



# Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs

## City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

Substance misuse is a major cause of preventable illness and social problems across Australia. Alcohol and drug misuse are associated with debilitating physical and mental health conditions, antisocial behaviour, homelessness and crime. Consequently, addressing the harms of substance misuse remains a priority concern for Port Phillip.

### What is substance misuse?

**Substance misuse** refers to the inappropriate or excessive use of substances such as alcohol and other drugs, both legal and illegal. These could include the use of cannabis, methamphetamines, prescription medications and nicotine, that affect a person's ability to function in everyday life. The misuse may arise due to emotional, psychological or physical problems. A person may become addicted to a substance, where they become psychologically and/or physiologically dependent on it, and unable to effectively control their usage (Lifeline, 2023).

**Tobacco use** is one of the leading causes of preventable illness world-wide. Unlike the use of alcohol or other drugs, there is no safe level of tobacco consumption. "Every cigarette is doing you damage" (Cancer Council Victoria, 2019).

### How does substance misuse affect the Port Phillip community?

According to Turning Point, one of Australia's leading addiction treatment, education and research centres, Port Phillip has:

- The sixth highest number of alcohol and drug-related **ambulance attendances** among local government areas in Victoria, with 14,152 between 2012-2021.
- The sixth highest number of alcohol and drug-related **hospitalisations** among local government areas in Victoria, with 16,857 between 2010-2019.
- 908 **liquor licences** in operation as of the 2021 financial year, the third highest number out of all local government areas in the state, after the City of Yarra with 1010 and the City of Melbourne with 2267 (Turning Point, 2023).

According to the 2017 Victorian Population Health Survey:



- 39.3 per cent of adult Port Phillip residents were at an increased lifetime risk of alcohol-related harm due to weekly drinking habits, compared to the Victorian average of 24.7 per cent.
- 59.3 per cent of adult residents consumed more than 2 standard drinks on a single day once or twice a week, more in line with the Victorian average of 56.9 per cent.
- 19.4 per cent of adult residents were at an increased monthly risk of alcohol-related injury from a single occasion of drinking, compared to the Victorian average of 12.8 per cent.
- 10.1 per cent were classified as current smokers, compared to the Victorian average of 16.7 per cent. Of these, 6.7 per cent described themselves as daily smokers, compared to the Victorian average of 12.4 per cent (Department of Health, 2022).

In addition to health impacts, there is a clear correlation between alcohol misuse, anti-social behaviour and crime. According to the 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, “more than 1 in 5 people (21 per cent) had been verbally or physically abused, or put in fear by another person who was under the influence of alcohol in the previous 12 months” (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). As a municipality which hosts a number of events and is a location often frequented by visitors and tourists, alcohol and drug related antisocial behaviour is present.

### How does substance misuse affect some groups in our community?

- Use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs are key risk factors contributing to inequalities between **Aboriginal** and non-Aboriginal Australians.
- There is a strong correlation between problematic alcohol or other drug use and experiences of **homelessness**.
- According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in 2019, **younger people** (aged 18-24) were the most likely age group to have used illicit drugs in the last 12 months. However, this reduced to a likelihood of 31 per cent from 37 per cent in 2001 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022).
- Using information from the same data source, as of 2019, **older people** (aged 70 and over) were the most likely age group to drink alcohol daily. In addition, people aged 50-59 were the most likely to smoke tobacco daily, at 15.9 per cent.

### Current impacts on substance misuse?

- According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, “in April 2022, national wastewater analysis indicated that most drug markets are returning to pre COVID-19 settings” (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022). This suggests that illicit drug use is returning to ‘normal’ after COVID-19 related changes.
- The recent rise in the cost of living and inflation has the potential to change people’s behaviour depending on the individual. For example, some may choose to lessen their alcohol, drug and tobacco use due to financial constraints. However, others who may regularly partake in substance abuse or have addiction issues, may experience financial hardship due to feeling the necessity to continue to consume the substance. This could



further complicate the addiction issues that someone is facing, as they may seek alternative methods, potentially criminal ones, to funding their substance abuse.

