

The Right Mix: Alcohol Management Strategy

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Introduction

The Government's recent alcohol reforms give local communities a greater say in how alcohol is managed. The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 allows councils to develop a local alcohol policy that looks at the sale and availability of alcohol – including the number of outlets, their location and conditions under which they can operate.

This Alcohol Management Strategy provides a broader context for the Council's Local Alcohol Policy. It takes a wider view of alcohol and alcohol-related behaviour, how alcohol can positively contribute to our aspirations for a dynamic central city with vibrant suburban centres, and how we can all play a part in reducing alcohol-related harm.

At the beginning of the year, we asked the public for their views on the role of alcohol in Wellington City. We received wide-ranging feedback. This feedback has shaped our thinking about the priorities for this strategy, which are to:

- address pre-loading and side-loading
- get the right balance in the central city
- allow communities to have a greater say on the availability of alcohol
- support the responsible consumption of alcohol at events
- work together to minimise harm.

We consulted on a draft strategy in July. This strategy, together with the Local Alcohol Policy, provides a framework for action – to achieve the right balance in promoting efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm while ensuring Wellington continues to develop as a vibrant, safe city, and an events destination.

The strategy focuses on the role the Council can play in creating the kind of city that encourages safe alcohol consumption. Many of the proposed initiatives are concerned with what happens in public – in licensed premises, on our streets and in open spaces – because this is within our sphere of influence.

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Some aspects are outside our control, such as minimum pricing on alcohol. In these circumstances, the strategy outlines how the Council will work with licensees, government agencies and community organisations to achieve the outcomes sought by our communities. The strategy includes an issues and initiatives section, which outlines our proposed response to the feedback received during the earlier community engagement programme.

Context

Wellington City has a different pattern of alcohol consumption to the rest of New Zealand.

Wellington City is a nationally significant entertainment destination...

Figures from Positively Wellington Tourism show that domestic visitors contribute \$557 million to the Wellington economy. The city's entertainment offering, accompanied by the availability of alcohol, supports Wellington's position as one of New Zealand's most popular domestic tourism destinations.

So a greater proportion of our drinking takes place in public...

Figures from ACC show that Wellington has 26 on-licences (bars and restaurants) per 10,000 people compared to 18 per 10,000 people for the rest of New Zealand.

Much of this is happening in the central city...

Figures from the District Licensing Agency show that 71 percent of all alcohol licences are issued in the Lambton Ward with 79 percent of these being bars, night clubs and restaurants.

It means we have an active late-night economy...

Figures from Hospitality New Zealand show that electronic card transactions in the Wellington region between 4–7am total \$33m per year – 22 percent of all late-night transactions nationally.

But there is a skewed activity mix...

Figures from the District Licensing Agency show that of the 31 licences operating later than 3am (excluding hotels and the airport), 21 are classified as taverns.

And there is more harm generated as the night goes on...

Figures from the Police show that nationally the predicted rate of alcohol-related offending doubles between 1–2am, doubles again between 2–3am, and doubles again between 3–5am.

Alcohol-related harm is also greater for young men...

Figures from Regional Public Health show that males aged 15–29 comprise 37 percent of all alcohol-related presentations at Wellington Hospital's emergency department.

Especially for young men who live in the south of the city...

Figures from Regional Public Health show males aged 15–29 living in the south of the city, from Mt Cook to Island Bay, have alcohol-related presentation rates that are more than double the average for this age group.

But alcohol consumption is not limited to young people...

Figures from a recent survey of 1000 residents in Wellington show that 94 percent of respondents consume alcohol and 63 percent said they do so at least once a week.

Yet we are concerned that alcohol consumption does more harm than good...

Figures from the same survey show that 50 percent of respondents thought the harm caused by alcohol outweighs the benefits. Only 19 percent thought the benefits outweigh the harm.

Strategic Setting

This strategy promotes safe and responsible alcohol consumption, and minimising alcohol-related harm while promoting a dynamic central city with vibrant suburban centres. It plays an important role in achieving our Wellington Towards 2040: Smart Capital vision.

