

# Policing Alcohol Harm in Victoria

2014–2024



VICTORIA POLICE



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# Foreword

Victoria Police is setting a clear vision for reducing alcohol related harm in our community. This position statement outlines that vision, and is supported by a strategic plan that sets clear actions for the organisation.

Our position statement draws from and builds on the wealth of experience Victoria Police has in responding to, and preventing alcohol related harm. This aligns with the directions set in the *Blue Paper: A vision for Victoria Police in 2025*, allowing for a more coordinated, evidence-led and flexible approach that adapts to the changing patterns of alcohol consumption.

Our long term vision recognises the complexity in responding to the issues of alcohol harm. Alcohol consumption is central to our social fabric; it forms part of our celebrations, commiserations and social occasions. As well as the social benefits of responsible alcohol consumption, the liquor industry contributes significantly to the Australian economy in terms of employment, revenue and hospitality.

Cultural change has been widely identified as the answer to reducing the levels of alcohol related harm, and this will take time. In the interim, Victoria Police will work with our partners in health, justice, the not-for-profit sector, business and academia towards a consolidated whole of government approach to promote the responsible, safe use of alcohol. These partnerships allow Victoria Police to focus on prevention and intervention programs in key areas such as family violence, crimes against the person and poly-drug use, working towards our ultimate goal of a safer community.

This position statement and supporting strategy focus on three key priority areas: developing partnerships, building capacity and reducing harm. These priorities, and the actions that underpin them, are informed by evidence. We know that alcohol significantly contributes to road trauma, assaults and sexual assaults, family violence, property damage, child abuse, victimisation and public disorder.

The costs associated with the misuse of alcohol are incredibly high and require significant police time and resources to respond. The continuing rise in alcohol related harm will create additional demands on police resourcing. With our key partners, and the broader Victorian community, new and flexible approaches to respond to the challenges of alcohol misuse are required.

Through all of this, Victoria Police will continue with a range of business-as-usual approaches in responding to alcohol harm in the community. This includes effective policing of licensed premises, promotion of responsible service of alcohol and targeting alcohol fuelled violence and antisocial behaviour.



**Deputy Commissioner  
Lucinda Nolan**

# 1. Rationale

More than 80 per cent of Victorian adults drink alcohol. It is a widely accepted part of Australian culture, generating positive impacts in the form of revenue, employment and social amenity.<sup>i</sup> However, the costs to the Victorian community resulting from the misuse and abuse of alcohol are significant, with a recent report estimating the social costs at \$4.3 billion per annum.<sup>ii</sup>

Reducing the harms associated with alcohol use is a long-term proposition that will not be the sole responsibility of Victoria Police. Enforcing laws and changing regulation alone will not be effective. What is needed is a continued focus on challenging Australia's drinking culture and the entrenched attitudes that exist around alcohol consumption. This requires a concerted, sustained effort to be led not only by government but by health and community services, business and the broader community. Victoria Police's position statement aligns with the broader Victorian whole of government direction identified within *Reducing the Alcohol and Drug Toll: Victoria's Plan 2013–2017 (Reducing the Toll)*.<sup>iii</sup>

There is significant evidence of the risks to the individual from the misuse of alcohol, including a number of short and long term physical and psychological harms.<sup>iv</sup> The risks also extend beyond the individual to impact the broader community. These community and societal harms include road trauma, assaults, family violence, property damage, child abuse, victimisation and public safety issues.<sup>v</sup>

Rates of alcohol related harm have increased significantly over the last 10 years, despite the level of alcohol consumption per capita remaining stable since 1992.<sup>vi</sup>

Between 2001 and 2010:

- > Alcohol related assaults increased by 49 per cent.
- > The number of reported alcohol related family violence incidents has more than doubled.
- > Alcohol related ambulance attendances in metropolitan Melbourne have more than tripled between 2000–2001 and 2010–2011.
- > Of all family violence incidents police attended in 2012–2013 alcohol has been assessed as likely to be involved in almost half (46 per cent).<sup>vii</sup>

Alcohol is also a significant factor in road trauma. Almost one in four drivers and motorcycle riders killed in the last five years had a blood alcohol content greater than 0.05.<sup>viii</sup> Intoxicated pedestrians also have an increased risk of injury and death.

