

Reducing Harm

from Alcohol and
other Drugs Policy

Acknowledgement of Country
Maribyrnong City Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung Bunurong Peoples of the Kulin Nation and pays its respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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Introduction

Local governments play an important role in balancing the contribution that licensed premises make to the vitality of local areas, with management of the social, economic and health impacts of alcohol and other drug use in local communities.

The responsibilities of Council in regards to the management of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) is defined within State legislation, including the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and the *Victorian Local Government Act 2020*, the *Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* (in relation to licensed premises) and the *Tobacco Act 1987*.

Maribyrnong City Council has a strong history of taking action on the harm caused by the use of AOD, beginning with its first strategic policy response in 1998.

By implementing the Reducing Harm from Alcohol and Other Drugs Policy (the Policy), Council contributes to the work of other levels of government and local stakeholders to reduce the supply, demand and harm of alcohol and other drugs.

Further work and strong partnerships between federal, state and local governments, Victoria Police, community health providers, drug and alcohol service providers, research institutes, health promotion agencies, the education sector, sporting clubs, the hospitality sector and the community will be required to see positive change in this area.



Term	Definition
Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD)	A term encompassing alcohol and various substances, both legal and illegal.
Harm reduction	Harm reduction refers to programs and policies that are aimed at reducing harm from drugs, but not drug use.
Intersectionality	Intersectionality is the concept that individual social identities (like race, gender, and class) overlap and influence experiences of privilege and oppression in complex ways.
Health inequality	Differences in health status and access to healthcare among different population groups, often influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors.
Equity	The principle of fairness and justice in which resources, opportunities, and benefits are distributed to individuals or groups based on their specific needs and circumstances to achieve equality of outcomes.
Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)	Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is the legislated peak body for providing support to councils and councillors in Victoria.
Public intoxication	Being visibly impaired by alcohol and/or other drugs in a public place.
Pill testing	Pill testing is a harm reduction strategy that allows people who are already in possession of drugs to test them at a facility or booth.

Term	Definition
Drug law reform	Drug policy reform is where the government makes changes to specific drug laws that may include decriminalisation of specific drugs or changes to legislation.
Drug decriminalisation	Removing criminal penalties for the possession of small quantities of drugs for personal use, with a focus on public health and harm reduction rather than punishment.
Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA)	Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) is training that is compulsory in Victoria, for anyone serving alcohol under General, On premises, Late Night and Packaged Liquor licences.
Supervised injecting Facility (SIF)	A dedicated space where illicit drugs can be used under the supervision of health care professionals to prevent fatal overdoses whilst also connecting people with other health and support services.
Social determinants of health	Social, economic, and environmental conditions and factors, such as income, education, employment, housing, and access to healthcare, that significantly influence an individual's or a community's overall health and well-being.
Vaping devices/ E-cigarettes	Vaping devices/E-cigarettes are battery-operated devices that people use to inhale an aerosol, which typically contains nicotine (though not always), flavourings, and other chemicals.

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Purpose

The purpose of the Reducing Harm from Alcohol and Other Drugs Policy is to prevent and minimise AOD-related harm in the City of Maribyrnong community.

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Scope

The Policy applies to all Council departments, relevant to the principles and policy commitments detailed in the policy section.

Council has a limited role in regulating alcohol through Maribyrnong's Licenced Premises Policy and the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*.

Under Section 40 of the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*, Council can object to the granting, relocation or variation of a packaged liquor licence or late night (packaged liquor) licence, if it would be conducive to or encourage harm. However, Council is reliant on the Victorian Liquor Commission referring Liquor License applications currently with them for Council comment and it is rare that this occurs.

Maribyrnong's Licenced Premises Policy is part of the Maribyrnong Planning Scheme at Clause 22.08.

This policy has a focus on assessing amenity impacts taking into account existing amenity conditions and the role of licensed premises in the city's activity centres.

This Policy takes into account previous changes to State and Federal policies and legislation relation to AOD including:

- *The Victorian Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness Act* introduced in 2021.

- The establishment of an ongoing Medically Supervised Injecting Room in Richmond in Melbourne following a two year trial of the facility.
- Changes to State and Federal drug laws to allow the cultivation and use of medicinal cannabis in Australia.

This Policy also considers other areas of AOD harm minimisation reform including:

- Pill testing for festivals, nightclubs and dance parties.
- The further expansion of safe injecting facilities in metropolitan Melbourne and across Victoria.
- Drug law reform.

Substances within scope of the Policy include:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco and E-cigarettes
- Prescription drugs including medicinal cannabis
- Illicit drugs including heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, cannabis, GHB, hallucinogens and synthetic drugs.





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Background

Council's approach to managing the impacts of AOD-related harms is based on a social justice and harm reduction approach. This approach aligns with the Council Plan 2021-2025, which incorporates the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Reducing AOD-related harms is a key municipal public health and wellbeing priority for Council.

The *Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021* is a recent legislative change which has had an impact on public health responses to public intoxication in Victoria.

The Act has removed public drunkenness as an offence in Victoria which came into effect on 7 November 2023.

In response to the changing legislation, and the review and update of the Maribyrnong Social Justice Framework 2023-2033, Council has updated the Policy to ensure it provides a foundation for Council's commitment and actions to protect human rights, promote social justice and health and wellbeing in the City of Maribyrnong.





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Policy

Council is committed to social justice and equity for all and has a vital role to play as a leader, partner, advocate and planner in developing and implementing strategies to protect and promote health, now and into the future.

Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan has a focus area dedicated to promote a harm reduction approach to AOD use in the City.

Existing health inequalities in our community mean that some groups may experience poorer health outcomes based on their identity and experiences.

