Alcohol Policy

Purpose

The Alcohol Policy aims to establish a comprehensive framework across all council functions, fulfilling the council's statutory responsibility of upholding community health and well-being by addressing alcohol-related harm while fostering social and economic sustainability.

The policy aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Articulate council's public health approach to prevent alcohol-related harm.
- Establish a robust, evidence-based, and consistent approach to planning and regulatory decisions related to the sale and consumption of alcohol in Wodonga.
- Secure the real and perceived safety and amenity of places and spaces within the municipality where alcohol is purchased and consumed.
- Optimise the potential of licensed premises to contribute to the establishment of a vibrant night-time economy, with the aim of fostering economic growth, supporting businesses, whilst mitigating anti-social behaviour, and ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals.

Implementation of this policy will ensure that all council actions and decisions related to alcohol are aligned with a unified and consistent approach. This approach prioritises the community's health and well-being, balances social and economic considerations, and effectively addresses the specific challenges associated with alcohol-related harm.

Scope

The policy applies to all statutory roles fulfilled by the council in managing the sale, distribution, access, and consumption of alcohol within the municipality.

While this policy offers support, it does not replace the existing processes linked to permit applications and planning scheme amendments governed by the Planning and Environment Act 1987, nor does it replace the objection procedures for liquor licensing applications under the amended Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 (2021). Additionally, this policy does not extend to other council processes, such as addressing service requests or handling complaints concerning the sale and consumption of alcohol within the community.

Definitions

Advocacy	Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy
Community	Refers to the people who have a stake and interest in the City of Wodonga and includes the following: • Those who live, work, study, conduct business or provide services in the municipality. • Those involved in local community groups or organisations. • Those who visit, use, or enjoy the services, facilities and public places located within the municipality. • Those who share an interest, a sense of identity or a shared common goal.
Council	Wodonga City Council
Council-owned land	Land owned by Council, including vacant land, discontinued roads, and any building and development thereon.

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Equity	Equity means that available information, spaces, services, and programs should deliver outcomes that are equal for all. This requires that services be able to consider and respond to the intersecting forms of disadvantage and discrimination to truly cater to all diverse needs.
Harm	Harm arising from the misuse and abuse of alcohol, including: • Harm to minors, vulnerable persons, or communities, including groups within communities • Alcohol-fuelled family violence • Poor health and wellbeing outcomes • Road accidents and fatalities • Anti-social behaviour, including behaviour that causes personal injury or property damage[i]
Partnership	A relationship between Council and stakeholders, and between stakeholders themselves that involves shared responsibilities for implementing a range of actions that seek to achieve a common goal such as upholding the community's health and wellbeing.
Policy	Sets out Council's values with respect to a particular matter. It includes a set of principles or rules that provide a definite direction for the organisation.
Public Health Approach	A public health approach involves utilising scientific knowledge, evidence-based strategies, and community-based interventions to improve the health and well-being of populations by focusing on prevention, health promotion, and addressing the underlying determinants of health.
Stakeholder	An individual or group identified with a strong interest in a particular topic regarding the decision-making of the Council and are directly affected by the outcome of any decisions.
Vulnerable groups	Groups within the community at an elevated risk of alcohol-related harms because of their age, socio-economic status, gender, cultural and linguistic background, or exposure to licensed premises.

Policy

As a leader, advocate, service provider, regulator and planner, council is committed to addressing alcohol-related harm within the community, while simultaneously fostering a thriving and strong night-time economy. Council will consider the well-being of individuals and the community in all decision-making processes relating to the sale and consumption of alcohol in the community.

To achieve this, council will adopt a public health approach to addressing alcohol-related harm and supporting a strong, vibrant, and safe night-time culture. A public health approach is underpinned by the following principles:

- Equity: council recognises that everyone should have an equal opportunity for good health and well-being. Efforts to address alcohol-related harms will prioritise reducing health inequities.
- Prevention Oriented: council will prioritise prevention strategies that aim to reduce alcohol-related harms before they occur.

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- Collaboration: While the council can offer leadership, preventing and minimising alcohol-related harm requires the involvement of various stakeholders and agencies, underscoring the need for a collaborative and intersectional approach.
- Evidence Based: The council will base its decisions and actions on robust and transparent evidence.
- Social determinants of Health: Alcohol-related harm is influenced by a range of factors, including socio-cultural, political, economic, environmental, and health-related determinants. Efforts to address alcohol-related harm will consider the broader determinants of health.

In accordance with these principles, council is committed to fulfilling its legislative role and assuming a leadership position in an effort to address alcohol-related harm, through its local government mechanisms, focusing on the following four key areas:

1. Planning and Regulation

It is Wodonga Council policy to utilise statutory planning and regulatory levers to:

- Protect and uphold the safety and amenity of the area surrounding licensed premises and the broader community. This includes assessing cumulative impact to inform decision-making processes and formulating appropriate planning mechanisms to manage the location and operation of high-risk venues;
- Assess the economic and social impact of new liquor licence applications and amendments, to ensure neighbourhoods and vulnerable groups are not disproportionately negatively affected by such licences;
- Encourage the incorporation of good design to create safer environments for patrons and the community, and limit opportunities for anti-social behaviour.

2. Advocacy

Council plays a significant statutory role to act on the needs and concerns of the community and represent these views to the appropriate governing bodies. As a responsible governing body, the council is committed to taking proactive measures and advocating on behalf of the community to address and mitigate alcohol-related issues. Our advocacy activities will prioritise the safety and well-being of the community, ensuring responsible practices and minimising the potential social, economic and environmental risks associated with alcohol consumption.

3. Collaboration and partnerships

Wodonga Council takes a leadership role in collaborating with stakeholders and advocating on behalf of the community to enhance access to services for individuals impacted by alcohol-related harm and to implement effective harm minimisation measures.
Wodonga Council will work with businesses to support a balanced approach that ensures the responsible sale and consumption of alcohol, while supporting the growth and sustainability of businesses operating during day-time and night-time hours.

4. Capacity building

The Wodonga Council is committed to actively educating, promoting and supporting the development of safe drinking cultures among individuals, businesses, organisations and the community. The council aims to create a community that embraces responsible alcohol practices, protects the health and well-being of its residents, and fosters vibrant and thriving environments for all.

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To achieve this, the council will prioritise fostering the community's understanding of the impacts associated with risky alcohol consumption behaviours. By promoting safe drinking cultures and enhancing community awareness, the council aims to foster a sense of well-being, reduce alcohol-related harm, and create an environment that supports the health and wellbeing of all residents.

Related legislation

Local Government Act 2020 (Vic), S. 8 & 9
Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 (amended 2021), S. 38, 40 & 47
Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic), S. 4(2) (d), 6(2) (d) & 7(3) (b)
Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic), S. 24, 25, 26 & 27

Review

Council may review this policy at any time but unless otherwise requested at least every four years from date of adoption. Minor amendments to the policy may be authorised by the CEO at any time where such changes do not alter the substance of the policy e.g.: typographical errors, a change to the name of a related policy, or a change to the name of legislation.

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Approved By:	Manager City of Wodonga
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