While responding to the issue of alcohol misuse is not solely the domain of Victoria Police, alcohol is a thread that runs through most areas of police work and consumes considerable police resources. Alcohol is involved in approximately 60 per cent of all police attendances.<sup>ix</sup>

Excessive consumption of alcohol is a major cause of physical and social harm. Victoria Police data indicates the availability of alcohol, either in concentrated entertainment precincts or the increased number of packaged liquor outlets acts as a substantial driver of assault and related offences. Recent research has found a strong correlation between family violence rates and the expanded availability of alcohol from packaged liquor outlets.<sup>x</sup>

The practice of "pre-loading" (drinking alcohol prior to entering licensed premises) is also linked with increased levels of violence and as a major impediment to responsible service of alcohol in licensed premises.<sup>xi</sup> Pre-loading is often motivated by the cheaper alcohol prices in packaged liquor outlets compared with licensed premises.

Disproportionate levels of alcohol related harm are experienced by some groups within the community, such as young people aged 10–24 years old. Rates of alcohol related hospital admissions and heavy drinking (more than 20 drinks on a single occasion) among young people have increased considerably over the last 10 years.<sup>xii</sup>

In addition to the impact on community safety and amenity generated by alcohol misuse, Victoria Police has identified alcohol as a driver of crime, particularly related to recidivist offending. A recent Australian Institute of Criminology study of police detainees found 30 per cent of them attributed their offending to alcohol, more than all other drugs combined.<sup>xiii</sup>

## 2. Vision

To strive towards a safe, secure and orderly society free from alcohol related crime, violence and harm.

## 3. Purpose

To articulate a policy framework for Victoria Police, which aims to coordinate the police response on issues of enforcement, harm reduction and prevention. The framework positions Victoria Police as a partner working with key stakeholders and the broader community on a long-term strategic focus for reducing alcohol harm.



## 4. Policy context

Together with the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation, Victoria Police has responsibility for law enforcement under the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* and the *Liquor Control Reform Regulations 2009*. This legislation combined with the *Road Safety Act 1986* and *Summary Offences Act 1966* provides a legislative framework within which Victoria Police works to minimise alcohol related harm.

A community wide approach as articulated in the Victorian whole of government strategy *Reducing the Toll* and the *National Drug Strategy 2010–2015* is required to address the levels of harm alcohol misuse generates.

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*Across the community, there is a need to assess policies on alcohol availability from many different perspectives, including public safety, health, planning, local government, tourism, and business regulation.  
(Reducing the Toll)*

