

15 December 2016

To whom it may concern

I write to provide a submission from Our Watch to Victoria's review of the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* (the Act).

Established in 2013 by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments, Our Watch is an independent, not for profit organisation that now has seven members: the Commonwealth, Victorian, South Australian, Tasmanian, Queensland, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory Governments.

Our Watch works to drive nation-wide change in the social norms, structures, attitudes and practices that underpin and support violence against women and their children.

Evidence shows that it is gender inequality that is the fundamental, underlying driver of gendered violence, hence it is advancing gender equality that is the key focus of our work at Our Watch. However, we also know that the harmful use of alcohol is one of a range of reinforcing factors that can interact with gendered social norms, structures and practices to 'trigger' particular incidents of such violence, or to increase its probability, frequency or severity. For this reason Our Watch encourages and supports initiatives that aim to reduce harmful alcohol use – particularly where these initiatives tackle the intersection of harmful social norms relating to both alcohol *and* gender. As one component of such a holistic and intersectional approach, improvements to regulations that govern the price, promotion and availability of alcohol are likely to have a considerable impact in helping to reduce violence against women.

This is the approach outlined in *Change the Story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, developed by Our Watch, in partnership with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) in 2015. This submission draws directly on the analysis contained in the framework.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Victorian Government on the wide range of policies programs and reforms that can contribute to the prevention of violence against women.

Yours sincerely,

**Mary Barry**

CEO



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## OUR WATCH

# SUBMISSION TO THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S REVIEW OF THE *LIQUOR CONTROL REFORM ACT 1998*

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## About Our Watch

Established in 2013 by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments, Our Watch is an independent, not for profit organisation that now has seven members: the Commonwealth, Victorian, South Australian, Tasmanian, Queensland, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory Governments.<sup>1</sup> Our vision is shared with the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan), namely an Australian community free from violence against women and their children.

The specific mandate of Our Watch is to focus on the *prevention* of violence against women and their children. We aim to provide leadership at national, state, regional and local levels to drive change in the social norms, structures, attitudes and practices that underpin and support violence against women and their children. Our Watch has four key areas of work:

1. Design and deliver public campaigns that engage and educate individuals and the community
2. Promote a sustained and constructive public conversation
3. Enable organisations, networks and communities to effect change
4. Influence public policy, systems and institutions.

## About this submission

Our Watch's organisational position, informed by the international evidence on this issue, is that advancing gender equality is fundamental to the prevention of violence against women. We are therefore encouraged by the Victorian Government's strong and ongoing commitment to both these goals. This is evidenced by the recent release of the *Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, and the many initiatives being undertaken to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence – particularly those relating to the *prevention* of this violence (and other forms of violence against women).

Our Watch strongly opposes any simplistic suggestion that alcohol 'causes' violence against women, both because this is contrary to the evidence, and because such a position can inadvertently have the effect of excusing such violence, further adding to a culture in which the condoning of violence against women is already common.

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<sup>1</sup> Other States and Territories have been invited to join as members.

However, Our Watch does specifically acknowledge the relevance of harmful alcohol use to a full and nuanced understanding of this complex social problem, and therefore, the potential contribution that effective alcohol regulation can make to the overall prevention effort.

This submission outlines our position on this issue. It draws in particular on *Change the Story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, developed by Our Watch, in partnership with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), and launched in November 2015.

*Change the Story* was developed following a significant review of the international evidence on what drives and contributes to the current prevalence of violence against women. It was also informed by an extensive, national consultation process, involving over 400 diverse stakeholders from across civil society and all levels of government, enabling the framework to draw on existing practice-based knowledge and expertise as well as available research. Based on this evidence, the framework presents an explanatory model of violence against women, and a coherent conceptual approach to its prevention – one that prescribes actions that are explicitly aligned with, and designed to address the underlying causes and drivers of violence, and the range of reinforcing factors that intersect with these – of which the weakening of pro-social behavior caused by the harmful use of alcohol is one.

This submission is based on the evidence that informs and underpins *Change the Story*, and provides a brief summary of the analysis and approached outlined there, as it is particularly relevant to the current review of the *Liquor Control Reform Act (LCRA)*. Full references to this literature, research and other evidence can be found in the framework itself, and the two accompanying 'Framework Foundations' papers, all of which are available on the Our Watch website: [http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-\(1\)/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-(1)/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework)

## Review Terms of Reference

Our Watch also notes that the first object of the LCRA is to contribute to minimising harm arising from the misuse and abuse of alcohol, including by:

- providing adequate controls over the supply and consumption of liquor
- ensuring as far as practicable that the supply of liquor contributes to, and does not detract from, the amenity of community life
- restricting the supply of certain alcoholic products
- encouraging a culture of responsible consumption of alcohol and reducing risky drinking of alcohol and its impact on the community.

