

Unhappy Hour – Profiting from Alcohol Harm

June 2019

“Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” Luke 12:15

The Foundation of Alcohol Research and Education has noted that in over 50 peer reviewed studies around the world, higher prices have been proven to lower consumption rates of alcohol. Those most likely to be harmed by consumption of alcohol are most likely to buy the drink that gives them the greatest alcohol content for their money. For this reason the Victorian Government has imposed restrictions on promotions by alcohol businesses that encourage rapid and high levels of drinking of alcoholic beverages. However, rather than embracing the spirit of what is intended many owners of liquor businesses seek to push the limits of what they can get away with in the pursuit of increasing profits.

The Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation has issued *Guidelines for responsible liquor advertising and promotions*. Among the principles is:

Principle 5: The advertising or promotion of liquor involving “happy hours”, free drinks or discounted drinks must have reasonable limits and controls to minimise the risk of rapid, excessive or irresponsible consumption of liquor...

However, “happy hour” promotions that extend beyond one hour are problematic, raising an increased risk of irresponsible consumption. Offers of free drinks and extreme discounting can result in an environment of irresponsible consumption by creating incentives for patrons to purchase and drink more than they normally would. Where this involves particular client groups (for example, young people or women), these practices can have the result of making that group more vulnerable or at risk of harm.

These types of promotions will be closely monitored.

As part of their obligations to serve liquor responsibly, licensees must ensure that there are limits and controls in place when conducting such offers to minimise the risk of irresponsible consumption of liquor. Practical advice on the types of controls that can be put in place is provided at the end of these guidelines.

Examples of unacceptable practices:

- *Extended “happy hours” (for example, “5 hours of happiness”)*

The Justice and International Mission cluster has observed that some liquor business owners have interpreted this advice to mean that a ‘happy hour’ period of four hours is acceptable. Clearly, that is not the intention of the guidelines.

Research from the US found that happy hours were associated with increased levels of fights as a result of additional alcohol consumption and increased levels of drink driving.¹

Another principle is:

¹ Julie Marie Baldwin, John M Stogner, and Bryan Lee Miller, ‘It’s five o’clock somewhere: An examination of the association between happy hour drinking and negative consequences’, *Subst Abuse Treat Prev Policy*. 2014; 9: 17.

Principle 7: Where the advertising or promotion involves the inclusion of unlimited liquor within the entry price, the advertising or promotion must be consistent with responsible serving of alcohol practices.

For certain types of functions, the supply of liquor may be included within the entry price. Such an event will usually include food and/or entertainment (for example, race day functions, fundraising events, balls or special events).

In some cases, the combination of the type of event with unlimited alcohol as part of a ticket or entry price can lead to excessive drinking over a period of time. Promoting these functions as “all you can drink” events can encourage a culture of irresponsible consumption of liquor, especially where no controls are in place to minimise this form of consumption.

The Justice and International Mission cluster is aware of an increasing number of pubs, clubs, cafes and restaurants offering all you can drink ‘bottomless brunches’ where for a flat fee a person can drink as much as they can over a two hour period.

The Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation is willing to hear from us regarding liquor outlets offering extended happy hours and bottomless brunches (the latter will include cafes and restaurants) to assist them in identifying where to send their inspectors. These are normally advertised prominently on the outside of the venue, such as in their windows, but sometimes might only be advertised on the inside of the venue. If you are able to, please collect the following information in your local area.

Name of Venue	Address	Type of Promotion (eg. Happy Hour, Bottomless Brunch)	Length of Promotions (eg 4 hours)

Return to:
 Mark Zirnsak
 Centre for Theology and Ministry
 29 College Crescent
 Parkville Victoria 3052
 or
 E-mail: mark.zirnsak@victas.uca.org.au