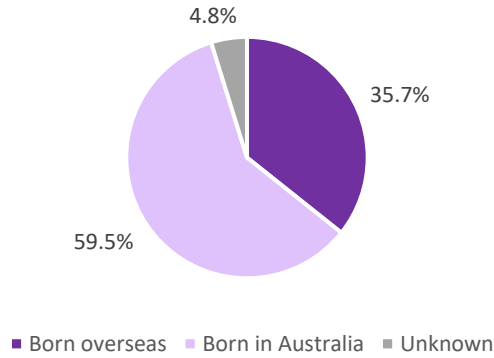


Figure 3: Percentage of residents in the City of Melton born overseas (ABS, 2021)

Of those born overseas a particularly large number of the City’s residents were born in India, the Philippines, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Malta, and Vietnam. In recent years, the City has welcomed an increase of people from African and Asian nations through skilled migration, family reunion and refugee immigration streams, adding further to the City’s cultural diversity.

Limited research has been conducted on alcohol consumption with people living in Australia who were born overseas, from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. However, findings from the 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey suggest that people born overseas are less likely to consume alcohol compared to other Australians<sup>17</sup>.

Despite this, people born overseas face a range of challenges and barriers for alcohol harm reduction in addition to those experienced by the broader Australian population. For instance, given the widespread alcohol culture in Australia, it has been identified that people born overseas may feel pressured to consume alcohol as a way of conforming to actual or perceived expectations<sup>18</sup>.

Additionally, Australians born overseas are underrepresented in alcohol and other drug treatment services, with a small percentage of the population seeking support when needed. Only 13 per cent of people born overseas will access these services, compared to 30 per cent of the broader Australian population in 2019-2020.

The evidence indicates that there may be more barriers for these communities for seeking treatment, such as feelings of shame, guilt, or stigmatisation<sup>19</sup>. Language and cultural differences between the provider and the client, as well as confusion or lack of awareness about services, have also been identified potential barriers. In more dire cases, people of diverse backgrounds may have a fear of deportation, or a fear of authority based on previous experience, preventing them from seeking support.

Based on these insights, it is clear that there is work that must be done in addressing the gaps in health literacy relating to alcohol-harms, and the provision or advocacy for inclusive services.

<sup>17</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019, [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/national-drug-strategy-household-survey-2019-summary)

<sup>18</sup> Lee, S. K., Sulaiman-Hill, C. M. R., & Thompson, S. C. (2014). Alcohol experiences and concerns of newly arrived migrant women. *Sage Open*, 4(2), 2158244014530727

<sup>19</sup> Department of Health and Aged Care (2023), People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, [People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds \(comorbidityguidelines.org.au\)](https://www.comorbidityguidelines.org.au/)

## Age and gender

In comparison to Greater Melbourne, the City of Melton has a relatively young population with a higher proportion of people in younger age groups (less than 15 years old) and a lower proportion of people in older age groups (more than 65 years old)<sup>20</sup>. This age breakdown, depicted in Figure 4, provides key insights into the level of demand for aged-based services and facilities such as childcare. It is also an indicator of City of Melton's residential role and function and how it is likely to change in the future.

Substantial new and larger housing options across the city provide opportunity for young couples and families to migrate to the area. This has contributed to the significant increase in young families in the City of Melton contributing to the large population groups of children and adults aged 30-44 years. It is forecasted that the largest age group increase over the next decade will be 35 – 49 years old, which is expected to increase by 26,780 people and account for 23.6 per cent of the population by 2031.

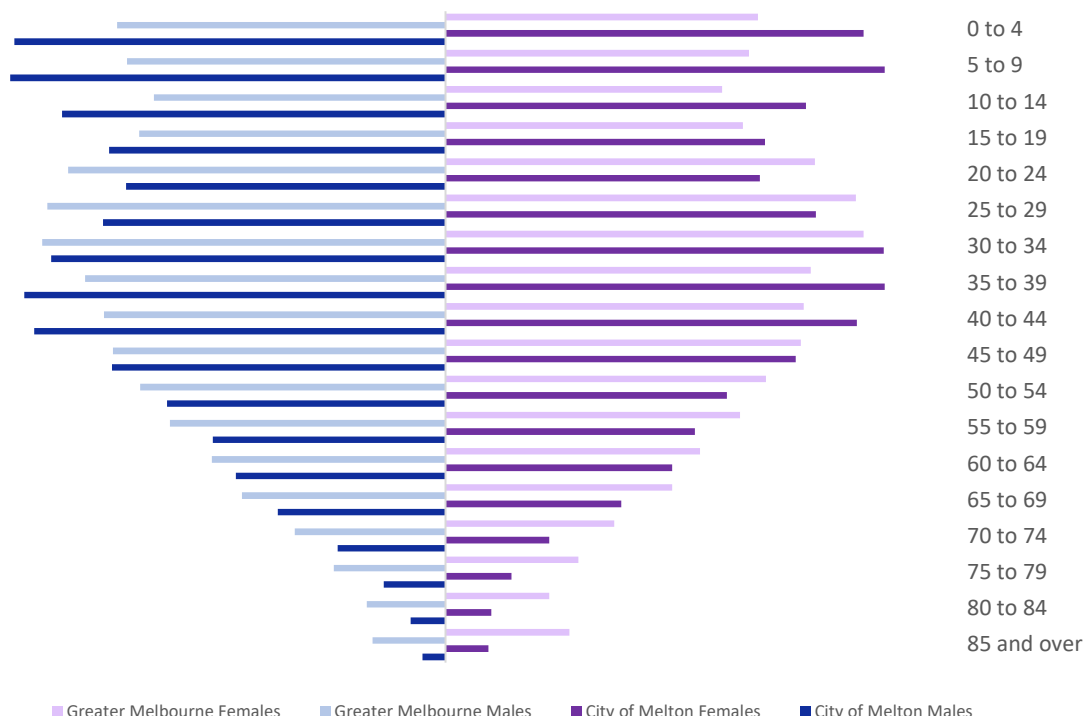


Figure 4: Age-sex pyramid of five-year age groups in the City of Melton compared to Greater Melbourne (ABS, 2021)

Evidence has shown that young people are particularly vulnerable to alcohol harms. The brain goes through important changes during puberty and continues to develop until around age 25 years old, making young people more sensitive to damage from alcohol as their brains and bodies develop<sup>21 22</sup>. Furthermore, it's known that young people who start drinking alcohol at an early age are more likely to have problems with alcohol later in life, such as binge drinking and becoming dependent on

<sup>20</sup> idcommunity (2021), City of Melton – Service age groups, <https://profile.id.com.au/melton/service-age-groups>

<sup>21</sup> Hermens, DF., Lagopoulos, J., Tobias-Webb, J., De Regt, T., Dore, G., Juckes, L., Latt, N. & Hickie, IB., (2013), Pathways to alcohol-induced brain impairment in young people: A review, *Cortex*, 49 (1), pp.3-17

<sup>22</sup> White, AM. & Swartzwelder, HS., (2005), Age-Related Effects of Alcohol on Memory and Memory-Related Brain Function in Adolescents and Adults in Galanter, M., Lowman, C., Boyd, G.M., Faden, V.B., Witt, E., Lagressa, D. (eds) Recent Developments in Alcoholism, vol 17. Springer, Boston, MA

alcohol<sup>23</sup>. Young people have been shown to be particularly susceptible to media imagery in the promotion of alcohol because they 'do not have the ability to compensate for biases in advertising portrayals'<sup>24</sup>. Research shows that parents have the greatest impact on shaping their child's attitude to alcohol and future drinking behaviour<sup>25</sup>, making it important keep young families in mind in the development of this alcohol policy.

While young people are considered particularly vulnerable from the impacts of alcohol, recent data suggests they are in fact, choosing to drink less alcohol than previous generations<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, there appears to be greater acceptance among young people of non-drinking<sup>27</sup>. The reasons for this vary, including more uncertain futures (for example, economic security), messaging around health and wellbeing, along with the rise of social media and the perceived negative implications on employment<sup>28</sup>.

However, young people who do choose to drink remain some of the highest-risk consumers of all age groups. People aged 18-24 years old are more likely than other age groups to consume 11 or more standard drinks on one occasion<sup>29</sup>.

In older age groups, both women and men are more likely to drink smaller quantities of alcohol and are more likely to abstain from drinking alcohol. However, the frequency of consumption does not appear to change consistently with age<sup>30</sup>.

The gender ratio in the City of Melton is fairly even, with female residents making up only slightly more (by 0.4 per cent) of the population than males, a similar result to the Greater Melbourne area<sup>31</sup>. The evidence shows that there is no significant difference in the probability of women and men abstaining from alcohol. However, men were more likely to exceed frequencies of heavy drinking and quantities of alcohol consumed. They are also less likely to be stop drinking altogether<sup>32</sup>. This suggests that a greater number of harm prevention initiatives need to include tailored messaging for men in particular.

## Employment

The vast majority of the labour force (persons aged 15+) in the City of Melton (93.5 per cent) are employed in some capacity, which is only slightly lower than the Greater Melbourne area (94.7 per cent) (Figure 5). More than half of these work full time (57.5 per cent), and nearly 30 per cent are employed on a part time basis<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Livingston, M, Callinan, S, Vashishtha, R, Yuen, WS, Dietze, P. (2022) *Tracking the decline in Australian adolescent drinking into adulthood*. *Addiction*, 117, pp.1273– 1281.

<sup>24</sup> Babor, TF., Robaina, K., Noel, JK & Ritson, EB., (2016) 'Vulnerability to alcohol-related problems: a policy brief with implications for the regulation of alcohol marketing', *Addiction*, 112 (1), pp.94-101

<sup>25</sup> [drinkwise.org.au/parents](https://drinkwise.org.au/parents).

<sup>26</sup> Vashishtha, R., Pennay, A., Dietze, P., Marzan, MB., Room, R. & Livingston, M., (2021) *Trends in adolescent drinking across 39 high-income countries: exploring the timing and magnitude of decline*, *European Journal of Public Health*, 31 (2), pp. 424-431.

<sup>27</sup> Caluzzi, G., Livingston, M., Holmes, J., MacLean, S., Lubman, D., Dietze, P., Vashishtha, R., Herring, R. & Pennay, A., (2021), *Declining drinking among adolescents: Are we seeing a denormalisation of drinking and a normalisation of non-drinking?*, *Addiction*, 117 (5), pp. 1204-1212.

<sup>28</sup> Livingston, M., Raninen, J., Slade, T., Swift, W., Lloyd, B. and Dietze, P., (2016), *Understanding trends in Australian alcohol consumption— an age-period-cohort model*, *Addiction*, 111 (9), pp. 1590-1598.

<sup>29</sup> AIHW (2020) *Younger people*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/priority-populations/younger-people>

<sup>30</sup> Wilsnack, RW., Vogeltanz, ND., Wilsnack, SC., & Harris, TR. (2000). *Gender differences in alcohol consumption and adverse drinking consequences: cross-cultural patterns*. *Addiction*, 95(2), 251–265.

<sup>31</sup> *idcommunity* (2021), *City of Melton – Population and dwellings*, <https://profile.id.com.au/melton/population>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021*

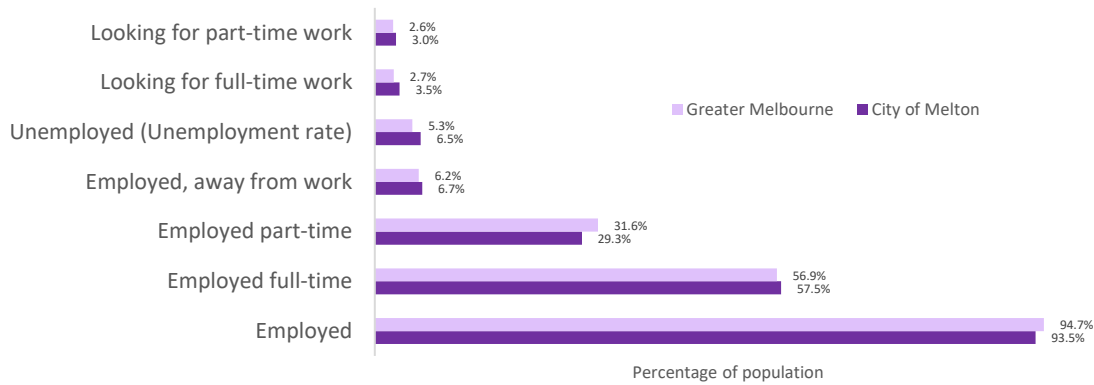


Figure 5: Employment of the labour force in the City of Melton, compared to Greater Melbourne (ABS, 2021)

Between 2016 and 2021, the number of people employed in City of Melton increased slightly by 1.2 per cent, lower than the rate of 1.6 per cent in Greater Melbourne.