Smart Capital has two goals that are particularly relevant to this strategy:

Dynamic Central City – The central city will be a vibrant and creative place, helping Wellington to offer the lifestyle, entertainment and amenity of a much bigger city. The CBD will continue to drive the regional economy.

People-centred City – Wellington's people centred city will be healthy, vibrant, affordable and resilient, with a strong sense of identity and 'place' expressed through urban form, openness and accessibility for its current and future populations.

There is an overlap between these strategic goals and the objectives of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012. For the central city, this means:

- supporting a city rhythm – transitioning the city through:
 - daytime – commerce
 - evening – entertainment
 - late night – bars and clubs, more evening Entertainment
 - morning – sleep, city regeneration: cleaning and rest.

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- promoting a dynamic night-time economy – with well-managed and designed pockets of vibrancy that offer a balanced mix of alcohol and non-alcohol trading activity
- creating a safe and welcoming city – where risks are effectively managed and inner-city residents are involved in decisions about alcohol availability
- building an accessible city – where people can safely and easily move into and out of the central city and between different zones within the central city.

For the suburbs, this means:

- supporting vibrant town centres and suburban hubs that provide appropriate spaces for economic activity, socialisation and community activity
- supporting local amenities – ensuring there are vibrant suburban centres that are pleasant and agreeable places to live alongside, created through greater regulation on the sale of alcohol compared to the central city.

The central city will be a vibrant and creative place, helping Wellington to offer the lifestyle, entertainment and amenity of a much bigger city

Outcomes

The outcomes sought by this strategy are:

- reduced harm: a reduction in the amount of harm and vandalism created by the excessive consumption of alcohol and drinking in public places
- increased vibrancy: an increase in late-night activity in the central city with less emphasis on alcohol consumption
- improved amenity: an improvement in suburban, inner-city and open space amenity
- greater personal responsibility: an increase in the safe and responsible consumption of alcohol
- greater collaboration: more shared responses to alcohol-related issues from licensees, local and central government, and community organisations.

Issues and Initiatives

We heard a wide range of views through our community engagement programme. This section outlines our responses to the main issues raised.

Pre-loading and side-loading

The most common issue raised was concern about excessive pre-loading and side-loading.

Pre-loading is where people consume alcohol purchased from bottle stores and supermarkets at home, before going out to bars, night clubs and restaurants.

Side-loading is where alcohol purchased from a bottle store or supermarket is consumed while travelling to, queuing to enter, or within bars, night clubs and restaurants.

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While having a drink or two beforehand is part of a great night out for many of us, excessive drinking before entering licensed premises plays a major role in generating alcohol-related harm. It also detracts from our enjoyment of events, and puts pressure on bars, night clubs and restaurants to manage problems that are not of their making.

Addressing pre-loading and side-loading is a complex issue. It involves societal attitudes to drinking, purchasing patterns for price-sensitive groups, such as young people and those on low incomes, and the comparative availability of alcohol in different types of licensed premises. So the initiatives should be seen as a package to effect change over the medium term.

Initiatives

Establish a 'Capital Hosts' group for off-licensees

Capital Hosts is an on-licence industry group with the goal of improving the quality and compliance of bars, night clubs and restaurants. Establishing a similar group for supermarkets and bottle stores would increase corporate responsibility for the sale of alcohol, drive better compliance practices and improve communication with organisations such as the Police.

Explore establishing a trial for reduced off-licence hours

We initially considered reducing all off-licence trading hours to 9pm as an initiative to curb spontaneous 'topping up' purchasing. However, there is no New Zealand specific evidence to demonstrate reducing off-licence trading hours reduces alcohol-related harm. So we don't know whether reducing trading hours will have the desired effect or will people just work around it by purchasing their alcohol earlier in the day. So we will work with licensees to establish a voluntary accord for a six-month trial of 9pm closing of off-licences in the central city and the south of the city on Friday and Saturday. The trial would be independently evaluated and we are seeking support from central government for the evaluation. The results of the trial would then inform the future decisions on off-licence hours by the District Licensing Committee

Advocate for the Government to further investigate minimum pricing and prohibiting price advertising

Increasing the minimum price for alcohol, particularly for products that are attractive to young people, was a solution suggested by a number of people during the community engagement programme. The Council does not have the ability to place a minimum price on alcohol but we can advocate for the Government to further consider this issue together with price advertising.

