

Discussion topic 3:

Harm reduction

Creating safe communities to reduce harms from alcohol, drugs, gambling, road trauma, violence and crime

Harms from alcohol, drugs, gambling, road trauma, violence and crime all have a significant impact on the health and safety of an individual, as well as on the broader community.

66% of adults in Frankston City are at increased lifetime risk of alcohol related harm, and 21% are at increased risk of alcohol related injury, due to drinking five or more standard drinks on a single occasion.

Victorian Population Health Survey 2017

In the year to September 2021, Victoria Police recorded 4,578 reports by victims of criminal offences in Frankston City, which is the 10th highest rate in Metro Melbourne.

Crime Statistics Agency

\$62.65 million was lost on pokies in Frankston City's nine gaming venues during 2018-19, equating to an average of \$582 per resident aged over 18 years.

Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission

There have been 20 road fatalities in Frankston City over the past five years (to 2021), the majority of which were male.

Transport Accident Commission

It is important that the strengths, resources and environments that promote safe behaviours and positive change are supported in our communities and neighbourhoods in order to prevent and minimise harm. These include the safe consumption of alcohol, responsible gambling, responsible driving, the elimination of attitudes that condone violence and evidence-based approaches and practices that prevent and minimise alcohol and drug harm and address the underlying causes of crime.

The consumption of alcohol is widespread, with an established drinking culture prevalent within many social and cultural activities. In Frankston City alone, there are 245 licensed premises and on average people only have to travel less than 1km from home to reach a bottle shop. The misuse of alcohol and other drugs is a contributor to many health, social and economic harms, including injury, chronic conditions and preventable diseases, road trauma, violence, healthcare and law enforcement costs and can contribute to people remaining trapped in cycles of poverty and disadvantage. Evidence shows alcohol is associated with increased frequency of family violence, with data on Australian police responses to family violence incidents indicating alcohol is often reported as a risk factor in up to 65% of all incidents.⁸

Gambling is an activity that affects the quality of life of many people, affecting the health, wellbeing and financial security of even those who gamble infrequently. Poor mental health, poverty, homelessness and chronic illnesses can all be linked to gambling, and there is emerging evidence linking gambling with the perpetration of violent and non-violent offences, including domestic and family violence⁹. Female gamblers are more likely to report depression and anxiety and to exhibit psychological distress, compared to male gamblers¹⁰.

⁸Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, Australia

⁹Dowling, N. A., Ewin, C., Youssef, G. J., Merkouris, S. S., Suomi, A., Thomas, S. A., & Jackson, A. C. 2018 'Problem gambling and family violence: Findings from a population-representative study' *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 806-813.

¹⁰Hing N, Russell A, Tolchard B & Nower L 2014 A comparative study of men and women gamblers in Victoria, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne

When road accidents occur they can have a devastating impact, not just on the people involved but also on their families, communities and workplaces. Victoria has been a world leader in the introduction of road safety initiatives that have been associated with a reduction in road deaths, like compulsory wearing of seatbelts and bicycle helmets — that have been associated with a reduction in road deaths. Nonetheless, in 2021 3,260 claims from people with injuries sustained in transport accidents that involved hospitalisation were made to the Traffic Accident Commission in Victoria, 54 of which were from Frankston City. Anti-social driving behavior, or ‘hoon driving’, endangers the lives of drivers and other road users and is recognised locally as a safety issue with older pedestrians at greater risk of harm.

Council's role

Local government has a role in the prevention and minimisation of harm through activities that address the underlying causes of crime and improve community safety. For Frankston City Council, this role includes:

Advocacy and building collaborative partnerships with government, not-for-profit organisations and other stakeholders to deliver prevention projects, which often relies on the successful application for grant funding.

Advocating for reforms and public health approaches to reduce gambling-related harms, which includes being a member of the Alliance for Gambling Reform's group of Leadership Councils.

Delivery of prevention programs through universal services, such as Youth Services programs and projects including the RAD-FMP project to address harms from alcohol and other drugs.

Local planning policies and issuing planning permits for licensed premises. In particular ensuring the safe development of the night-time economy.

Reviewing liquor and electronic gaming machine (pokies) license applications for detrimental amenity and socio-economic impacts.

Authorising the Victoria Police under the Community Local law to work in partnership to promote community safety.

Implementing the MAV Tobacco Agreement, including tobacco visits, audits and investigations.

Offering the Libraries After Dark program to provide a positive recreation activity in the evenings as an alternative to gambling.

Promoting safe social settings at festivals and events, libraries and community centres.

Ensuring sporting clubs that lease facilities from Council are members of the Good Sports Program and comply with Responsible Service of Alcohol requirements.

Undertaking road safety works, for example the 2021 intersection upgrade on Claudia Street.

Partnering with Community Support Frankston to support community welfare, particularly for those that are extremely financially disadvantaged and that fall through the gaps of the social services system.

Providing information and referrals to support services — Council's Maternal and Child Health Service provides resources and referrals to specialist services for help with alcohol and other drugs, gambling and family violence.