More than one in ten residents (12.3 per cent) in the City of Melton work in the health care and social assistance industry (Figure 6). Blue collar roles such as construction, logistics and manufacturing are also more common in comparison to residents from the Greater Melbourne area.

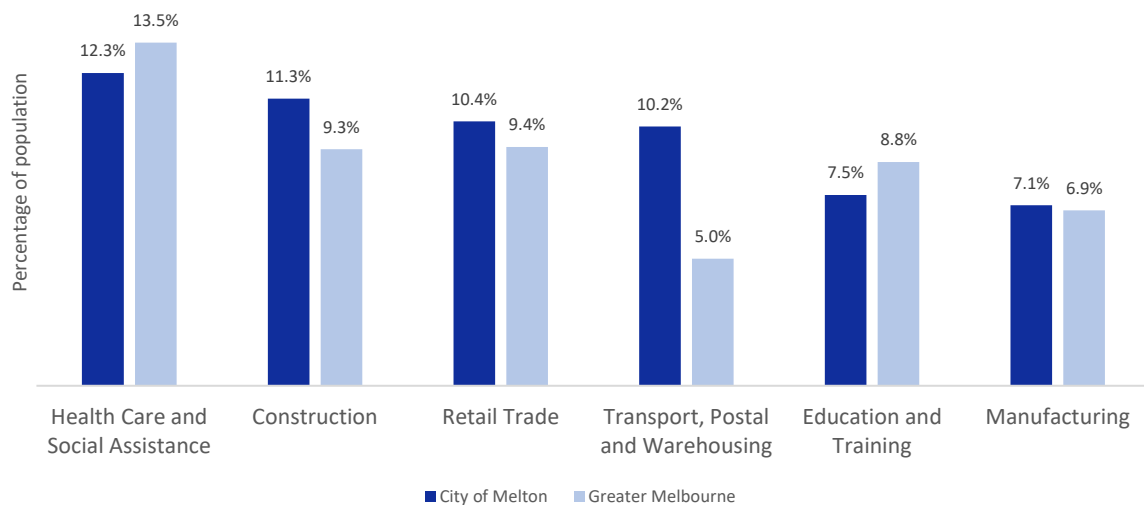


Figure 6: The six largest industries for residents in the City of Melton compared to Greater Melbourne (ABS, 2021)

In the City of Melton there is a lower proportion of people earning a high income (those earning \$2,000 per week or more). Overall, 8.4 per cent of the population earned a high income, and 33.4 per cent earned a low income, compared with 13.7 per cent and 32.1 per cent respectively for Greater Melbourne<sup>34</sup>.

There is limited evidence to suggested that there may be a link between unemployment and alcohol consumption. One older study found that unemployed individuals were more likely to be heavy

<sup>34</sup> *id.Community (2021), City of Melton – Employment status, <https://profile.id.com.au/melton/employment-status>*

drinkers compared to employed individuals<sup>35</sup>. However, it is important to note that the relationship between unemployment and alcohol consumption is complex and can be influenced by a range of factors, including age, gender, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, while some studies have found a relationship between unemployment and alcohol consumption, others have not.

While it is recognised that being employed can reduce consumption of alcohol due to the proportion of time spent in the workplace, this can also be a risk factor for some. For instance, workplace stress and social pressure can lead to higher consumption of alcohol<sup>36</sup>. The National Drug Household Survey found that employed people were more likely to drink riskier levels of alcohol than the unemployed<sup>37</sup>. Severe alcoholism can decrease productivity, as well as increase absenteeism from work or chances of losing employment due to inappropriate behaviour<sup>38</sup>. Employers in the City of Melton can help to reduce this impact by building and promoting healthy work environments which discourage the harmful consumption of alcohol.

Evidence has shown that Australians employed in certain industries, such as utilities, construction and agriculture are more likely to drink alcohol at harmful levels compared to other industries<sup>39</sup>. This is particularly relevant for the City of Melton given the high proportion of the population who work in these areas. Those who work in the healthcare and education industries are the least likely to consume alcohol at harmful levels. This is likely a reflection of the level of health literacy. Nonetheless, there may be opportunities to work with the healthcare and industries to learn how we can promote healthier work environments more broadly.

## Education

There is a larger proportion of the population attending primary school (10.7 per cent) compared to Greater Melbourne (8.1 per cent) as there is a high proportion of families with children. Young people in the City of Melton are more likely to leave secondary school prior to Year 12 (57.7 per cent) in comparison to Greater Melbourne (64.3 per cent), with a greater proportion participating in vocational training (18.8 per cent, compared to 14.8 per cent in Greater Melbourne)<sup>40</sup>. Two in five people over the age of 15 years old in the City of Melton reported having no further qualifications after secondary school, compared to one-third in the Greater Melbourne area<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Roche, A. M., Pidd, K., Fischer, J. A., Lee, N. K., & Cameron, J. (2008). Heavy alcohol use among Australian and New Zealand unemployed: prevalence, problems and policies. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 32(6), 534-541.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, P. (2010), *Alcohol and the workplace. A report on the impact of workplace policies and programmes to reduce the harm done by alcohol to the economy.*

<sup>37</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019*, [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, P. (2010), *Alcohol and the workplace. A report on the impact of workplace policies and programmes to reduce the harm done by alcohol to the economy.*

<sup>39</sup> National Alcohol and Drug Knowledgebase (NADK) (2023), *Employment*, [Employment :: The National Alcohol and Drug Knowledgebase \(flinders.edu.au\)](#)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

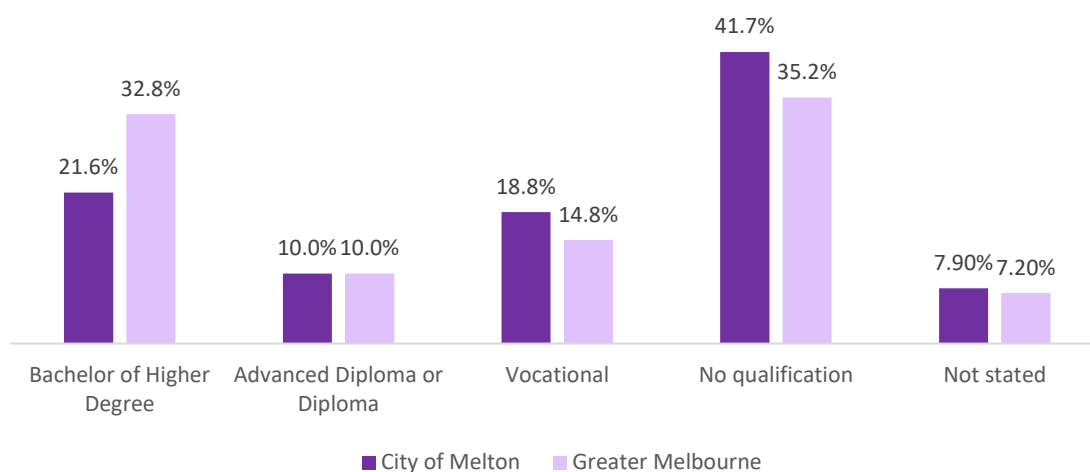


Figure 7: Highest qualification obtained in residents over the age of 15 for the City of Melton (ABS, 2021)

Research suggests that there may be a correlation between lower levels of education and higher rates of alcohol consumption in Australia. The National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that people with lower levels of education were more likely to consume alcohol at risky levels compared to those with higher levels of education<sup>42</sup>. The survey also found that individuals who had not completed high school were more likely to engage in risky drinking behaviours than those who had completed high school. Another study conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that people with lower levels of education were more likely to report experiencing alcohol-related harm than those with higher levels of education<sup>43</sup>. An individual's level of education may also impact how they respond to advertisements<sup>44</sup>.

It is important to acknowledge that these habits could more to do with other factors which influence whether someone is likely to attend university, such as their income, culture, class, and social networks.

## Disability and carers

In 2021, 9,496 people (or 5.3 per cent of the population) in City of Melton reported needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability<sup>45</sup>. More than half of people 85 years or older live with a disability. Compared to the Greater Melbourne area, there are more people in the City of Melton who require assistance due to disability (see Figure 8).

Whether or not someone has a disability does not appear to have a significant impact on their likelihood to consume alcohol. According to self-reported data from 2017-18, 14 per cent of adults with a disability consume, on average, more than 2 standard drinks of alcohol per day. This can be compared to 16 per cent of people aged over 15 years old without a disability<sup>46</sup>. This gap appeared

<sup>42</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019, [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>43</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: early insights, [Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: early insights, About - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>44</sup> Roche, A., Kostadinov, V., Fischer, J. and Nicholas, R. (2015), Evidence review: The social determinants of inequities in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related health outcomes, [HealthEquity-Alcohol-review.pdf \(vichealth.vic.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, (2022), People with disability in Australia, [People with disability in Australia, Health risk factors and behaviours - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

to be larger for riskier drinking habits, with 31 per cent of adults with a disability consuming more than 4 standard drinks, in comparison to 44 per cent of those without a disability<sup>47</sup>. However, there can be challenges for people with a disability in relation to modifying risk factors. For instance, assistance may be required to maintain a physically active lifestyle, and medication may exacerbate alcohol harms<sup>48</sup>.

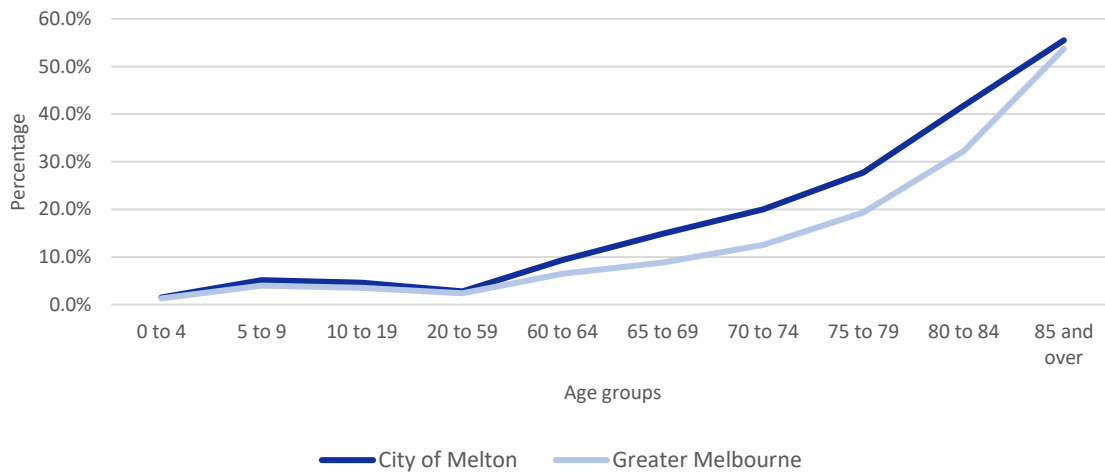


Figure 8: Percentage of each age group requiring assistance due to disability

In 2021 in the City of Melton, 16,201 carers reported that they were providing unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, long term illness or old age. This represents 12 per cent of the population aged 15 years and older. It is recognised that being a carer for a person with a disability can be a challenging and stressful role, which may lead to increased levels of psychological distress. While there is limited evidence to suggest carers may be more likely to consume alcohol, it has been found that alcohol use increases following stressful or traumatic incidents<sup>49</sup>.