Our Watch is pleased to see that one of the aims of the Review is to **'assess the effectiveness of the Act's harm minimisation measures, including the degree to which they can play a part in**

**minimising the incidence of family violence**', as recommended by the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence. Our Watch notes that the review intends to consult with stakeholders who have **'expertise in the inter-relationship between family violence and alcohol use'**. We consider ourselves to be one such organisation, and trust that this expertise is recognised by the reviewers.<sup>2</sup>

## Our Watch submission

### Gender inequality as the underlying driver of violence against women

Our Watch's organisational position, informed by the international evidence on this issue, is that gender inequality is the fundamental and underlying driver of violence against women.

More specifically, as *Change the Story* demonstrates, there are particular expressions or manifestations of gender inequality that are most consistently associated with higher levels of violence against women. These are referred to in *Change the Story* as the 'gendered drivers' of violence against women. A range of international evidence finds that these gendered drivers arise from unequal and discriminatory institutional, social and economic structures, social and cultural norms, and organisational, community, family and relationship practices. Together, these structures, norms and practices create environments in which women and men are not considered equal, and violence against women is tolerated and even condoned. The gendered drivers of violence against women outlined in the framework are as follows:

- 1) Condoning of violence against women
- 2) Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships
- 3) Rigid gender roles and identities
- 4) Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women

### Alcohol does not 'cause' violence against women

Our Watch strongly opposes any simplistic suggestion that there is a simple or inevitable causative link between alcohol and violence against women, because this is contrary to the evidence.

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<sup>2</sup> Although it should be noted that our organisational mandate is to focus on 'violence against women' rather than 'family violence', an overlapping but slightly different scope.

As *Change the Story* notes, pointing to alcohol as a ‘cause’ of violence against women is an example of the kind of problematic explanations that have been put forward in the past, which focused on single psychological or behavioural factors. As the framework states:

‘While such individual level factors may well be relevant, we need to explain why most men to whom they apply are *not* violent, and why other men not exposed to any of these factors *are* violent. We also need to explain why such factors seem relevant in some cases, contexts or countries, but not others’ (page 21)

Our Watch is also critical of an approach to the issue of violence against women that considers the role of alcohol in isolation. Because it lacks a gendered analysis, such an approach cannot explain the highly gendered patterns of violence perpetration and victimisation. Rather than looking at alcohol as a factor in isolation, we need to understand it in relation to social norms and practices that condone or support violence against women, in particular those relating to masculinity and men's peer group behaviour.

Furthermore, pointing to alcohol as a ‘cause’ of violence can inadvertently have the effect of excusing such violence, further adding to a culture in which the condoning of violence against women is already common – and is itself recognised as a significant *driver* of such violence. As *Change the story* notes, this driver comprises social norms, structures and practices that:

- **Excuse violence** by attributing it to external factors, or proposing that men cannot be held fully responsible for violent behavior, with alcohol use one such common factor; or
- **Shift blame for the violence** from the perpetrator to the victim. Again, alcohol is commonly used in such arguments, reflected in the finding that one in five Australians believes that if a woman is raped while drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible, and one in ten believes that domestic violence can be excused if a women is affected by alcohol.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Webster, K., Pennay, P., Bricknall, R., Diemer, K., Flood, M., Powell, A., Politoff, V. and Ward, A. (2014) *Australians’ attitudes to violence against women: Full technical report, Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/2013-national-community-attitudes-towards-violence-against-women-survey>

## Harmful use of alcohol *can* be a reinforcing factor for violence against women

While cautioning against arguments that alcohol ‘causes’ violence against women, Our Watch *does* specifically acknowledge the relevance of harmful alcohol use to a full and nuanced understanding of this complex social problem.

Specifically, evidence suggests that the weakening of pro-social behaviour that can result from the harmful use of alcohol is a significant reinforcing factor for violence against women. That is, it is one of a number of factors that can interact with the underlying gendered drivers to ‘trigger’ particular incidents of such violence, or to increase its probability, frequency or severity.

*As Change the story* explains:

‘[This] group of factors has been shown, in some cases, to increase the likelihood of violence against women because they compromise the ways in which people might otherwise or normally act to uphold gender equality and non-violence. This group includes any factor that might erode or weaken pro-social behaviour, heighten individualistic tendencies or reduce concern for others and the consequences of actions in the context of gendered socialisation and power imbalances.