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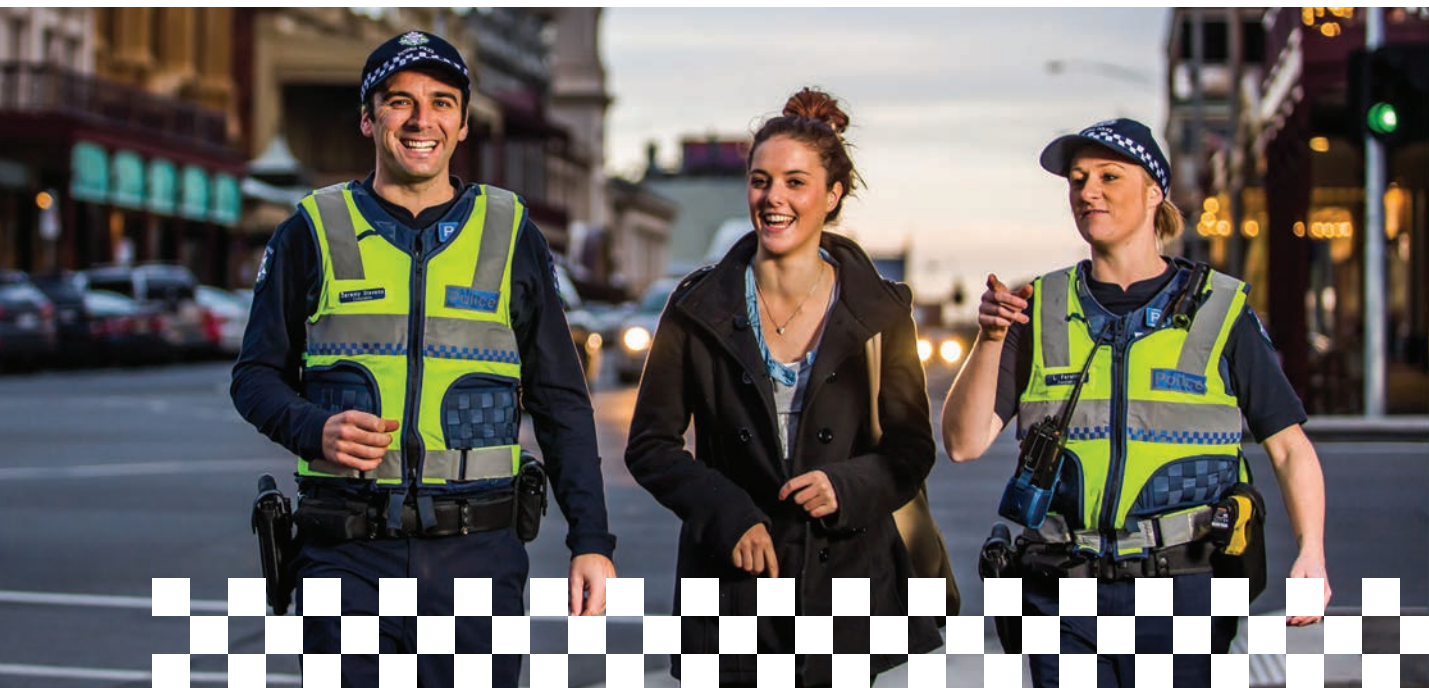
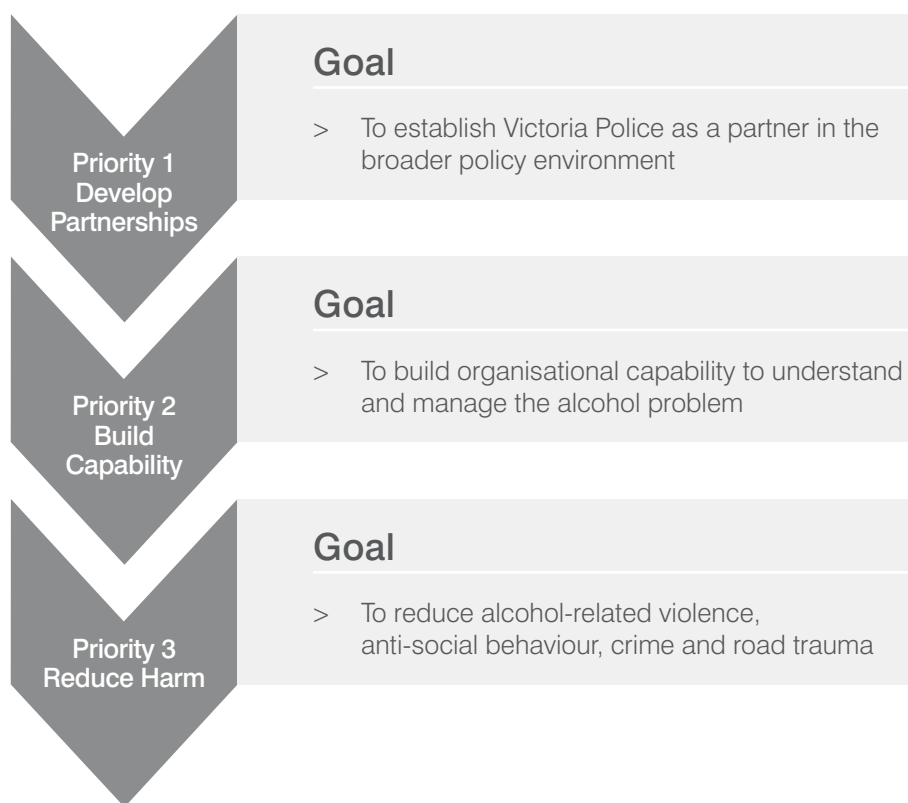
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*Alcohol abuse and misuse plays a role in many aspects of police work; as such, several other organisational strategies will contain complementary initiatives to the goals of this statement.*

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## Priority areas for action





## 5. Priority areas

Victoria Police will achieve this vision by developing a range of actions under each of the following priority areas:

### Develop partnerships

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*Alcohol forms an intrinsic part of many aspects of Australian culture, so any successful attempt to minimise alcohol related harm within our community will require a concerted and holistic approach in partnership with all stakeholders.*

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Aim: To establish Victoria Police as a partner in the broader policy environment

- > Ensure a whole of organisation approach is adopted in the management of alcohol related harm.
- > Position Victoria Police as an influential and active participant with key stakeholders in combating alcohol related harm including: industry, the community, all levels of government and non-government organisations.
- > Develop standardised approaches to preventing and responding to alcohol related harm.
- > Work with our partners and the community to enhance community ownership of alcohol related harm and to generate a healthy and safe culture around alcohol consumption.