Factors such as social and cultural norms, access to alcohol, and personal characteristics may also contribute to alcohol consumption patterns. Carers need to be provided with adequate support and resources to help them manage the stress and challenges of their role in a healthy way. This could include access to counselling services, respite care, and education on stress management techniques.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Alcohol and Drug Foundation (2020), *How mass trauma affects alcohol use*, <https://adf.org.au/insights/mass-trauma-alcohol-use/>



## Policy and Legislative Context

The minimisation of alcohol harms is an area that is addressed by all levels of government, each with some influence and responsibility. As a local government, the City of Melton is required to adhere to relevant legislation and is led by the evidence and strategic positions of relevant government agencies.

### Legislative requirements

The role of the City of Melton in relation to the supply and consumption of alcohol is delegated through legislation. The key legislation has been outlined below.

#### *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*

The *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* (the Act) regulates the supply and consumption of liquor in Victoria, ensuring that harms from the misuse of alcohol are minimised.

The Act is overseen by the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. It also requires the operation of a Liquor Control Advisory Council to advise the Minister on problems associated with alcohol abuse or related matters.

As outlined in Section 4 of the Act, its objectives are to:

- a) to contribute to minimising harm including by—
  - i. providing adequate controls over the supply and consumption of liquor;
  - ii. ensuring as far as practicable that the supply of liquor contributes to, and does not detract from, the amenity of community life;
  - iii. restricting the supply of certain other alcoholic products; and
  - iv. encouraging a culture of responsible consumption of alcohol and reducing risky drinking of alcohol and its impact on the community.
- b) to facilitate the development of a diversity of licensed facilities reflecting community expectations; and
- c) to contribute to the responsible development of the liquor, licensed hospitality, and live music industries; and
- d) to regulate licensed premises that provide sexually explicit entertainment.

The Act is intended to ensure every power, authority, discretion, jurisdiction and duty conferred is exercised and performed with due regard to harm minimisation. It aims to encourage diversity among licensed businesses, and to contribute to the responsible development of the liquor, licensed hospitality, and live music industries in Victoria.

Under the Act there are different liquor licence categories which have different allowances and restrictions to ensure they are appropriate for the relevant setting. The categories are defined in Part 2 of the Act.

Failing to comply with the Act or liquor licence conditions can result in penalties such as fines, licence suspension and/or cancellation. Examples of behaviours which may contravene the Act include the unlicensed selling of liquor and supplying liquor to persons who are intoxicated or underage.

The *Liquor Control Reform Regulations* support the Act by guiding its implementation, including the prescription of licence fees and application requirements. The Regulations are currently in a transition phase as the State Government reviews its contents, but the Interim Regulations (effective from 31 October 2022) provide further detail on the intentions of the Act.

### *Protecting amenity*

One of the purposes of the Act are to protect amenity in the community in the consideration of liquor licencing applications within Victoria. Amenity protection is important in relation to liquor licensing because it helps to ensure that the community surrounding a licensed establishment is not negatively impacted by its operation.

For clarity, amenity is defined under Sub-Section 3A of the Act as ‘the quality that the area has of being pleasant and agreeable’. Factors that may be taken into account are parking, traffic movement and density, noise levels, the possibility of nuisance or vandalism, harmony, and coherence of the environment and ‘any other prescribed matters’.

When considering liquor licensing under the Act, authorities need to assess whether the proposed licensed establishment would have a negative impact on the surrounding community's amenities. For example, if the establishment is located in a residential area, it may generate excessive noise, litter, or traffic, which could disrupt the neighbourhood’s peace and tranquillity.

### *Liquor licensing reforms*

Over the last decade, further evidence and investigations have led to certain changes in relation to liquor licensing which will be relevant for the update of Council’s policy.

In February 2017, the Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO) released a report on the effectiveness of Victoria’s regulation of gambling and liquor<sup>50</sup>. The report concluded that despite the 2012 State Government’s aspirations in creating a modern world class regulator (the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation, or VCGLR), its desired outcomes had not been achieved. A follow up report in 2019 identified continued failures of the VCGLR in terms of liquor licence application processes and compliance inspections<sup>51</sup>.

The Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence of Melbourne’s Crown Casino in 2021 led to significant changes for the gambling industry and its separation from liquor regulation. As a result, the regulation of liquor licensing matters was transferred to Liquor Control Victoria (LCV) (effective 1 July 2022) a branch of the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS). LCV have subsequently formed the Victorian Liquor Commission (VLC) to oversee liquor licensing and regulation in the state.

In addition to the changes to the body for liquor regulation, amendments have been introduced to the *Liquor Control Reform Act* in 2021 and 2022. Some of the amendments which are applicable to Council’s policy have been summarised below.

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<sup>50</sup> VAGO (2017) *Regulating Gambling and Liquor*, <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/regulating-gambling-and-liquor?section=32034--3-ensuring-compliance>

<sup>51</sup> VAGO (2019) *Follow up of Regulating Gambling and Liquor*, <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-12/20191128-Follow-up-Gambling-report.pdf>

Table 1: Amendments to the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998

	<b>Amendments effective 16 December 2021</b>
<b>Administrative changes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applications for packaged liquor licences may be advertised in online (not just print) newspapers.</li> <li>• Holders of general, late night, on-premises licences who provide accommodation on the licensed premises are no longer required to keep resident registers in an approved form.</li> <li>• Applications for licences in dry areas of Whitehorse and Boroondara are no longer subject to dry-area polls.</li> <li>• Producer’s licences have been expanded to include more products like sake and mead; not just wine, beer, cider, or spirits.</li> <li>• Owners and mortgagees of licensed premises can apply to cancel or surrender a licence/permit if the licensee has been evicted, had their lease terminated or has abandoned the premises.</li> </ul>
<b>Liquor accords</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The maximum period for which a person may be banned under a liquor accord is now 12 months.</li> <li>• Victoria Police will act as a formal consultation body when/if accords are developed.</li> <li>• It is now an offence for a person to use or disclose any information received from the VLC or Victoria Police regarding banned purposes, except for the purposes of enforcing an accord ban.</li> <li>• All liquor accords must now be published on the VLC website.</li> </ul>
<b>Club licences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clubs which operate with a restricted or full club licence can now supply alcohol to non-members of the public (non-club members) during approved trading hours.</li> </ul>
<b>Hours of operation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holders of a restaurant/café, general, late night (general), on premises and late night (on-premises) will be automatically authorised to trade until 1am every day of the week without needing to request any additional approval. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This variation notes that licensees still need to comply with planning permit conditions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<b>Amendments effective 15 March 2022</b>
<b>Restaurant and café licences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restaurants and cafes only need a single licence to be able to supply alcohol both on and off-premises. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Off-premises” refers to restaurants or cafes selling liquor in cans or bottles from the premises, provided customers buy the alcohol with take-away or take-home food.</li> <li>○ This must still be only with a meal service and is limited to no more than 750 millilitres of wine, and six containers of not more than 375 millilitres each of beer, cider, or premixed spirits.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Online alcohol orders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes for online liquor vendors, such as the introduction of new online-only licences and changes to allow restaurants and other venues</li> </ul>

	to supply liquor for orders placed online. Online licences have different limitations and conditions.
<b>Harm minimisation and advertising prohibitions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The VLC now has the power to ban any advertising or promotions that are not in the public interest. This includes liquor ads and promotions that encourage anti-social behaviour and are likely to appeal to minors.</li> </ul>
<b>Amendments effective 4 October 2022</b>	
<b>Remote sellers' licence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new licence category which is aimed at any business selling liquor products online without a physical retail premises. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing businesses operating under a renewable limited licence automatically had their licence transferred to the new category if they only sell products online and are therefore considered to be a 'remote seller.'</li> <li>The major implication of this change is that remote sellers are now required to nominate an exclusive physical area to be deemed the 'licensed premises'. This area must be where the 'supply' of liquor occurs, which – according to the new legislation – is where the liquor is picked and packed for the order (but not stored)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The legislative reforms have been criticised by harm minimisation campaigners for failing to go far enough. The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and others are advocating for the State Government to implement measures that will address the increasing use of alcohol takeaway and delivery services to reduce harm from family violence. Measures they have suggested including bans on delivering alcohol late at night when family violence is likely to occur and introducing a delay of at least two hours for delivery times<sup>52</sup>.

There have also been concerns regarding the amendments for hours of operation for certain types of licences which increase allowance for late night trading. Despite the extensions, holders of these liquor licences will still be required to comply with planning permit conditions regarding opening hours for their venue. This is likely to cause a degree of confusion and potential breaches of planning permit conditions, impacting how Council conducts permit audits, and resources local planning enforcement activities.

#### *The Victorian Liquor Commission*

The Victorian Liquor Commission (VLC) (previously the VCGLR) is an independent statutory authority established under the *Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation Act 2011*. The VCGLR is responsible for regulating all forms of legalised gambling and liquor licence activities in Victoria. The Commission is supported in its functions by staff of the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS), within the business unit Liquor Control Victoria.

The role of the VLC is to:

- undertake licensing, approval, authorisation, and registration activities
- promote and monitor compliance with the Act and the regulations

<sup>52</sup> FARE (2023) *Family violence services and advocates disappointed with Victorian Government's changes to alcohol law*, [Family violence services and advocates disappointed with Victorian Government's changes to alcohol law | FARE](#)

- detect and respond to contraventions of the Act and the regulations
- advise the Minister in relation to its functions under the Act and the regulations
- advise the Minister on the operation of the Act and the regulations
- ensure that Government policy in relation to liquor is implemented
- inform and educate the public about the VLC's regulatory practices and requirements.

The VLC acts as the state's regulator for liquor licensing matters. It is responsible for the assessment of applications for, and the issue of liquor licences or permits.

There are many types of liquor licences, including those for one-off events, general licences and those for restaurants or bottle shops. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that they apply for the correct licence type when making their application to the VLC for approval. The VLC will consider applications on a case-by-case basis, within the authority of the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*.

When a planning permit is required, the applicant will also be required to comply with the conditions of their permit. In instances where a planning permit is not required, the VLC will still accept submissions from Council in support or objection of an application for a liquor licence or permit which impact the amenity of the City of Melton community. However, in these circumstances, Council's submission does not bind the VLC to a particular decision.

#### *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (the Act) has an important role in regulating liquor licensed in Victoria, providing a legal framework for planning and land use, setting out planning requirements for licensed premises, and ensuring that the impact of liquor licenses on the community and the environment is considered.

When applying for a liquor licence, applicants must take into account planning requirements set out in the Act, as well as the Melton Planning Scheme (see below). Where there is a planning permit requirement, an application will be required to be submitted to and reviewed by the Council. The permit will set out specific conditions which will dictate how the land may be used. Neglecting to obtain a planning permit (when required) or breaching the permit conditions can result in severe penalties.

While the concept of amenity is not specifically defined in the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, it does refer to amenity in various sections, particularly in relation to planning schemes and the assessment of planning permit applications. For instance, Section 60 outlines the considerations that a responsible authority (i.e., Council) must take into account when assessing a planning permit application. Under subsection 60(2)(f), the responsible authority must consider the amenity of the area in which the land is situated, including any social and economic effects of the use or development of the land on the area. Another section of the Act that refers to amenity is Section 67, which sets out the requirements for the preparation and approval of planning schemes. Under subsection 67(1)(d), a planning scheme must set out objectives and policies relating to the protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment, including the amenity of the area.

#### *The Melton Planning Scheme*

A planning scheme is a statutory document which sets out rules and regulations determined by the Victorian Government directing how land can be used, developed, and protected within the City of Melton municipality.

Planning schemes contains State and local government planning policies, zones, overlays, and other rules affecting how land can and cannot be used and developed in Melton. Any planning permits issued within the City of Melton must comply with the Melton Planning Scheme.