Explore regulatory and education tools to support Wellington as a safe and vibrant entertainment destination

We received a lot of submission feedback that there needs to be more emphasis placed on personal responsibility. There was strong interest in

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making being intoxicated in a public place an offence to drive behaviour change in the same way attitudes to drink driving changed over a generation due to a combination of enforcement and social marketing.

We will investigate the regulatory and educational tools at our disposal to ensure Wellington is a safe and vibrant entertainment destination. This includes options for making public intoxication an offence. The central city is the region's premier entertainment destination so we will be looking at how these tools can be consistently deployed across the region.

Explore a regional approach to making being intoxicated in public an offence

~~We received a lot of submission feedback that there needs to be more emphasis placed on personal responsibility. There was a lot of interest in making being intoxicated in a public place an offence to drive behaviour change in the same way attitudes to drink driving changed over a generation due to a combination of enforcement and social marketing.~~

~~There are some legal hurdles, such as how this affects people's right to freedom of movement, and practical hurdles, like determining when people are intoxicated and how best to enforce the restriction without escalating matters, to overcome. We see a regional approach as having the greatest chance of success because it offsets the risk that if the rules only applied to Wellington City because it sets consistent behaviour expectations across the region.~~

Work with the Health Promotion Agency and industry organisations on social marketing campaigns

Social marketing campaigns are effective in creating medium-term behavioural change. To change attitudes to pre-loading and side-loading, the Council will work with industry organisations to increase the reach and tailor the message of nationwide social marketing campaigns run by the Health Promotion Agency. We see social media playing a key role in getting the message out about excessive pre-loading and side-loading being unacceptable.

Widen and strengthen the central city liquor ban

Feedback received shows that the central city liquor ban has been successful in improving a sense of safety and setting expectations for behaviour in the central city. The Police have also used the bylaw to curb drinking in public places. Changes in legislation mean that from 18 December this year, publicly-accessible private property, such as car parking buildings, will also be subject to the liquor ban. The liquor ban could be extended to cover:

- those areas in the south of the city that are over-represented in alcohol-related presentations at Wellington Hospital's emergency department
- along the main walking routes from the west into the central city where there have been problems with litter and vandalism.

The way the liquor ban is enforced will also be strengthened through better coordination between the Police and the Council's Local Hosts, to set the tone for what is acceptable behaviour for people in the central city, particularly late at night.

Encourage better practices to identify intoxicated people entering major events

The screening of intoxicated people entering licensed premises and events can play a pivotal role in curbing pre-loading. The industry already has an effective means of screening to assist licensees with identifying intoxicated people. This can be supported by working with Police and event operators to send a clear message that people who excessively pre-load will be denied entry to events.

Late-Night Activity in the Central City

Another common issue raised was concern about the harm generated from an over-emphasis on alcohol consumption late at night in the central city. The concern is about people's safety in the central city, the lack of non-alcohol activities and the ability for people to get home safely. We also heard that late-night trading contributed to Wellington's reputation as a stellar events destination and we should be doing more to encourage a diverse range of late-night activities.

Alcohol-related harm is significantly increased during the early hours of the morning. Factors making late-night trading riskier include preloading and side-loading, the numbers of people coming into the central city from throughout the region and beyond, and how the central city is designed and managed. While we can manage when, where and how alcohol is sold late at night through the Local Alcohol Policy, it will also require public and private sector investment to create a safe and vibrant environment.

Initiatives

Support initiatives to increase non-alcohol activities in the evening and late-night entertainment

The availability of venues and street activities that cater for a diverse range of customers is essential to achieving a safe and vibrant central city. We will work with public and private sector partners to support initiatives such as a technology hub, street vendors and entertainment, developing a calendar of activities, and leveraging the Courtenay Place triage to create a chill-out zone.