### Build capability:

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*Through consolidation of our data sources and evidence base Victoria Police will better focus enforcement activities towards areas generating the most alcohol related harm in our community.*

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Aim: To build organisational capability to understand and manage the alcohol problem

- > Improve Victoria Police data capture capacity around alcohol related harm including the areas of family violence, public safety and poly-drug use.
- > Develop information sharing protocols with relevant agencies and organisations.
- > Build a strong evidence and intelligence base around alcohol related offending, victimisation and prosecution to inform enforcement responses and predict emerging issues.
- > Trial evidence-based approaches to develop the frontline response to alcohol related harm.

## Reduce harm:

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*Research consistently demonstrates that increased control over the supply of alcohol results in a reduction of the harms caused. Victoria Police will support responsible alcohol supply, while targeting those neglecting their legislative responsibilities.*

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Aim: To reduce alcohol related violence, anti-social behaviour, crime and road trauma

- > Increase knowledge and application of existing liquor licensing legislation across the organisation and identify areas for improvement.
- > Develop research partnerships to identify vulnerabilities and opportunities for improvement in reducing alcohol harm, based on international and national research.
- > Adopt a standardised position on enforcement tactics, submissions for legislative reform and prevention activities by implementing targeted strategic approaches, that are driven by the organisation-wide alcohol policy framework.
- > Support development of harm minimisation strategies, developed in partnership with other organisations and agencies targeting at-risk groups.



## 6. Outcomes

Victoria Police will develop a consistent and concentrated approach to ensure a safe, secure and orderly society, free from alcohol related crime, violence and harm.

With the successful implementation of this policy, and the supporting strategic approach, Victoria Police will achieve the following long-term outcomes:

- > A reduction in alcohol related harm in the Victorian community.
- > The alcohol framework is adopted and there is evidence of a standardised approach to reducing alcohol harm.
- > The community sees Victoria Police as an effective, responsive organisation keeping the community safe.
- > Partner agencies and stakeholders have a clear understanding of Victoria Police's role in reducing alcohol related harm.
- > Intelligence and data capture capabilities underpin activities and align with research priorities.
- > Effective responses are implemented that respond to, and prevent alcohol related violence, crime, public disorder and road trauma.
- > Effective partnerships with stakeholders are maintained and innovative solutions to prevent alcohol fuelled violence are identified and adopted.
- > Best practice approaches are identified and inform legislation reform, policy and procedures.
- > Victoria Police has a strong workforce capability around alcohol legislation and enforcement, and is considered an influential leader in the development of holistic approaches in reducing alcohol related harm.

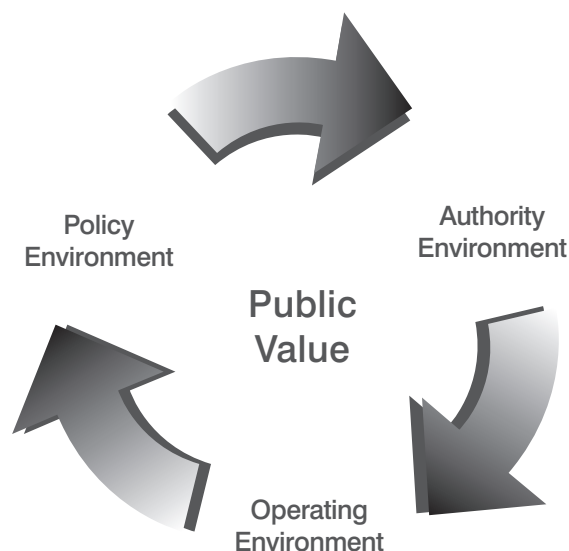
## 7. Governance and performance

Actions identified under each of the three priority areas will be implemented as part of a three-year strategic planning cycle. Implementation will be overseen by a Victoria Police Internal Alcohol Working Group.

## 8. Principles of practice and public value

These activities will be supported by a commitment to the principles of public value:

- > Service delivery will be equitable and sustainable, and consistent with evidence-based good practice.
- > Regulatory systems will be used as effective methods for reducing alcohol related harm.
- > Robust accountability, alignment with government policy and adherence to governance frameworks will guide activity and monitor performance.
- > A commitment to strategic partnerships.



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