The Victorian Planning Provisions are included in the planning schemes of all local government areas in the state. Clause 52.27 of these provisions helps to ensure that licensed premises are situated in appropriate locations, and that the impact of the licensed premises on the amenity of the surrounding area is considered.

Clause 52.27 dictates that a planning permit is required to use land to sell or consume liquor if any of the following apply:

- A licence is required under the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*.
- A different licence or category of licence is required from that which is in force.
- The hours of trading allowed under a licence are to be extended.
- The number of patrons allowed under a licence is to be increased.
- The area that liquor is allowed to be consumed or supplied under a licence is to be increased.

A permit is not required in all cases, such as limited liquor licences, to manufacture liquor in certain zones, or reduction of operating hours. A detailed list of exemptions is provided in the provisions.

Where a permit is required, Clause 52.27 sets out decision guidelines which Council is required to abide by, in addition to the guidelines in Clause 65. The responsible authority (Council) must consider, as appropriate:

- The Municipal Planning Strategy and the Planning Policy Framework.
- The impact of the sale or consumption of liquor permitted by the liquor licence on the amenity of the surrounding area.
- The impact of the hours of operation on the amenity of the surrounding area.
- The impact of the number of patrons on the amenity of the surrounding area.
- The cumulative impact of any existing licensed premises and the proposed licensed premises on the amenity of the surrounding area.

Additional considerations may include ensuring there is sufficient parking, lighting, waste management protocols or access for deliveries. Council must fully assess applications to be satisfied that the proposal is 'fit for purpose' and that it mitigates harmful impacts of alcohol. Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the broader context and location of the proposal, along with any factors which may lead to negative impacts.

When issuing a planning permit, Council may limit hours of operation or set conditions to limit noise levels. Applications which demonstrate an awareness of, and measures to address potential impacts will be seen favourably.

#### *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*

The *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* (the Act) provides a legal framework for protecting and promoting public health and wellbeing in Victoria. The Act has provisions related to liquor licensing, as alcohol consumption can have significant impacts on public health and wellbeing.

Under the Act, local governments have a responsibility to promote and protect the public health and safety of their communities. This includes ensuring that licensed venues within their municipality comply with the conditions of their liquor licenses and relevant legislation, such as the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*.

### *Local Government Act 2020*

The *Local Government Act 2020* outlines the powers and responsibilities of local governments in Victoria. One of the areas in which local governments have authority is the regulation of liquor licensing.

Under the Act, the Melton City Council has the power to issue and regulate liquor licenses within the municipality. This includes the power to determine the number of licenses to be issued, the hours of operation for licensed premises, and the conditions of operation for licensed premise.

Furthermore, the Act enables Melton City Council to regulate and control the use and consumption of alcohol on council-owned or controlled land. This includes regulating the sale and supply of alcohol at events held on council land, such as parks and community centres.

### *General Local Law*

The *Local Government Act 2020* gives Victorian Councils the power to create local laws within their municipality. Local Laws are designed to provide services that protect and enhance the safety, health and amenity of the municipality and its residents and visitors.

Part Three (behaviour on and use of roads, public places and council land including reserves) of the General Local Law is relevant in this policy areas.

Local Law 32<sup>53</sup> relates to the consumption and possession of liquor in the City of Melton. It states that:

*A Person must not, on any Road, in any Public Place or on any Council Land:*

- a) consume any Liquor or*
- b) be in possession or control of any Liquor other than in a sealed container or receptacle, except in such place as may for the time being be:*
  - i. licensed premises within the meaning of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 or*
  - ii. an area in which the consumption of Liquor is permitted in accordance with a permit or licence granted under the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 or*
  - iii. an area in respect of which Council has issued a Permit or licence for the consumption of the Liquor or*
  - iv. within an area designated by resolution of Council as an area to which the prohibition in this subclause 32.1 does not apply.*

In other words, the consumption of alcohol is prohibited in public spaces unless there is a valid liquor licence or permit in place. This does not relate to private land or homes.

The consequences for breaching the Local Law are five penalty units.

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<sup>53</sup> City of Melton (2015) [General local law Melton City Council](#)

## Policy alignment

As alcohol is a closely regulated legal drug in Australia, there are layers of government policy influences impacting on Council's decision-making processes on its supply and consumption, as well as general health.

### Melton City Council

The commitment to lead alcohol harm prevention is guided by several strategic documents and policies which have been endorsed by the City of Melton. These primarily include the *Community Vision 2041 - The City We Create*, and the *Melton City Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025*. Both documents reflect Council's commitment to work with the community and other stakeholders in representing shared values for improving community health and wellbeing.

#### *Community Vision 2041 - The City We Create*

*Melton City 2041—The City We Create*<sup>54</sup> is our community's vision for the City of Melton; developed by our community, for our community. It outlines the aspirations and priorities for what we want to see achieved over the next two decades. The *Community Vision 2041* is an important, long term strategic document that helps inform other key documents and plans including the *Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025*.

The *Community Vision 2041* reflects the feedback provided by community in 2020-2021 and includes a new vision statement developed by the City of Melton Community Panel. Theme One in the *Community Vision 2041* identifies the community's desire of being 'fit and healthy'.

#### *Melton City Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025*

The *Melton City Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025*<sup>55</sup> is the key document that sets out the strategic and planning direction for Council and the community. Council has incorporated its Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan into its Council Plan, reinforcing its commitment to promoting, improving, and protecting public health and wellbeing.

The Council and Wellbeing Plan was developed following extensive consultation with our community and stakeholders, along with analysis of relevant data, making it a reliable source on the values of the City of Melton.

Theme One in the Plan seeks 'a safe City that is socially and culturally connected.' Reducing the harm caused by tobacco, alcohol and drug use has been identified as a key strategy (1.4.3) to meet Council's objective of promoting public health and wellbeing outcomes to our community.

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<sup>54</sup> City of Melton (2021), *Community vision*, <https://www.melton.vic.gov.au/Council/About-the-City/Community-vision>

<sup>55</sup> City of Melton (2021), *Council Plans and Budget*, <https://www.melton.vic.gov.au/Council/About-Council/Council-Plans-and-Budget>



	Objectives	Performance Indicators	Strategies
1.4	A City that promotes positive public health and wellbeing outcomes to our community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community agreement that family violence is prevalent in our community</li> <li>Personal level of satisfaction with support services</li> <li>Community agreement that there are opportunities to participate in recreational and leisure activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.4.1 Work in partnership with health and community service providers to deliver initiatives that meet the needs of the community</li> <li>1.4.2 Invest in the mental wellbeing, healthy eating and physical activity of all our community with an emphasis on children and young people</li> <li>1.4.3 Improve community health and wellbeing outcomes related to sexual and reproductive health, and harm caused by tobacco, alcohol and drug use</li> <li>1.4.4 Raise community awareness and deliver programs to prevent family violence</li> <li>1.4.5 Support children and young people to learn, develop and reach their full potential</li> </ul>

Figure 9: Excerpt from Theme One of the Melton City Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025.

## Australian Government

The Federal Government's *National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028*<sup>56</sup> is a framework that aims to prevent and reduce alcohol related harm across the country. It identifies national priorities, guides action by stakeholders and outlines strategies that can help to reduce demand, supply, and harm.

The three harm minimisation pillars outlined in the National Alcohol Strategy are:

<p><b>Demand Reduction</b></p> <p>Preventing the uptake and/ or delaying the onset of use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs; reducing the misuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in the community; and supporting people to recover from dependence through evidence-informed treatment.</p>
<p><b>Supply Reduction</b></p> <p>Preventing, stopping, disrupting or otherwise reducing the production and supply of illegal drugs; and controlling, managing and/or regulating the availability of legal drugs.</p>
<p><b>Harm Reduction</b></p> <p>Reducing the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of drugs, for the user, their families and the wider community.</p>

Figure 10: Key principles of the National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028<sup>56</sup>

These three pillars of harm minimisation should be adopted for the purposes of this policy to align Council's position with Australian standard. The National Alcohol Strategy identifies priority actions, populations and substances which may be used to support Council decisions. It also indicates a range of measures which are applied nationally to assess progress.

## Victorian Government

The Victorian Government is a critical regulatory and influencing body in the area of alcohol harm prevention. There are two key documents which relate to Council's work in this area.

### *Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023*

The Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023*<sup>57</sup> is developed every four years as a requirement of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. It sets out the State Government's approach to delivering improved public health and wellbeing outcomes for Victorians. The

<sup>56</sup> Department of Health and Aged Care (2019), *National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028*, <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-alcohol-strategy-2019-2028?language=en>

<sup>57</sup> Victorian Government (2019) *Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023*, [victorian-public-health-and-wellbeing-plan-2019-2023.pdf](https://www.vic.gov.au/public-health-and-wellbeing-plan-2019-2023)

Department of Health is responsible for leading implementation the Plan, working closely with other Departments such as the Department of Education and Training where needed.

One of the ten priority areas set out in the Plan is to reduce harmful alcohol and drug use. The Plan identifies the impacts of alcohol harm on individuals, their families, friends, and the broader community. It seeks to achieve:

- increased capability in all service systems including mental health, housing, child protection and family violence to assist people with alcohol and other drug-related issues
- better outcomes for those who access treatment, reducing harm (such as overdose, drug-related illness) and improving social outcomes (such as employment, stable housing, and family reunification)
- improved capability of primary care providers to assist people to manage alcohol and other drug-related issues before treatment is required or complexity develop
- changes to risky drinking cultures and delivery of environments that support low-risk drinking.

## Strategic alignment

In addition to its policy and strategic alignment, the City of Melton is led by the work of several key organisations which work in the area of preventing alcohol harms.

### *VicHealth*

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) is a statutory authority in Victoria which focuses on promoting good health and preventing chronic disease.

VicHealth have undertaken extensive work in the prevention of alcohol harm and have developed a strong repertoire of evidence which can be used to inform Council's approach to preventing or reducing harms from the supply and consumption of liquor. Council works regularly with VicHealth on initiatives that aim to improve the overall health of Victorians.

### *VicHealth Alcohol Strategy 2019-2023*

The *VicHealth Alcohol Strategy 2019-2023* reaffirms the foundation's ten-year goal of 200,000 more Victorians drinking less alcohol. It aims to prevent harm from alcohol products within two focus areas: changing risky drinking cultures and enabling environments to support low risk drinking.

For each of the focus areas VicHealth undertakes extensive research and develops practical tools which organisations such as the City of Melton can use to inform both policy and practice. One example is the VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework, which is discussed below.

### *The Art of Community Alcohol Management: What Local Government can do to prevent and minimise alcohol related harm*

The Art of Community Alcohol Management is a guide that was developed in partnership between VicHealth and the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) to explore what Victorian local governments can do to prevent and minimise alcohol-related harm, creating safer and healthier communities.

It draws from the best available evidence and the experience of public health and Victorian local government professionals who have tried and tested strategies in rural and metropolitan areas.

The guide is divided into six sections which explore the role of local government what provide direction for the development, implementation, and evaluation of strategies.