Alcohol is a feature in a disproportionate number of police call-outs to family violence, and is correlated with a higher number of, and more severe, incidents of violence against women. Alcohol does not itself drive violence against women; not all people who drink are violent, and many people who do not drink are violent. However, the contribution of alcohol to increased perpetration is significant in the context of social norms and practices that condone or support violence against women, in particular those relating to masculinity and masculine peer group behavior.

Gender socialisation and identities are also reflected in the ways in which alcohol is consumed, and in the social norms relating to alcohol, for example, in drinking cultures that emphasise male conquest and aggression, as well as in the ways individual men and women tend to behave under the influence of alcohol. This suggests **it is the interaction between social norms relating to alcohol, and social norms relating to gender, that can increase the likelihood, frequency or severity of violence against women**, not just the consumption of alcohol itself’ (page 27).

## Reducing harmful alcohol use can contribute to the overall violence prevention effort

The above analysis of the role that alcohol plays as a reinforcing factor for violence against women suggests a need for strategies that address the intersection between alcohol use and social norms relating to both violence and gender. Our Watch suggests that such strategies will not only be

extremely valuable in their own right, but can also help create a more supportive environment for other prevention activity.

In addition to its focus on taking action to tackle the gendered drivers of violence against women, *Change the story* outlines a number of specific actions that are designed to address those factors that reinforce, contribute to, or exacerbate such violence. These include:

- **Address the intersections between social norms relating to alcohol and gender.** This involves challenging drinking cultures that emphasise male conquest and aggression and social norms and attitudes that position men's drinking as an excuse for violence, or women's drinking as a form of victim blaming.
- **Improve the regulation of alcohol** by considering violence against women in policy debates about the promotion and physical and economic availability of alcohol (page 34).

In line with *Change the Story*, Our Watch therefore encourages and supports initiatives that aim to reduce harmful alcohol use – particularly where these initiatives tackle the intersection of harmful social norms relating to both alcohol *and* gender. As one component of such a holistic and intersectional approach, improvements to regulations that govern the price, promotion and availability of alcohol are likely to have a considerable impact in helping to reduce violence against women.

### **Need to align violence prevention and alcohol harm minimization efforts**

As *Change the story* states, harm minimization strategies should draw on and be informed by specialist violence prevention and gender equality expertise. The framework advocates establishing or strengthening partnerships between those specifically working on preventing violence against women, and those working on other social policy issues (including alcohol harm minimization), to enable the kind of cross-learning and capacity building that will help achieve shared or complementary outcomes. It suggests in particular that such partnerships should ensure that work on other social policy issues incorporates appropriate gender analysis.

## **Conclusion**

Given the evidence that shows alcohol is a feature in a disproportionate number of police call-outs to family violence, and is correlated with a higher number of, and more severe, incidents of violence against women, it appears that the LCRA is not currently meeting this aspect of its harm minimization objectives. Our Watch therefore urges the Victorian Government to prioritise harm minimization concerns in the current Review and to carefully consider any improvements to the regulation of alcohol in Victoria that have the potential to minimize alcohol-related harm.

Furthermore Our Watch suggests that there is a need for the Victorian Government to pay greater attention to how it can ensure that the LCRA meets those aspects of its primary objective that refer to:



- ensuring as far as practicable that the supply of liquor contributes to, and does not detract from, the amenity of community life; and
- encouraging a culture of responsible consumption of alcohol and reducing risky drinking of alcohol and its impact on the community.

Based on the evidence about the role that alcohol plays in the current extremely high prevalence of violence against women, it is Our Watch's position that in order to promote such a culture of 'responsible consumption' and reduce 'risky drinking' and its impacts, the government specifically needs to include in its consideration strategies that not only improve the regulation of alcohol but that also challenge harmful male drinking cultures.

Finally invites the Victorian Government to draw on the *Change the Story* framework to inform the Review of the LCRA. *Change the Story* provides an established evidence base on the relationship between gender inequality and violence against women, and includes careful consideration of the evidence on the role that harmful alcohol use plays in reinforcing and contributing to this serious problem. It is this evidence that informs Our Watch's position in response to this Review – namely that:

1. improving and strengthening regulations that govern the price, promotion and availability of alcohol are actions that are likely to have a considerable impact in helping to reduce violence against women; and
2. measures to reduce alcohol related harm must not be undertaken in isolation from population-wide violence prevention measures. Rather they should be part of a broader social change agenda – a gender transformative national approach to preventing violence against women. Such an approach involves challenging and changing deeply entrenched social and cultural norms about both gender and alcohol consumption, and the intersections between the two.

Our Watch looks forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Victorian Government on this and other initiatives that can contribute to the prevention of violence against women and their children.