- Stresses from this rise in cost of living may cause some people to consume more alcohol, drugs or and/or tobacco, as they are well known to be coping mechanisms in times of emotional distress.
- Presently, there is an increase in 'vaping', i.e. e-cigarettes that contain e-liquids. These may contain nicotine and are made from a mixture of chemicals including solvents, sweeteners and flavourings. These have become increasingly popular with younger people, including teenagers. While all the exact effects of vaping are unknown, the negative impacts of nicotine are well researched. Vaping is currently a social trend and is likely to be negatively impacting residents.

### Why is managing substance misuse important for our community?

- The harms associated with alcohol misuse can have devastating impacts on individuals and their families and can seriously affect relationships, work and family life.
- Tobacco continues to cause more ill health and premature death than any other drug. Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable disease burden in Australia and was 8.6 per cent of the total burden of disease and injury in 2018 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022).
- Illicit drug use is a major risk factor for ill health and death, being linked with HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, low birth weight, malnutrition, poisoning, mental illness, suicide, self-inflicted injury and overdose.
- As there is a clear correlation between alcohol misuse, mental health problems, antisocial behaviour and crime, action that Council takes to reduce alcohol consumption will positively impact on other health and social outcomes across the municipality.

### How are the Federal and State Governments managing substance misuse?

The Federal and State Governments establish policy relevant to substance misuse, develop rolling action plans and provide funding to peak community-based agencies that work to minimise the harm arising from substance misuse rather than a prohibition, zero tolerance approach to substance use. At the federal level, the National Drug Strategy 2017-2026, which contains alcohol and tobacco related issues as sub-strategies, provides the policy framework and guidelines to reduce and prevent the harmful effects of these substances.

Organisations in receipt of government funding include the Heart Foundation and affiliate state foundations, Cancer Council Australia and affiliated state councils, drug and alcohol foundations and peak organisations delivering drug and alcohol rehabilitation services. Together, with revenue raised via donations and campaigns, these peak organisations work to address issues at a local and national level.



## What is the role of the Port Phillip City Council in responding to and preventing harms associated with substance misuse?

The role of the Council is to:

- Ensure that Council services and facilities have implemented operational policies and procedures that will minimise harms from substance use.
- Partner with police, licenced venues and local agencies to balance the contribution that licenced premises make to the vitality of our local areas, with the management of social, economic and health impacts of substance misuse.
- Provide safe disposal of drug litter and drug paraphernalia through daily cleaning programs and a syringe disposal collection contract.
- Develop partnerships with government and non-government peak agencies to implement harm minimisation approaches to substance misuse, through mechanisms such as awareness raising campaigns and local level research, monitoring and reporting.

By working to address the drivers of mental ill health, which are linked to substance misuse, including homelessness, discrimination, economic disadvantage and social isolation, Council can improve outcomes in this area.

## Who are our partners?

Addressing substance misuse involves a cross sector approach, which includes partnership development with the government, business and community sectors. Some of our key partners include:

- Victoria Police
- Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation
- Liquor outlets and venues
- The Department of Health (formerly the Department of Health and Human Services)
- Better Health Network (formerly Star Health)
- Access Health
- Windana
- First Step
- VicHealth
- Cancer Council Victoria
- Australian Drug and Alcohol Foundation
- QUIT Victoria
- Community based sport and recreation organisations and facilities



- Venue operators and events managers.
- Ngwala Wilumbong

### What may change over the next five years?

- While society has entered a 'COVID-normal' phase of the pandemic post-lockdowns, the future of the pandemic is uncertain. While it does not seem likely at the time of writing, public health restrictions could be enforced again in response to waves or rises in cases, or new variants or sub-variants. Such restrictions could cause changes in habits surrounding substance use, as was seen previously in periods of harsh restrictions.
- With the future of the economy looking uncertain, and inflation and the cost of living continuing to rise, future substance use could change as a result. As mentioned previously, it could cause some to lessen their usage in trying to manage personal budgets, or it could increase for those experiencing emotional and financial stress. Additionally, those with addiction disorders may suffer disproportionately, as the substance they consume may increase in price and add to the problems they experience.
- The prevalence of 'vaping' may increase, and more negative health consequences in the community may be seen as a result. Research may provide further insight into the effects of vaping, which could require a public health response to counteract its widespread presence.

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