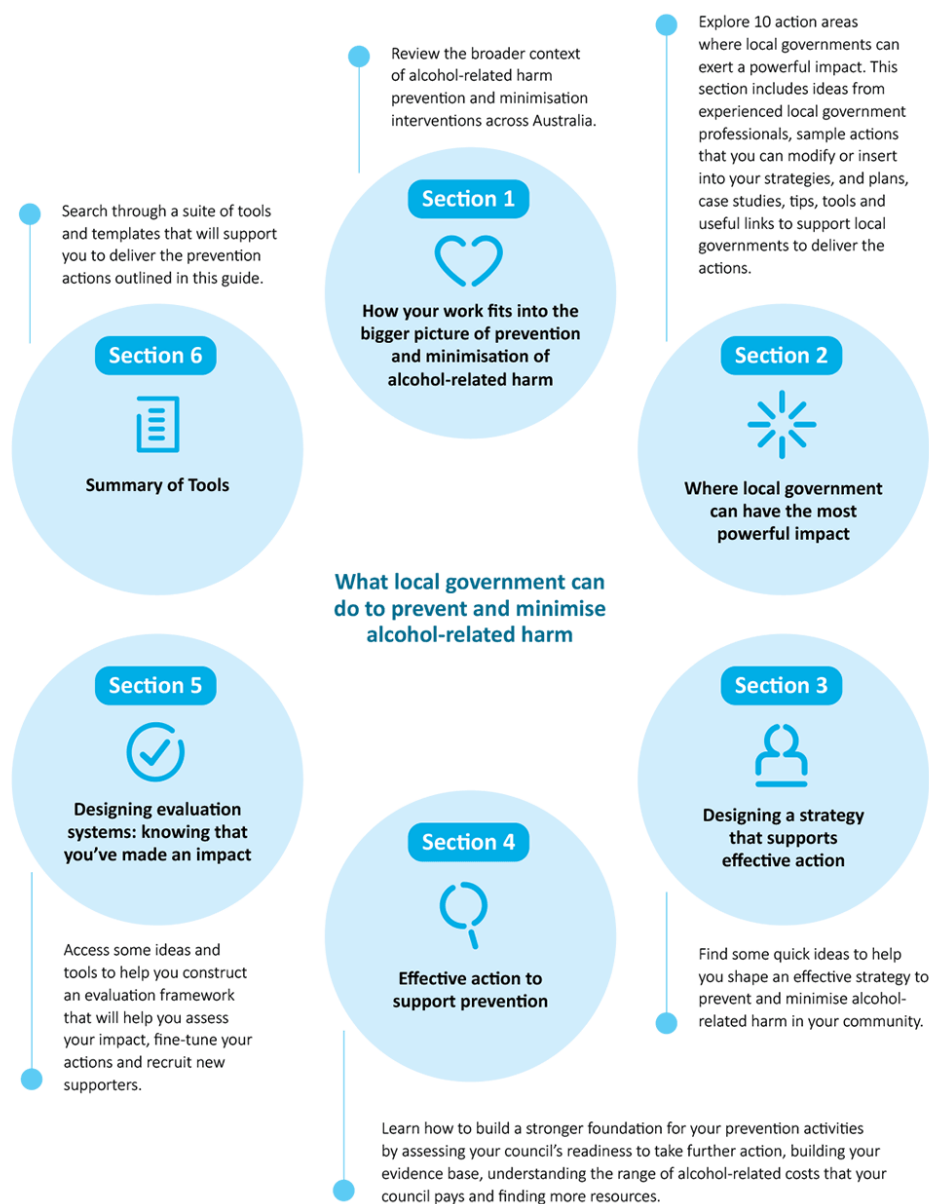


Figure 11: Outline of *The Art of Community Alcohol Management* guide (ADF, 2020<sup>58</sup>)

### VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework

The VicHealth *Alcohol Cultures Framework* provides a guide for values-based messaging to frame community targeted initiatives for 'risky drinking cultures' and identifies barriers which may inhibit

<sup>58</sup> Alcohol and Drug Foundation and VicHealth (2020), *The Art of Community Alcohol Management: What local government can do to prevent and minimise alcohol-related harm*, Alcohol and Drug Foundation and Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

this work. It also provides tangible actions which can be taken by specific stakeholders to achieve shared values.

The Framework is based on principles of psychology and marketing, making it a valuable tool to help change cultures and reduce harm from alcohol products. It highlights the key role of community and industry partners to ensure the effective implementation of the policy and provides a straightforward matrix to test vision alignment.

The Framework highlights that alcohol culture change is not seeking to draw members away from a social world, but help to transform drinking norms, expectations, and practices within social groups where it occurs. According to the Framework, there are three key separate but overlapping elements which are critical in changing alcohol cultures in this environment - settings, skills, and shared learnings. Surrounding these three elements are societal and individual factors which can potentially compound someone's vulnerability to risky drinking, and therefore must be considered.

The Alcohol Cultures Guide was developed in 2020 to support the implementation of the Framework. It provides practical strategies on how to enact the principles from the Framework, along with case studies to demonstrate its effective application.

Table 2: The elements of alcohol cultures, as adapted from the VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework (2019)

<b>Societal</b>		
<i>Population drivers at a state, national or global level e.g. the way alcohol is priced, promoted and its availability</i>		
<b>Settings</b> <i>Where the drinking takes place.</i>	<b>Skills</b> <i>What people know about drinking that they bring to the social world</i>	<b>Shared Learnings</b> <i>Why people drink</i>
The factors that shape the environment and atmosphere of alcohol cultures i.e. the venue, the type and availability of alcohol products, advertising, and promotions.	The competencies, abilities and knowledge that are held by members of their social world.	The shared cultural expectations, norms, and understandings of drinking
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical settings e.g., licensed venues, private residences, public spaces, social events, festivals, workplaces, sports events</li> <li>Virtual settings e.g. social media, internet, online gaming</li> <li>Televisions, entertainment, pinball machines, dance floors</li> <li>Type of drinks, glassware used in the setting</li> <li>Availability of alcohol, enforcement of legislation and policy, advertising and promotion, role models e.g., positive, or negative</li> <li>Safe and accessible transport to/ from the setting</li> <li>Timing of events and occasions where drinking occur</li> </ul>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practical expertise e.g. which glasses are used for different types of alcohol, how to give a toast, use lemon, do a shot</li> <li>Knowing how to handle large volumes of alcohol or the alcohol content of drinks</li> <li>Knowing techniques to handle occasions of risky drinking e.g. drinking water or managing a hangover</li> <li>Knowing how to respond to someone who wants to drink too much/has drunk too much/is drinking too much</li> <li>Knowing when risky drinking might be inappropriate for the group e.g. when supervising children</li> </ul>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drinking is used to connect with others or alter mood in the group</li> <li>Risky drinking is seen as normal and low-risk drinking is discouraged</li> <li>Drinking together is fun, pleasurable, exciting, relaxing, sophisticated, transgressive</li> <li>Shared rituals, myths, or traditions around drinking</li> <li>Shared gendered meanings of drinking</li> <li>Shared histories of drinking as a group</li> <li>• Drinking together creates belonging and inclusion and/or</li> <li>• it could be a mode of excluding 'outsiders'</li> </ul>
<b>Individual</b>		
<i>Someone's unique combination of genetic and personal characteristics e.g. age, gender, resilience, ethnicity, family influence and beliefs.</i>		

Particularly relevant for Council is the Settings element, due to its role in influencing liquor licensing for venues, and operations in a broad range of areas (e.g. events and recreation).

The Framework remains a highly influential document for Council's policy position, providing a strong evidence base to support our commitment to alcohol harm reduction and prevention.



## Alcohol in the City of Melton

Compared to other areas in Greater Melbourne, the City of Melton currently has a relatively low density of liquor licences per resident (approximately 0.0014). The City of Melton has also largely avoided the challenges experienced in inner-city areas which come with a higher number of late night venues.

With the rapid population growth occurring in the City of Melton, it's expected that there will also be a greater diversity of entertainment and hospitality services. This may be an exciting prospect for the economic and tourism sector of the community, but it also presents an opportunity for the City of Melton to carefully monitor (and manage, where possible) the increasing supply of alcohol in a way that will minimise harm, and promote healthy practices in relation to its consumption. It will be important that Council policy is agile, and able to adapt to individual service settings or new trends as they emerge.

As of 28 February 2023, there were a total of 202 liquor licences operating in the City of Melton, up from 143 licences in 2016. Of these, restaurants and cafes were the most prominent licence type (68), followed by limited licences (57) and packaged (bottle shop) licences (33). There were also six late night liquor licences operating. Of these late night venues, five are gaming venues. The graph below (Figure 14) illustrates the range and number of liquor licences per category operating in the City of Melton.

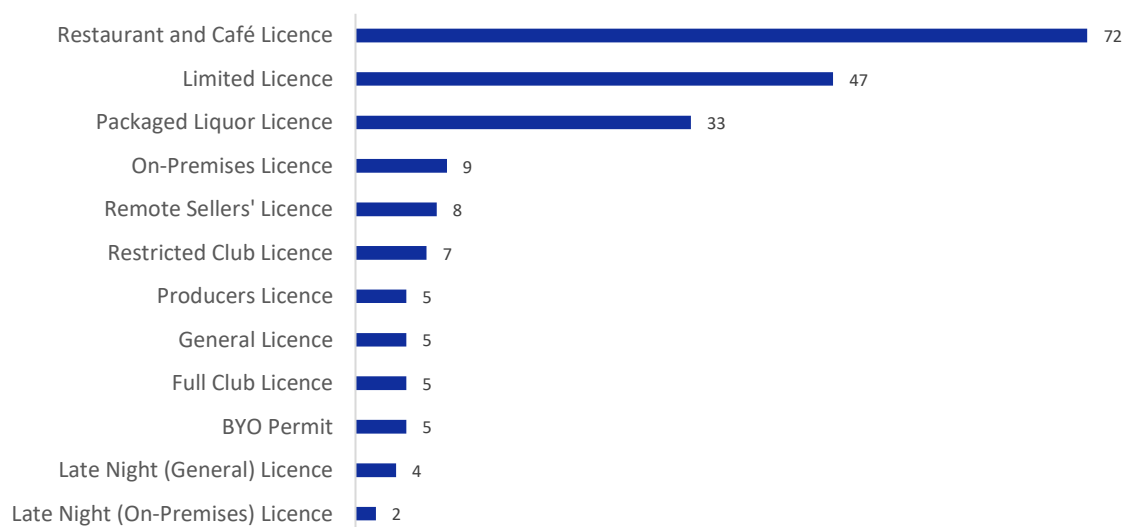


Figure 12: Number and range of liquor licences operating in the City of Melton (VCGLR, 28 February 2023)

As depicted in Figure 15, most of the licensed premises in the municipality are clustered around activity centres and the more densely populated areas of Melton or the eastern corridor. The premises outside these areas are predominantly restaurants, cafes or sporting clubs. There are also several producers licences (for example, vineyards and wineries) operating in the rural areas of the municipality.

