

Personal Submission

Inquiry into Alcohol and Other Drugs

Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sports

Anonymous submission

Lived Experience

21st September 2024

Who am I

I want to remain anonymous because I work in the preventing harm from alcohol and other drug not for profit space, and I want you to hear my story from me and not as a person who works in this space.

Alcohol has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember, and it is easier to describe my journey with alcohol in dot points, taking a life cycle approach. Perhaps read this thinking about what a child sees and feels, then as a young woman, to finally an adult, now caring for their parents.

I am the daughter of two parents with substance use issues. I was a child subjected to the harms of alcohol; I was a young woman subjected to the harms of alcohol and now I am an adult who has continued to have to deal with the ramifications of alcohol in my personal life and in the community in which I live, work and play.

Every point listed below has had alcohol feature in all situations of my life.

I was a:

- Child who witnessed violence, uncertainty, fear, loss, loneliness, who struggled to know what family should be like.
- Child who had suffered two near misses of sexual assault at barbecues of strangers, as her parents were outside drinking with friends.
- Child whose parents regularly drove whilst drunk with my brother and I in the car.
- Child who repeatedly was yelled at or was told on the flip side how intelligent I was and I could go to the best university in the world.
- Child who waited for her dad to come home at night from his drinking as her mum wasn't home as was at night shift.
- Child whose dad punched her in the side of the head when she pleaded for him to stop driving so irrationally, then later that night was in the house when he tried to take his own life.
- Teenager ashamed to bring friends home as her mother could be drunk and crawling all over the floor.
- Teenager who came home one morning to find her mother's mattress burning in the neighbour's empty block of land as she fell asleep drunk with a cigarette in her hand.
- Teenager whose mum would go to the pub and not come home till the next day.
- Teenager whose mum disappeared to rehab twice with no explanation.
- Teenager with her licence picking up her intoxicated father from the side of the road as he staggered home from the RSL.
- Teenager who couldn't wait to leave home and did when she was 16 and just finishing high school.
- Young woman who never did go to the best university in the world (wherever that was meant to be) became pregnant at the age of 19 and whose mother told her she had to marry the father of her child, who later abused her and she had to flee with her two toddler boys in her early 20's.
- Young woman whose brave mother stopped drinking alcohol because she was told she will die and never see her grandson grow up.
- Young woman who struggled and still struggles to have the wonderful relationship with her mother that she sees other people have and hates herself for it.

I am a:

- Wife to her second husband, a wonderful man whose own father suffered from alcohol related brain damage and spent his final years in a locked dementia section of an aged care home and see some of the other issues we had with him:
 - a. He had severe short term memory loss
 - b. He would make abusive phone calls and leave messages in the middle of the night with no memory of having done that
 - c. He thought people were breaking into his house
 - d. He would bash a garbage can near his neighbor's house at night because their screen door woke him up
 - e. He had alcohol delivered to his door constantly and was able to sign for it intoxicated.
 - f. He repeatedly drove drunk and no amount of calls to the Police resulted in him being pulled over.
 - g. After he passed away, we cleaned out his house of old empty alcohol bottles stored everywhere.

I am an:

- Adult women caring for older parents, elderly father still alive and who until recently consumed at least 15 standard drinks every day from 5 pm.
- Adult woman continuing to witness his verbal and sometimes physical abuse to her elderly mother.
- Adult woman who received that phone call to say her father has fallen whilst drunk and broken his hip.
- Adult woman's whose injured father at 80 years of age finally stops drinking alcohol but family relationships will remain fractured.
- Adult woman whose youngest child received alcohol adverts on his 18th birthday on Instagram.
- Adult woman gently guiding her children to the risks of alcohol while their friends are starting their own journeys with it, one recently told by her psychologist she is consuming at dangerous levels.
- Adult woman whose daughter's friend is a heavy consumer of alcohol and a mother of two young children, recently diagnosed with brain tumours.
- Adult woman whose second son was given alcohol by a parent while he was underage.

Why do you want to make this submission?

I want to make this submission because my story is the story of so many others, whose lives have been ruined, changed, or torn apart by alcohol. In my lifetime, I want to see significant investment in enabling our communities to make their lives better and free from alcohol-related harm. I want to see alcohol fading from our culture and not be the core of who we are in Australia.

I want our communities to have choices and not have alcohol adverts prolifically entering our social feeds like the industry thinks they have a right to do.

The alcohol industry does not care for us. It only cares about its bottom line. Alcohol is too accessible and too cheap. This has got to stop.

Alcohol causes cancer. Alcohol is linked to family and sexual violence, assaults, road trauma and death. Alcohol ruins people's opportunity to become the best they can be. Alcohol destroys children's lives and affects their ability to have normal, trusting relationships as adults.

Alcohol costs our government billions of dollars in terms of productivity, services, treatment and mental health, hospital treatment and ongoing recovery from injury, and lives lost.

What change do you want to see in Australia?

- More money for evidence-informed, community-led, co-designed, place-based prevention and evaluation, with longer funding terms, focusing on priority populations.
- More money for evidence-based national alcohol education campaigns targeting parents or adults who supply alcohol to other people's kids, including why we have secondary supply legislation.
- Minimum unit pricing- as we know, this works.
- No alcohol advertising for young people on any channel, including television and sport.
- Tightened legislation around home delivery and delivery times, the provision to people who are intoxicated and receiving the delivery.
- Money for services to support families of young children including parenting programs that we know work.
- Evidence-based compulsory alcohol education in all schools (public and private) including comprehensive training of teachers.
- Easier access to services and knowing how to find them, funding for innovative online digital platforms that help people find the information they need to seek help and information.

My submission aligns to the following Terms of Reference for this enquiry:

- a) Assess whether current services across the alcohol and other drugs sector is delivering equity for all Australians, value for money, and the best outcomes for individuals, their families, and society;
- b) Examine the effectiveness of current programs and initiatives across all jurisdictions to improve prevention and reduction of alcohol and other drug-related health, social and economic harms, including in relation to identified priority populations and ensuring equity of access for all Australians to relevant treatment and prevention services;
- c) Examine how sectors beyond health, including for example education, employment, justice, social services and housing can contribute to prevention, early intervention, recovery and reduction of alcohol and other drug-related harms in Australia.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I have not provided evidence for my recommendations, as others will, as I am sure many of us are on the same page. I just wanted to bring my story to the table.