

Strategy 2. Maximise the use of research to improve population health

Strategy 2.1: Facilitate synthesis of and access to research evidence

Community impact of liquor licensing

Controlling, managing and/or regulating the availability of legal drugs such as alcohol is one of the three pillars of harm minimisation in Australia based on evidence for its effectiveness.^{1,2} Applicants for liquor licences are required by State law to consult with public entities including NSW Health to complete the Community Impact of Liquor Licences process, in accordance with the *Liquor Act 2007 No 90* (NSW). Details of license applications are forwarded by the Ministry of Health's Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch to relevant local health districts to ensure that a truly local response is provided, as sought by the decision makers at Liquor and Gaming NSW.

To ensure that responses are based on the highest quality evidence, *How to Respond to Liquor Licensing Applications – a Guide for Local Health Districts* ('The Guide') has been developed by the Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch. The Guide was informed by a Sax Institute Evidence Check *Community Impact of Liquor Licences*,³ which reviewed the literature on the impacts of density of liquor licences, trading hours and other restrictions on trading, as well as information from recent alcohol harms data from the Rapid Surveillance Team in the Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence. These data look at four indicators that are used as proxies for alcohol health-related harms from the Public Health Rapid, Emergency and Disease and Syndromic Surveillance (PHREDSS) system, emergency department records and NSW ambulance data. The indicators include: (1) Visits to hospital for alcohol; (2) Late night visits to hospital for alcohol; (3) Late night visits to hospital for injury; and (4) Late night ambulance call outs for assault. Variations in the rates of harm by Local Government Areas (LGAs), as well as LGA rates relative to NSW rates, are analysed to provide information about locations where alcohol-related harms are relatively high.

An evaluation is currently underway of The Guide. The evaluation will explore: the relevance, uptake and usefulness of The Guide and its individual components; local level processes to implement The Guide; whether The Guide has enhanced LHD capacity and capability to respond to licence applications; whether The Guide has enabled NSW Health to fulfil its obligations in responding to liquor licence applications; and whether there has been a perceived increase in influence of health system responses to liquor licence applications using The Guide. The outcomes of this evaluation will be made publicly available and will be used to improve The Guide and more broadly NSW Health's approach to responding to liquor licences. The evaluation is due for completion in late 2019.

This work not only maximises the use of research evidence through facilitating the synthesis of and access to research evidence as outlined in *Population Health Research Strategy 2.1 (Facilitate synthesis of and access to research evidence)*, but also meets the requirements of the NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines where agencies are expected to prioritise evaluation of programs to maximise insights.⁴

Further reading

1. Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Health) National Drug Strategy 2017-2026. Accessed March 2019 at www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-drug-strategy-2017-2026.
2. World Health Organisation (WHO). Tackling NCDs, Best Buys. Best buys and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. WHO 2017 WHO/NMH/NVI/17.9 accessed at <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259232/WHO-NMH-NVI-17.9-eng.f.jsessionid=9C5C06E64D6D5482B027BC203F9FE78A?sequence=1>
3. Livingston M, Wilkinson C, Room R. Community impact of liquor licences: an Evidence Check rapid review brokered by the Sax Institute for the NSW Ministry of Health, 2015. Accessed at www.saxinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Community-impact-of-liquor-licences-1.pdf
4. The NSW Government Circular C2016-01 Program Evaluation. Accessed at <https://arp.nsw.gov.au/c2016-01-program-evaluation>.