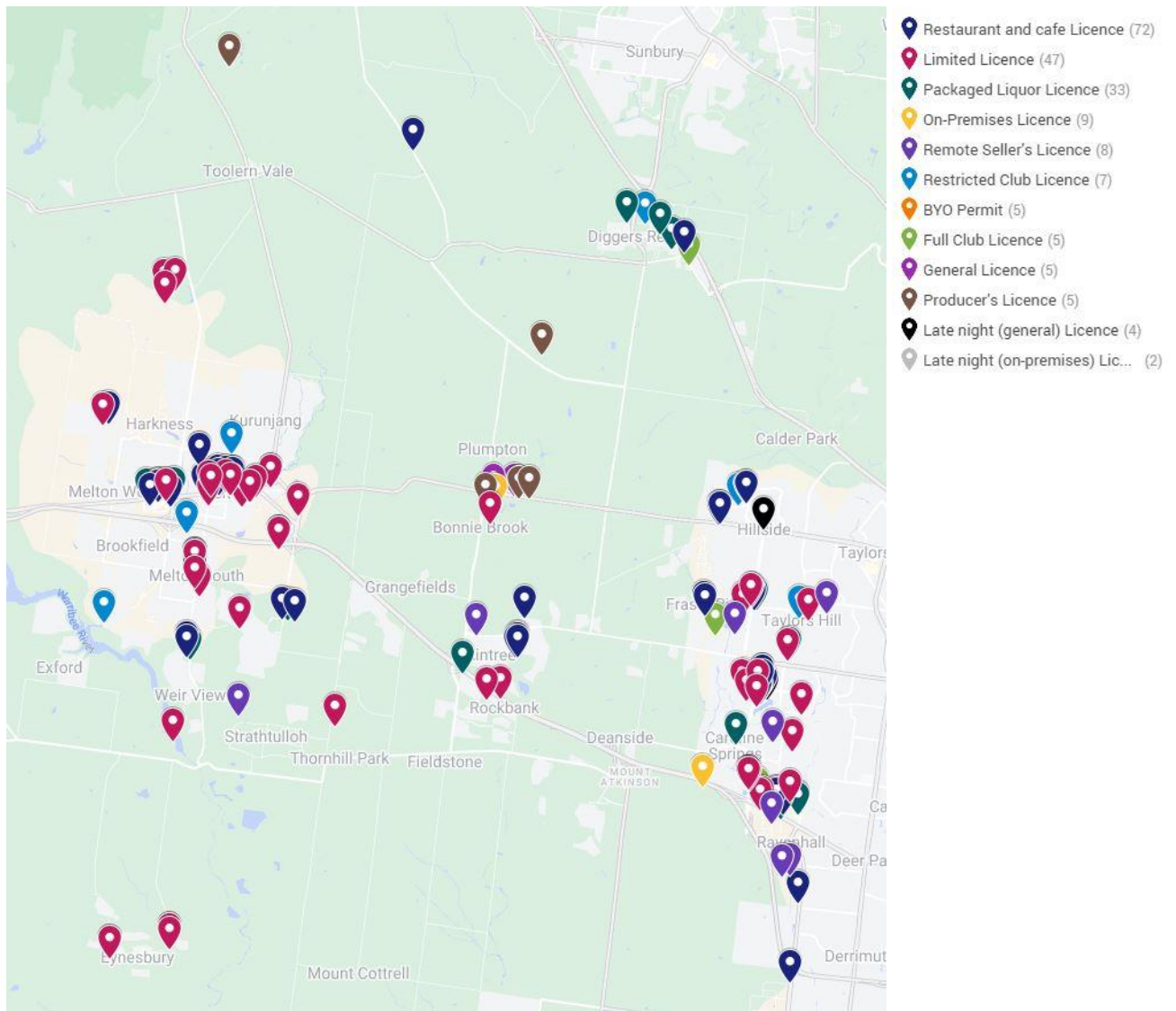


Figure 13: The location of licensed premises located in the City of Melton as at 28 February 2023 (data from VCGLR 2023, developed using Google My Maps) – the [interactive map](#) can be accessed online.

The category which has increased the most over the last five years are the restaurant and café licences (increased from 47 in 2018, and 33 in 2015). In these environments alcohol is generally served as an accompaniment to food, and may contribute to the culinary environment. This is in contrast to environments where alcohol is served as a primary purpose (sometimes complimented by entertainment).

Limited licences have also increased from 42 in 2018, and packaged licences have increased from 25. The remote sellers' licence was introduced as a category in October 2022 to better regulate the increasing variety of liquor delivery services.

It is recognised that the alcohol industry in Australia is a significant contributor to the economy and tourism sector. It generates a significant amount of revenue and provides employment opportunities to a large proportion of the local community. Alcohol retailer turnover in Australia has increased by \$3.6 billion (29 per cent) from 2019 to 2021, reaching a record \$15.9 billion in 2021<sup>59</sup>. The tourism

<sup>59</sup> FARE (2022), *Alcohol retail during COVID-19 (2020-2021)*, <https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Alcohol-retail-during-COVID-19-2020-2021.pdf>



sector also benefits from the industry, with a range of venues across the City of Melton and Victoria attracting visitors. However, there is substantial evidence on the amount of harm caused by excessive alcohol consumption, and by extension the alcohol industry.

When making decisions or providing recommendations regarding the sale and consumption of liquor in the City of Melton, Council therefore needs rely on evidence. By engaging stakeholders and presenting the relevant data, highlighting success stories and showcasing the benefits of harm minimisation, Council can work effectively with businesses and the tourism sector.

This section provides an overview on some of the research regarding the sale and consumption of liquor in our community. It identifies key barriers and influences that impact the City of Melton community.

## Health impacts

Alcohol (referred to interchanably as liquor) is a depressant drug, which means it slows down the messages travelling between the brain and the body.

Unlike any other commodity, alcohol stands alone as one of the most acceptable legal drugs in Australia. While many drink alcohol periodically to relax and socialise, drinking too much can put people at risk of immediate and long-term harm.

In Australia, 1 in 3 people drink more than they should on a single occasion. This is commonly referred to as 'binge drinking' (drinking more than 4 standard drinks on any one occasion).

In the short term, drinking too much alcohol can cause negative side effects, including:

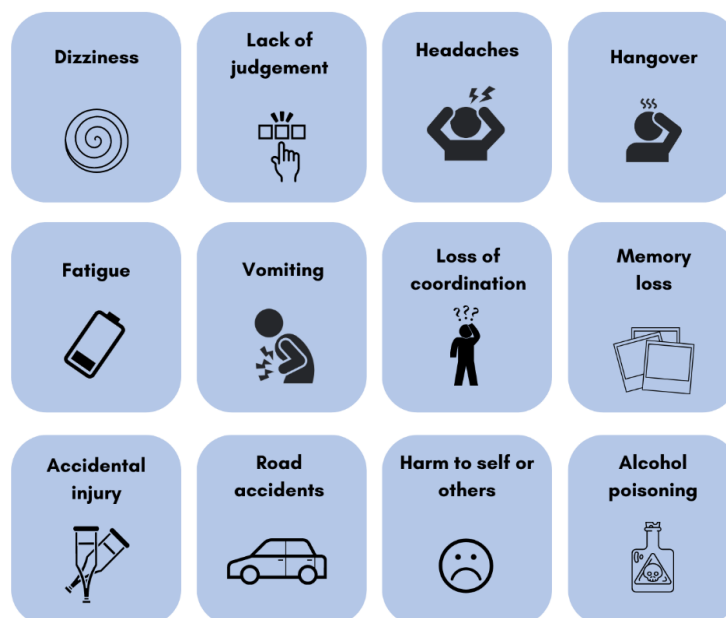


Figure 14: The short-term impacts of excessive alcohol consumption

The risks of injury are heightened after excessive drinking on a single occasion. For instance, binge drinking can result in death or injury due to road traffic accidents, falls, drowning, assault, suicide and acute alcohol toxicity.

Drinking more than two standard drinks a day regularly can affect physical and mental health over someone's lifetime<sup>60</sup>. Side effects of drinking too much alcohol may include dependence and addiction, especially in people who have depression or anxiety. It can also increase the risk of suicide<sup>61</sup>.

Long term effects of heavy alcohol consumption can result in unhealthy weight gain, and increases cancer risk. The risk of injury for frequent heavy consumption of alcohol is also higher.

Regular heavy drinking can affect an individual's:

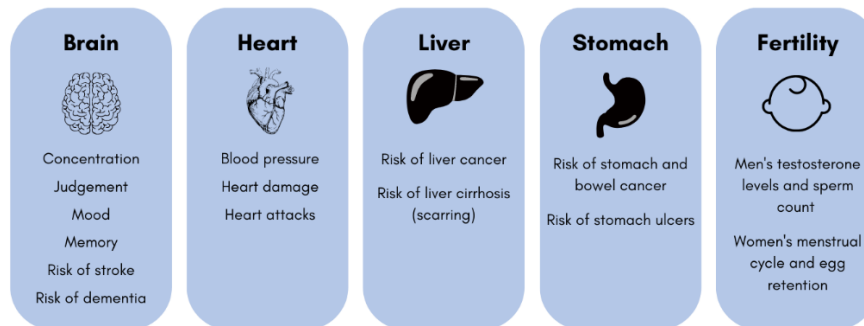


Figure 15: The impacts of regular over consumption of alcohol

Potential harms that can come from episodes of heavy drinking often extend beyond the individual drinker and can have serious consequences for others, including family, friends, victims of alcohol fueled violence, bystanders, employers and road users<sup>62</sup>. For instance, alcohol-related harm can impact the economy due to increased healthcare expenses, or loss of productivity. The social consequences may include increase rates of family violence or child neglect. Widespread over consumption of alcohol in the community can place a significant strain on resources including emergency services, healthcare providers and social service organisations. These levels of impact have been depicted below in Figure 18.

<sup>60</sup> Healthdirect Australia, (2023), How alcohol affects your health, <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/how-alcohol-affects-your-health>

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

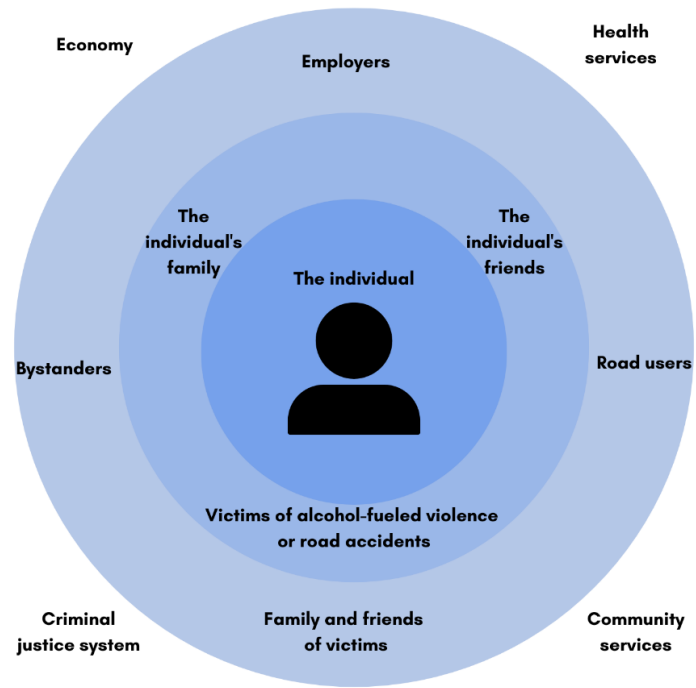


Figure 16: The levels of impact from alcohol related harms.

## Stakeholders

There is a range of stakeholders involved in the sale and consumption of liquor in the City of Melton. Council recognises that each one may hold different views and interests in the industry, making it important to identify common ground and shared values for balanced outcomes. There are ways that each stakeholder can contribute to the exposure, sale, promotion, and consumption of liquor which will help to protect those most vulnerable in our community while maintaining a thriving economy. Stakeholders can also help to build and maintain a positive alcohol culture, challenging the normalisation of harmful and destructive alcohol consumption to build a safer community.

It is important to acknowledge that the alcohol industry is a multi-million-dollar sector which has a vested interest in making money, growing the industry, and entrenching alcohol as a widespread product. Prominent and alluring promotions that seek to establish brand recognition and loyalty are a widely accepted and intentional industry practice. The industry invests in strategic advertising and promotion to influence consumers, a tactic which the broader community has become increasingly cautious of. Through the combined efforts of Council and its stakeholders, we can support, educate, and empower communities to improve their health and wellbeing.

### Melton City Council

The City of Melton can influence the location and conditions of liquor licences through a variety of channels. Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, and the *Local Government Act 2020*, local government has a legislative responsibility to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of the local community. Melton City Council has a role in managing the exposure of alcohol products, advertising, and promotion, in order to challenge the normalisation of alcohol as an everyday retail commodity, particularly for vulnerable communities.

To achieve this Council takes an inter-disciplinary approach, with departments working together towards a common goal. Strong and clear communication between teams is vital, along with sharing information which may assist the approach by another area. Cultural change can be challenging, with differing priorities for departments across Council, and reliance on economic benefits or established connections. Furthermore, resourcing limitations and staff turnover can make it difficult to sustain consistent approaches over time. The report and policy seek to address these challenges, providing a reference on an agreed approach which has taken various priorities into account.

### Planning and liquor licences

Council acknowledges the variety of settings and service contexts where alcohol products may be offered. While some may require both a planning permit and a liquor licence, others may be exempt from any statutory assessment or approval. This occurs when the zone or overlays of the subject site (as per the Melton Planning Scheme) requires planning approval for serving and consuming liquor.