When developing strategies to minimise AOD- related harms, Council has committed to taking an intersectional approach. This approach considers the unique needs and challenges of priority communities, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people experiencing homelessness, unemployment, mental illnesses, young people, people living with a disability, LGBTIQ+ communities and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

As the level of government closest to the community, Councils have a mandate to create healthy, safe and inclusive environments.

The harm reduction approach to managing the impacts of AOD-related harm is based on the social determinants of health. These determinants of health include gender, income and social status, education, physical environment, social support networks and access to health services (World Health Organisation 2013).





Policy commitments

Council is committed to the principles of advocacy, partnership, and research throughout the life of this policy, with the aim of reducing AOD-related harm.

These principles and associated commitments are guided by evidence and support the advocacy, partnering and research role that local government is best placed to play in addressing harm caused by AOD.

Advocacy

The services and programs that address AOD misuse are funded and delivered by the Federal, State and community based sectors.

To maintain and improve programs, it is crucial that Council and local stakeholders adopt a proactive advocacy role to ensure local needs are met. Advocacy opportunities include:

- Participate in regional advocacy efforts for improved AOD service coverage in the Western Metropolitan Region.
- Advocate for AOD harm reduction programs, particularly for parents, children and young people. This includes specific programs for alcohol, e-cigarettes, illicit and prescription drugs.
- Advocate for the development of AOD alternative programs and activities, particularly for at risk groups in the community.
- Advocate for the introduction of pill testing for festivals, nightclubs and dance parties across Victoria.
- Advocate to the State government for sustained investment in assertive outreach programs and responsive health services, including supervised injecting facilities.
- Advocate for increased government investment in research on the health and wellbeing impacts of AOD including research into family violence, and mental and physical health impacts.
- Continue to assess referred packaged liquor licenses, especially those linked to late-night operations, to identify any that might promote AOD-related harm.
- Under the Maribyrnong's Licensed Premises Policy, continue to assess amenity impacts taking into account existing amenity conditions and the role of licensed premises in the city's activity centres using an intersectional approach.
- Actively oppose liquor license applications in neighbouring municipalities if they have a negative impact on the well-being and safety of City of Maribyrnong residents.
- Discourage the placement of AOD promotional material in Council-owned facilities or on Council's websites.



Partnerships

Stakeholders and all levels of government are working towards responding to AOD-related harms. Council will strengthen its current partnerships, and work to build new partnerships through the following:

- Council will provide training to community facing teams, to support staff who may interact with community members affected by AOD or seeking support.
- Participate in the Western Metropolitan Region AOD network, the MAV AOD Issues Forum, the northern and north-western region health and wellbeing planner's network, community safety forums in partnership with Victoria Police and other multidisciplinary steering groups to support prevention efforts.
- Partner with festivals to promote responsible alcohol service, emphasising alternative food and non- alcoholic drink options, while also highlighting the health benefits of moderation or abstention from alcohol.
- Partner with community, businesses and festival organisations to deliver alcohol-free events.
- Seek grants in partnership with local services and neighbouring municipalities to strength collaborative harm reduction approaches to AOD.
- Support the provision of Responsible Service of Alcohol training for organisations such as sporting clubs, bars and clubs.
- Collaborate with community health organisations to advocate for local AOD-related harm reduction initiatives, such as the Good Sports Program.
- Prioritise comprehensive cultural safety training for staff with localised input from and delivery by Community Controlled Organisations.
- Work with any venues located on Council-owned land to ensure the continued implementation of AOD harm reduction measures are included in lease and contractual documentation.



Research

Council has an important role in undertaking research and providing data and information about prevention, harm, services and programs. Council will work to strengthen the following:

- Research and evaluate evidence-based information that will assist in responding to AOD- related harms, using an intersectional lens and disseminate to internal and external stakeholders.
- Develop factsheets on AOD-related harm that will be published on Council's website, and apply an intersectional lens to data collection and analysis.
- Monitor local implications of State Government legislation changes such as lock out laws, medicinal cannabis and the regulation of e-cigarettes.
- Engage with community-based organisations, such as food relief services and housing agencies, to gather insights into emerging trends and issues related to substance use, leveraging community-level data for informed decision-making.



Policy statement

The Policy supports Council in taking a public health and harm reduction approach to alcohol and other drugs within the City of Maribyrnong. It take a collaborative and local approach to the principles of advocacy, partnership and research.

The Policy guides and outlines the important role of local government in addressing and preventing AOD- related harm.

Key stakeholders

Council will work collaboratively and contribute to the work of all levels of government, local organisations, businesses and stakeholders to reduce the AOD- related harms.

Council will also work alongside a range of stakeholders to drive positive change across the municipality and continue to seek out new partnerships. Our partners in this work include:

- Commonwealth, State and other local governments
- Victoria Police
- Community Health
- Drug and alcohol services
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Research institutions
- Health promotion agencies
- Education
- Sporting clubs and associations
- Hospitality sector.

Consultation

- Research and literature review
- Community engagement:
 - Council department engagement
 - Stakeholder engagement
 - Community engagement.

Implementation and monitoring

The monitoring and reporting of the Policy is supported by Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Policy owner

Manager Community Services and Social Infrastructure Planning.

Directorate

Community Services.

Review of policy

The Policy is due to be reviewed by June 2028. However, Council will undertake an earlier review of this Policy in response to any changes to Commonwealth and State AOD-related legislation and/or policies, or changing Council priorities.

References

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Gender Equality Act 2020

Liquor Control Reform Act 1998

Local Government Act 2020

Maribyrnong Planning Scheme 22.08 Licenced Premises Policy

Maribyrnong City Council Plan 2021-2025

Maribyrnong Social Justice Framework 2023-2033

Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008

Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021.

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