

Preventing alcohol-related harm through the school community: priorities for action

Introduction

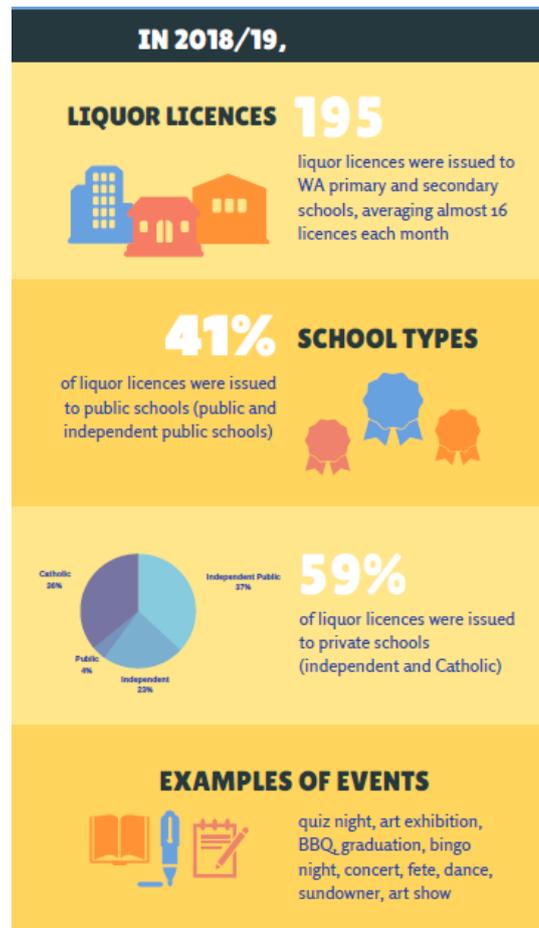
This document outlines evidence-informed and consensus-based priorities for the prevention of alcohol-related harm through Western Australian schools and broader communities. The priorities are intended to be used by health professionals, school staff, and those working within and with the school communities to help guide action to prevent alcohol-related harm among young people.

Background

Harm from alcohol is preventable and there is good evidence for what works to prevent harm. Drinking, including by young people, is guided by the broader culture. The way we advertise alcohol, how it's made available and how cheap it is are all factors that contribute to young people's drinking.

Schools are central parts of the community that reflect and can impact on broader community values, including around alcohol. Opportunities for schools to prevent alcohol-related harm among young people include education approaches and consideration of the way alcohol is portrayed in the school environment. For example, information from the WA Department for Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries showed that in the 2018/19 financial year, 195 liquor licences were issued to 107 WA primary and secondary schools for events such as school concerts and performances, fetes, quiz nights, family picnics and milestone celebrations. There was a fairly even split between licences issued to government and private schools, with around 41% issued to government schools and 59% issued to private schools.

It is well understood that schools cannot do everything and that the curriculum is already crowded, but ultimately, schools have a critical role and great opportunity to equip young Australians with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to lead healthy lives. This document outlines ways that schools can contribute to preventing harm from alcohol.



Development of the priorities

This list of priorities for action on alcohol through school communities was developed by the PHAIWA Alcohol Programs Team in consultation with a wide range of organisations that work in or with school communities and organisations and individuals that work to prevent harm from alcohol. The priorities are based on and informed by the best available evidence. The initial priorities were developed based on a desktop review of the literature, key guiding strategies and existing policies. They were then refined through consultations with public health organisations, parent associations, child advocates, educational associations, peak bodies, government departments, researchers, and school staff.

Purpose and intended use

We hope these priorities are used to help guide action on alcohol within school communities that are interested in addressing harm from alcohol. School communities and organisations that work with school communities are welcome to refer to this list of priorities as a set of evidence-informed recommendations for further action on alcohol through WA schools.

The priorities are intended to be a comprehensive set of actions and not necessarily a list of gaps in action on alcohol; therefore, some priorities are already being actioned by various organisations, individuals and school communities. The priorities recognise action on alcohol in the broader community, and aim to add value and extend these into the school community.

Priorities for action to prevent alcohol-related harm through the school community

Continue support for comprehensive alcohol and other drug education programs

- Encourage a whole-of-school approach to alcohol and other drug (AOD) education.
- Promote the use of well-supported, evidence-based and evidence-informed AOD education across the school curriculum for primary and secondary students. Evidence-based education should include a supporting parent component and health literacy education.
- Provide schools with a list of measures and initiatives that have been found to be ineffective (e.g. one-off education sessions with guest speakers, including past AOD users, and education programs designed by the alcohol and related industries).
- Encourage education in secondary schools about the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
- Strengthen teachers' capacity to teach health literacy, including by encouraging the inclusion of AOD education as part of teacher education by tertiary institutions.

Develop clear and transparent alcohol policies that contribute to a supportive school culture

- Encourage departmental and association policies and guidelines that prevent the use of alcohol at school events, particularly those that children and young people attend, and through fundraisers.

Encourage schools to work towards being alcohol-free environments

- Ensure school principals are well-equipped and informed to make decisions on the availability of alcohol at school events, particularly those that children and young people attend, including school fetes, music concerts and performances, junior sports, and milestone celebrations.
- Encourage school communities to use healthier alternatives to alcohol as prizes for school raffles or at fundraisers.
- Discourage the provision of alcohol as gifts for teachers and other school staff.
- Reduce the availability of alcohol at schools, including for all staff.
- Encourage school policies and/or guidelines that prevent the use and promotion of alcohol in association with school activities, supported by appropriate information for parents.
- Encourage school communities to seek support from resources and services available to schools, including through the School Drug Education and Road Aware Program, to develop clear and transparent alcohol policies and plans that contribute to a supportive school culture.

Promote the Alcohol.Think Again and other relevant AOD public education campaigns through the school community

- Promote the Alcohol.Think Again *Parents, Young People and Alcohol* campaign and associated resources through schools, including to principals, through newsletters, at events, and on notice boards to reinforce the role of parents in young people's drinking.
- Raise awareness among school principals and P&Cs of the Alcohol.Think Again *Parents, Young People and Alcohol* campaign, the reasons behind it, what school communities can do to support the campaign and broader action on alcohol, their role, and how to talk to parents about alcohol.
- Raise awareness of secondary supply laws among school communities, particularly around Leavers' celebrations.
- Engage support from other Mental Health Commission-funded community and school community services to provide health information to parents around alcohol and other drugs.

Continue support for further research to identify the extent and need for alcohol education in schools

- Identify the availability and uptake of AOD and resilience education for WA schools; there is potential to conduct a pilot survey in a smaller region.
- Support intervention research into effective parental programs for reducing young people's AOD use through the school setting.
- Investigate opportunities to limit liquor licences issued to WA schools and school events.