

Submission to the House Standing Committee of Family, Community, Housing and Youth on the Inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians**Executive Summary**

Gold Coast City is the sixth largest city in Australia and one of its premier tourist destinations. The city has a permanent resident population of approximately 500,000 people and is one of the fastest growing local government areas in Australia. In addition to its residential population, the city attracts an average of 80,000 domestic and international visitors each day.

The number of young people who reside on the Gold Coast is growing with ABS Statistics indicating that the population aged 12–24 years in Gold Coast City increased by 60% from 48,353 in 1991 to 77,401 in 2006. Over the next 13 years, the number of young people between the ages of 10–24 years is projected to increase by almost 22,000.

Council recognises that the factors leading to an increase in crime and violence involving young people (either as victims, offenders or bystanders) are varied and complex. As a local government authority, Council is not qualified to comment on all of these factors. This submission is therefore limited to issues which are directly or indirectly managed by Council, however, these do not occur in isolation and are likely to relate to other individual, social, cultural and community trends raised by other submitters.

The Gold Coast is often perceived as being 'glitzy' or extremely affluent however behind this image, the city is experiencing significant social problems. Existing social issues, coupled with high current and forecasted population growth, contribute to present enormous challenges for Federal, State and Local governments. Council believes that these are all related to the increase in violence experienced by the community, including young people.

A significant proportion of young people in Gold Coast City are increasingly exposed to harms relating to antisocial behaviour and violence. For example, there are strong links between violence and the consumption of alcohol. Currently, the city has approximately 1,200 licensed premises, including 28 late-trading premises (which are approved to operate until 5am). Surfers Paradise contains the highest concentration of licensed premises in Queensland. Council research suggests that young people aged between 18-24 years are most affected by alcohol related violence.

High rates of population growth have placed pressure upon the planning, provision and management of social infrastructure. There are major short falls in community facilities and services across the city, particularly in the north, where there is a high need for community facilities, affordable housing, sport and recreation facilities, community development services, public transport services, and individual and family support services. The lack of social facilities and services, increases young people's vulnerability to crime and violence.

Homelessness is also a significant issue for young people in the City and The causal links between homelessness and experiences of violence are well-documented within literature. A large proportion of people who present to homelessness services in Gold Coast City are under the age of 25 years. Factors that contribute to homelessness include high levels of domestic violence, low median incomes, high median housing costs, high levels of housing stress, low proportions of social housing and high levels of unmet need for homelessness services. There is also

evidence to suggest that supported accommodation options for young people were found to be limited and inadequate.

Gold Coast City Council has implemented a number of strategies to address these issues including the *Gold Coast City Council Youth Plan 2007-09 – Creating a young people friendly city*, inter-governmental social infrastructure planning projects; and youth diversionary programs. Council is also currently involved in national work to reduce alcohol-related harms (via the National Local Government Drug and Alcohol Advisory Committee) and is drafting an Alcohol Management Plan.

Recommendations

Based on its experience in responding to the above problems, Council makes the following recommendations to the Committee, to reduce violence involving young people:

Alcohol Management

- Creation of a consistent national framework for liquor licensing regulation.
- Undertake a review of the National Competition Policy to provide greater confidence to State and Local governments regarding their refusal of licensed premises on harm minimisation grounds.
- Expansion of long-term social marketing campaigns aimed at challenging the culture of violence.
- Increased funding for early intervention programs for young people engaging in risky behaviours (eg. public drinking).
- Increased funding for alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services for people at risk of being the victims and/or perpetrators of alcohol related violence (including domestic violence).
- Commitment to long-term social marketing campaigns and community education programs, including those aimed at parents.
- Increased focus on messages of individual responsibility and accountability. improvement of inter-government information sharing and local government access to police and ambulance data.
- Creation of an inter-governmental local, state or national database to measure the costs of alcohol related violence.
- Recognition of the economic impact of alcohol related violence on local government.

Social Infrastructure and Services

- Development of a strategy to coordinate planning, sequencing, funding and delivery of key social infrastructure on Gold Coast City, with particular emphasis on the high growth communities to the north of the city.
- Expansion of the Regional Local Community Infrastructure Program as an effective means of providing social and community infrastructure.
- Provision of greater financial support in rapidly growing local government areas for funding of key social infrastructure (particularly in 'greenfield' areas).
- Continuation of the National Australian Social Inclusion Board particularly initiatives that target children at greatest risk of long term disadvantage.
- Continuation of to support initiatives such as the Headspace Mental Health Program that promotes social inclusion and wellbeing for young people.
- Continuation of the partnership with Gold Coast City Council to extend the Thrower House initiative post June 2011.
- Reinstatement of crime prevention funding (similar to the previous National Community Crime Prevention Programme)