Where a planning permit is not required, liquor licence applications will be referred to Council and the relevant Licensing Inspector of Victoria Police for comment by the Victorian Liquor Commission (VLC). Council has the ability to positively influence alcohol-related outcomes by making a submission if deemed appropriate. This report and Council's policy will assist the provision of consistent advice when opportunities to provide comment arise in these circumstances. Planning approvals are attached to the land, so should the business with an existing liquor licence decide to relocate within the City of Melton, they may need to consider planning requirements for the new location.

All new applications or amended planning permit applications and proposals involving alcohol service and supply that do come through Melton City Council will be assessed for alignment with the Melton Planning Scheme and any relevant legislation. Through the referral process Council will also ensure that proposals comply with associated policies and strategies. Proposals which align with the evidence on health impacts, such as that presented in this report, will receive a greater level of support from Council. In some cases, municipal local laws and ancillary considerations associated with land tenure arrangements (lease and licence conditions and even insurance arrangements) may also need to be considered and appropriately addressed by potential applicants. Should a planning permit condition not be met, Council may initiate planning compliance proceedings.

While situations vary, there are several factors which are regularly considered when determining the suitability of the supply and consumption of alcohol, including:

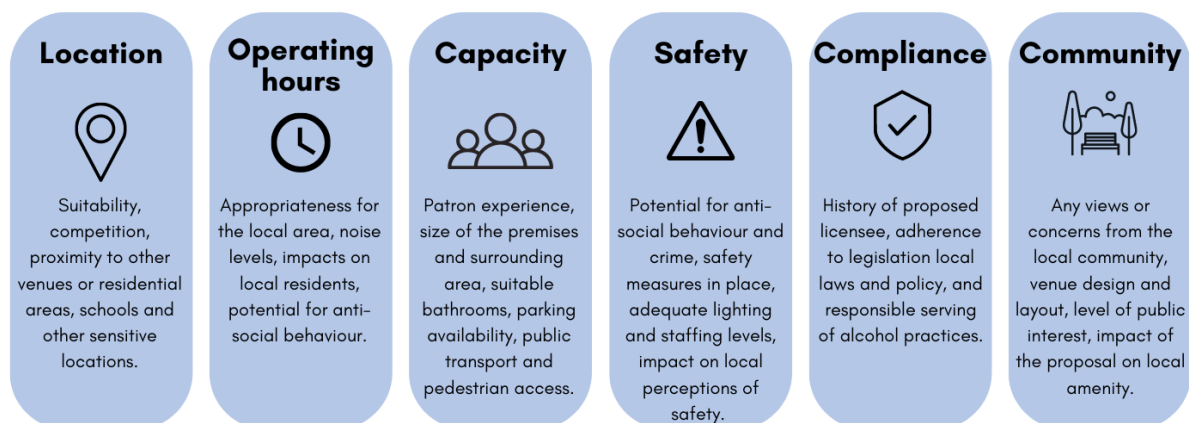


Figure 17: Factors considered by Council when determining the suitability of the supply or consumption of alcohol (in addition to health impacts)

Business owners applying for a liquor licence can reduce delays in the decision-making process by providing sufficient detail (e.g. detailed floor plans for red-line area proposals to enable informed decisions) and outlining how they will implement best practice for harm minimisation. For planning permit processes applicants may also consider contacting relevant Council officers in planning services or requesting a pre-application meeting to help pre-empt any potential issues.

Where there are concerns about a proposal, Council will aim to articulate its position clearly by defining the issue, providing the rationale, and linking it to relevant legislation, policies or strategies discussed in this report. In these situations, applicants will generally be given the opportunity to amend applications before re-submitting. Council must be satisfied that the amended application addresses the concerns expressed through specific measures or strategies.

Where harm minimisation strategies are outside the scope of the planning approvals process, planners may engage other areas across Council to provide support as needed. For example, officers may provide advice on placement of advertising materials or ways to provide customers with balanced options. Council can establish an internal process to support this approach.

## Regulation and enforcement

Council has the authority to regulate alcohol in the municipality through the establishment and enforcement of local laws. As discussed above, Local Law 32 specifically pertains to the regulation of alcohol consumption in public spaces. Where it has been identified that a local law has been breached, Council officers will investigate the matter and may provide a notice or infringement to

the offending or responsible party. This can be escalated to legal action if the offending or responsible party does not comply. Enforcing local laws helps to protect public safety, security, amenity, and the well-being of the community.

On enforcement matters outside the authority of local government, Council officers will collaborate with Victoria Police or other authorised officers to ensure the relevant laws are upheld. This may involve working with Victoria Police to regulate trading hours, venue patronage and density.

### Public spaces, events, and programs

Council has a role in minimising alcohol-related harm through the planning, development, cleaning, and maintenance of public or open space. This is important to ensure that spaces are safe, functional, and accessible for all members of the community.

When planning and delivering community events and programs, Council has a duty of care to ensure that residents, visitors, workers, and volunteers are able to interact in a safe and inclusive environment. For this reason, serving alcohol is generally prohibited for events and programs on land that is owned or managed by Council. Where alcohol is being served on rare occasions (for example, events which are ticketed or by invitation only) measures should be put in place to minimise exposure to vulnerable cohorts and promote safe alcohol consumption to model best practice in alcohol harm reduction to the community.

A thorough risk assessment should also be conducted in these circumstances to identify potential issues and mitigation strategies. When promoting spaces, events, or programs where alcohol will be consumed, officers should take care to ensure that the serving of alcohol is not the main or sole purpose. This can involve having equal emphasis on other highlights (for example, the view or hired entertainment in public spaces). Furthermore, organisers are responsible for ensuring responsible service of alcohol requirements are adhered to and may consider registering with the Victoria Police 'Party Safe' program. Businesses or community groups running events and programs in the City of Melton are encouraged to take the same approach.

In settings where sponsorship arrangements are being considered to offset the costs of running an event or program, consideration should be given to the role, nature, and value of the sponsorship package. Where the supply of alcohol is a main element of a sponsorship package it would be inconsistent with harm minimisation principles. Alcohol should be served as an ancillary activity, and not compromise the equitable access or intent of the event or program. More broadly the purpose of the event or program should align with the values and policies of Council, demonstrating support for community health and wellbeing.

### Education and advocacy

At a broader level, the City of Melton has a role in improving the health and wellbeing of the community. This is achieved through the development and implementation of the *Melton Community Vision 2041 – The City We Create* and the *Melton Council and Wellbeing Plan*. Council provides a range of education and awareness programs to build the capacity of the community to recognise the potential harms of excessive alcohol consumption. This includes forming partnerships with related organisations and community groups to deliver initiatives. It may also involve working in partnership with schools, sporting clubs and other community groups to promote healthier alcohol behaviours and cultures. For matters outside the powers of local government, Council may undertake community engagement and advocacy to the relevant body to call for improved policy and practices.

Prevention and health promotion approaches are integral to the advancement of the Council's community health and wellbeing objectives. It is therefore important to remaining up to date on the latest evidence which can be used to provide clear direction on matters relating to alcohol supply and consumption. In doing so, Council reflects its determination to exercise leadership on behalf of its community to promote health and prevent alcohol-related harm.

The combined aim of Council's work in this area is to limit the extensive or harmful exposure of alcohol products to the community, including through the proliferation of alcohol advertising. Council is committed to reduce the normalisation of alcohol as every part of life, ensuring health and wellbeing outcomes in the short and long term.

## Community

The community plays an important role in alcohol harm minimisation. While individuals have the responsibility to make responsible choices about their own alcohol consumption, the community has a collective responsibility to create an environment that supports safe and responsible drinking. The City of Melton community can support the implementation of the policy in the following ways:



Figure 18: The role of the community in minimising alcohol-related harms

Community, social or sporting groups are examples of where leadership in this area is particularly influential. These groups are in a strong position to promote healthier drinking behaviours and create a supportive environment for individuals who choose not to drink. They can help by educating members and participants or setting policies and guidelines for alcohol consumption at events or activities. They might also consider providing and promoting a wider range of non-alcoholic options. Leaders of these groups are in an excellent position to model responsible drinking behaviour and encourage others to do the same.

There are a number of specific actions that can be taken by community groups. Liquor Accords are an example of how groups can build effective partnerships with Victoria Police and government to collaborate on strategies which reduce alcohol-related harm. Becoming actively involved in programs (for example, Good Sports and Party Safe) or campaigns (such as choosing designated drivers, Feb-Fast and Dry-July) can also help by signalling to the community that the group is supportive of a healthier alcohol culture. When planning community events, creating designated alcohol-free zones (or not serving alcohol at all) can make a more family-friendly atmosphere, and minimise the risk of public drinking leaving to disturbance or harm.

## Licence and permit holders

Liquor licence and permit holders have a significant role to play in alcohol harm minimisation. They are responsible for ensuring that alcohol is sold and served responsibly, and that their customers do not harm themselves or others as a result of their drinking. There are general obligations for licence and permit holders set out through legislation, including planning, responsible serving of alcohol and specific liquor licence conditions. The general obligations have been depicted below in Figure 24.

A premises is only able to operate within their ordinary trading hours, which vary between licence and permit categories. These are defined under Section 3 of the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*. Exceptions to these hours will sometimes apply, such as for New Year's Eve celebrations. Where a planning permit is required, a licence or permit holder must also comply with any operating hours specified in their conditions.

If there are concerns about a liquor licensee, or something that has occurred at a licenced premises, it can be reported to Liquor Control Victoria.



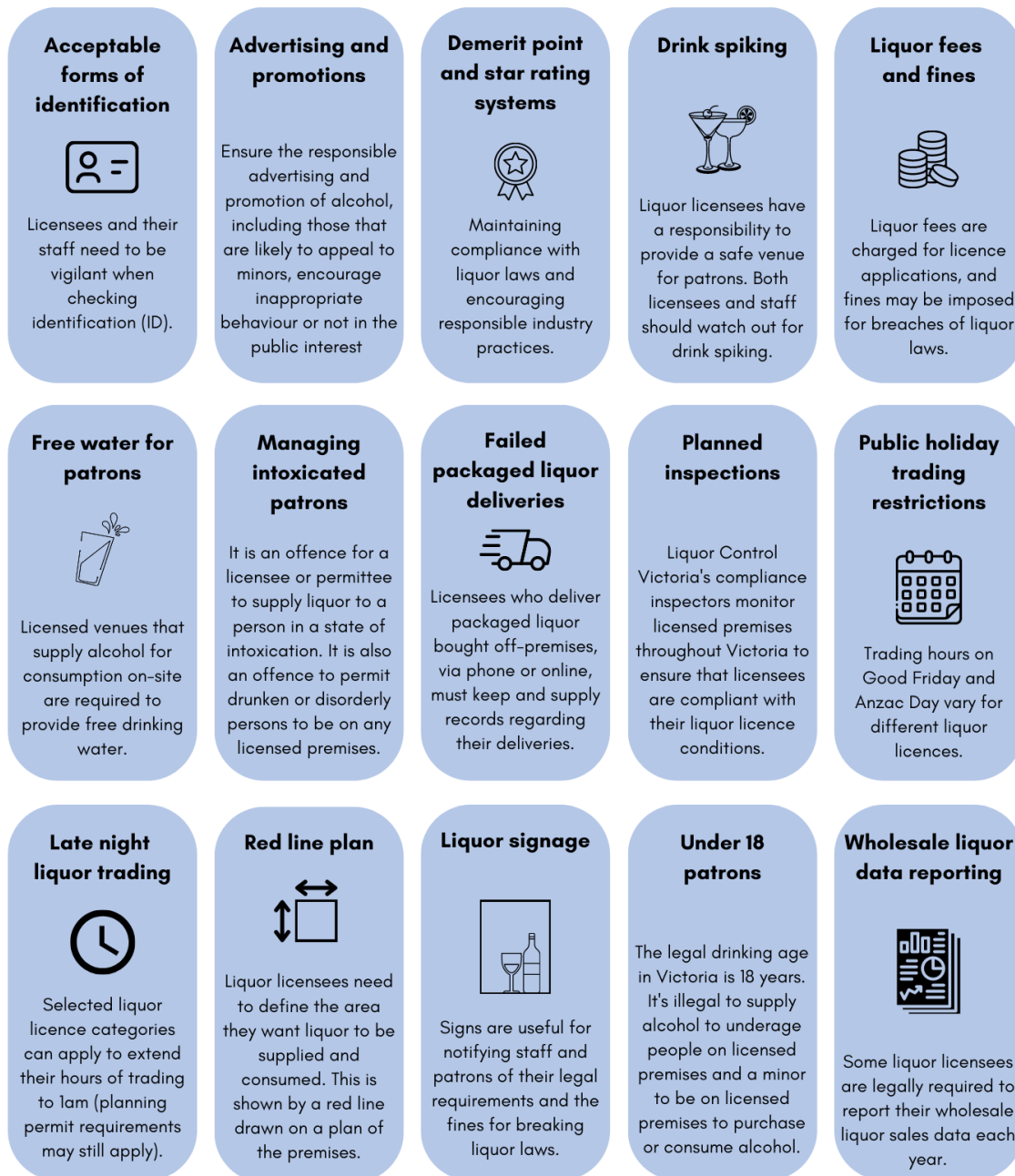


Figure 19: General obligations of licensees and permit holders, adapted from the VLC website<sup>63</sup>.

The design and layout of premises serving alcohol can also help to minimise alcohol related harms by regulating consumption, reducing visibility of alcohol, and decreasing risks to personal safety. At minimum, premises serving or supplying alcohol must meet the relevant Australian standards, Building Code, requirements of the Melton Planning Scheme and other relevant regulations. However, premises that go beyond this, ensuring that the environment is fit-for-purpose can promote good business, encourage healthier behaviours, and reduce the normalisation of alcohol to vulnerable cohorts.

Good design such as a neat seating layout can enhance the efficiency of licensed hospitality venues and help to improve perceptions of safety for patrons, encouraging them to stay longer and enjoy other elements of a business. For businesses which sell packaged liquor (i.e. bottle shops) good

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/liquor-licensee-obligations>

design can reduce product theft and make customers feel safer attending a store, especially after dark. For all types of venues, good design can reduce delays in the planning approval process and avoid the need for amendments at a later time. Examples of good design principles have been depicted below.

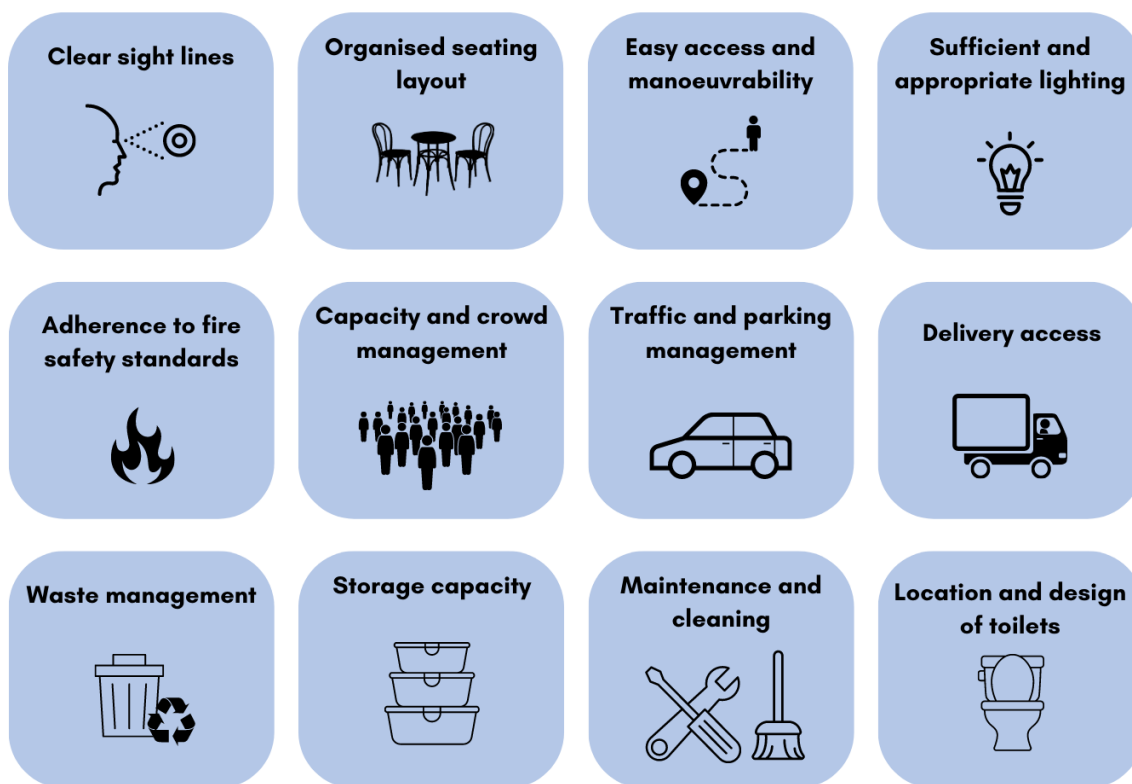


Figure 20: Examples of design principles which can impact a licensed premises

For sites that require queuing for entry, that or include outdoor dining, licence holders need to take extra care to ensure that patron behaviour does not promote aggression or influence the behaviour of other public space users. Similarly, overcrowded or ‘vertical’ drinking venues (where the majority of patrons are standing) are considered higher risk for verbal and physical altercations inside the premises. This may be mitigated by undertaking additional monitoring or where required, security. Should an incident take place, it should be reported to law enforcement.

Expanding on good design principles, business practices can also be used to influence attitudes around alcohol consumption. Where packaged liquor is sold, it is important to have a clear service distinction and point of sale – particularly when it is separate to other products. The display of alcohol in fridges, shelves or counters should not be in open view of the general public in areas where there may be vulnerable members of the community present, such as bistros, sporting clubs or supermarkets. This also applies to signage and promotional materials which are visible to the general public or outside of the licensed premises. It is particularly important where the principal activities involve participation of families and children, or community services.

Council can support licensed premises to implement harm minimisation and prevention initiatives that promote healthier behaviours and attitudes. For instance, encouraging them to serve alcohol as an ancillary item or one that is in addition to a core activity or function can support people who are reducing or abstaining from alcohol consumption. Furthermore, balanced choices (for example, free water) should be available and encouraged to create supportive environments where consumers are invited to engage in a conscious choice and where external pressures are limited. Recommendations

from the *VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework* can be implemented to help identify and address certain behaviours or attitudes which are more harmful than others.

Businesses practices which are not encouraged include promotions that promote binge drinking, pre-loading, discounted shots, bulk, or over proofed alcohol. These practices encourage and support excessive alcohol consumption and can be harmful to alcohol cultures.

Evidence of good design principles and business practices should be provided to authorities when reviewing applications for a planning permit and liquor licences and are generally a requirement of Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA) provisions.

## Stakeholder engagement

In the development of this report Council officers consulted with both internal and external stakeholders throughout April and May 2023.

Internal stakeholders included representatives from planning services, local laws, economic development, health promotion, recreation, and youth. Council officers spoke about some of the historical challenges with implementing alcohol-harm minimisation strategies, and how we can improve internal processes to address these challenges. Examples of this was consideration of how we can embed alcohol harm minimisation principles into the Melton Planning Scheme and better establish intra-organisational referral processes. Consultations also identified the need for a procedure or tool to ensure decisions are being made transparently and consistently (regarding venue patronage levels, for instance).

There was discussion on how we can integrate harm minimisation principles while still supporting a thriving tourism and economic sector, such as the expansion of outdoor dining, and ensuring decision making guidelines are flexible to assess proposals on a case-by-case basis. Having a clear policy will support Council officers to work with licensed premises and embed harm minimisation principles more broadly.

## Conclusion

The evidence presented in this report highlights the importance of harm minimisation strategies in addressing the negative consequences of alcohol consumption. While Council values the benefits of having a thriving entertainment, tourism and hospitality industry in the City of Melton, the health and wellbeing of the community must be prioritised. In this report, evidence has been presented on the various ways that alcohol can cause harm and the measures that can be implemented to mitigate these harms, particularly for vulnerable groups (for example, children and young people).

To maintain consistency and transparency, Councils' policy will establish how it will navigate its various roles in relation to the supply and consumption of alcohol. The considerations in this report will also provide valuable insights for relevant stakeholders or those applying for a liquor licence in the City of Melton. Council recognises the need for strong leadership and informed decision making in relation to the role alcohol plays in our community.

## Recommendations

Having reviewed the evidence presented in the report, there are a number of recommendations for Council's policy position on the alcohol harm minimisation.

<b>1. Alignment with the VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework</b>	The <i>VicHealth Alcohol Cultures Framework</i> is well supported by evidence and continues to be a highly influential document in the minimisation of harm caused by alcohol. Being a key statutory body, VicHealth has a strong reputation in this space and is widely seen as an authority on health and wellbeing standards. Council's policy should therefore be closely aligned with the Framework, and stakeholders (particularly those seeking Council's support on relevant proposals) are encouraged to refer to this source as well.
<b>2. Define harm minimisation as the main objective</b>	Council's policy must effectively communicate its intention to improve community health and wellbeing by defining clear objectives for clear and consistent decision-making. The policy must outline Council's commitment to ensuring the safety and liveability of local neighbourhoods, and that any decisions are made in the best interests of the public. Support for supply and demand reduction strategies should also be embedded into the policy.
<b>3. Provide clear guidance for licence and permit holders</b>	Having established harm minimisation as a priority for Council, the policy must clearly establish what the considerations will be for decision-making. This will save time for applicants when developing a proposal that contributes to a healthier alcohol culture and support existing licence or permit holders to understand how they can achieve responsible service outcomes, and how they can contribute to a thriving municipality. Having clearer guidance will also help to improve the quality and thoroughness of applications.

<p><b>4. Outline Council's own commitment to harm minimisation through modelling</b></p>	<p>Council's policy should outline clear expectations for both staff and the community about how the organisation will model healthier alcohol behaviours, such as limiting or prohibiting its supply and consumption at council facilities and events (particularly where vulnerable cohorts will be present).</p>
<p><b>5. Support evidence-based community initiatives and advocacy in harm minimisation</b></p>	<p>Given Council's commitment to health and wellbeing, the policy should highlight the need for developing and implementing community initiatives which promote healthier alcohol behaviours and cultures. It should also call for Council to reflect its commitment for harm minimisation through advocacy to state government or relevant bodies.</p>

## Glossary

<b>Alco-pop</b>	A flavoured alcoholic beverage (either malt, distilled or wine based) that has been flavoured (e.g. with fruit juice)
<b>Late night venue</b>	The VLC defines late night venues as those licensed venues that are permitted to trade and serve alcohol beyond 1am
<b>LCV</b>	Liquor Control Victoria
<b>Multi-buys</b>	Purchase of liquor in large volumes to provide cost savings (e.g. purchase of a case of beer at a lower cost, per unit, than purchasing bottles individually)
<b>Post-loading</b>	Consumption of alcohol bought from a packaged liquor outlet after visiting a licensed, on-premises venue (e.g., night club or pub)
<b>Pre-loading</b>	Consumption of alcohol bought from a packaged liquor outlet prior to visiting a licensed, on-premises venue (e.g., night club or pub)
<b>Price floor</b>	The imposition of a minimum price for alcoholic beverages (e.g., a minimum of \$5 per standard drink) through law or regulation
<b>Red-line area</b>	A designated area within a licensed venue where alcohol is permitted to be consumed
<b>Side-loading</b>	Consumption of alcohol bought from a packaged liquor outlet between visiting licensed, on-premises venues (e.g. as moving between a pub to a night club)
<b>VCGLR</b>	Victorian Commission for Gaming and Liquor Regulation (now represented by the VLC and VGCCC (Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission))
<b>Vertical drinking</b>	Drinking while standing up in a nightclub, pub, or bar. The opposite is seated drinking
<b>VGCCC</b>	Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission
<b>VLC</b>	Victorian Liquor Commission