Develop an urban design plans where entertainment venues cluster

Good urban design in places where entertainment venues cluster will ensure that people can safely use streets, footpaths and open spaces. Urban design considerations include:

- locating seats and other amenities to eliminate 'pinch points' that can lead to a crush of people
- creating spaces in which late-night non-alcohol activities can safely take place

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- locating bus stops and taxi stands so that people can safely and easily enter and leave ~~the precinct~~ places where entertainment venues cluster
- using lights to give ~~the precinct~~ places where entertainment venues cluster a discernible look as safe, late-night entertainment zones and to signal when it's time to go home.

Improve late-night transport options

The lack of affordable late-night transport options is why many people stay on later than they intended or choose to sleep rough until public transport services start in the early morning. We will work with public and private sector partners to make it easier for people to get home late at night. Possible initiatives include increasing public or corporate-sponsored late-night bus services, and fixed-price taxis being available from participating venues.

Improved street cleaning and rubbish collection in the central city

Better amenities such as more rubbish bins and improved street cleaning will help to set the tone in places where entertainment venues cluster. Overflowing rubbish bins create hotspots for crime, and street cleaning is essential in refreshing the central city for the following day's business. We propose more frequent emptying of rubbish bins and more street and doorway cleaning to enhance places where entertainment venues cluster.

Investigate ways of improving residential amenity in the central city

The Council's Central City Framework encourages a mix of residential, business and entertainment activities to create a healthy city rhythm. Places where entertainment venues cluster need such a mix to ensure it is lively, with different types of activities at different times of day and night. An important factor will be to ensure residential amenity is not eroded through noise and nuisance from late-night activities.

We will work with residents in places where entertainment venues cluster to improve amenity, such as noise insulation options, conditions on the cleaning of, and noise from, licensed premises, and more robust building design standards for new residential development. The Council will develop processes for communicating and engaging with residents on the design of ~~the precinct~~ places where entertainment venues cluster, through automatic hearings of new licence applications and renewals. It will also encourage an inner-city resident representative on the Wellington Licensee Forum.

Communities having a greater say on alcohol availability

Communities have told us there are widely-shared concerns about the availability of alcohol. These relate to the number of bottle stores in local communities, their proximity to sensitive facilities such as schools, and the hours of operation. We also heard that people want to see more restaurants and well-managed off-licences.

Initiatives

Introducing automatic hearings for proximity and density matters

The Local Alcohol Policy addresses these concerns by proposing that proximity and density are matters for the District Licensing Committee, the new body that will issue licences, to consider as part of approving applications.

The policy does not place any caps on the number of licensed premises in a locality nor automatically prohibit the establishment of licensed premises next to facilities such as schools. Instead, it allows for the District Licensing Committee to consider each application on its merits with input from local communities.

This will be achieved by ensuring there is an automatic hearing for applications ~~are proposed to be~~ for premises adjacent to sensitive facilities or for high-risk applications within 100 metres of such facilities in the central city and for high to medium risk applications in the south of the city ~~an application that has been assessed as medium or high risk is within 100 metres of sensitive facilities.~~

We will also invest in better notification systems, such as web alerts, to make local communities aware of licence applications and when there is an opportunity to present to a District Licensing Committee.

Alcohol consumption at events

Feedback from the community engagement shows there is concern about the amount of alcohol-related harm and nuisance in and around major events. While some leeway was considered appropriate to support our reputation as a premier entertainment destination, the balance was seen as skewed.

We know that event management practices are improving, particularly since the Rugby World Cup. This assists in setting the tone for acceptable behaviour at events and supporting activities in the central city. We also heard that a well-rounded calendar of activities was needed to support the goal of dynamic central city.

Initiatives

Work with venue managers and event organisers to continuously improve alcohol management plans for large-scale events

Major event organisers have been developing Special Event Alcohol Management Plans for some time. This has led to innovations like the wrist-banding of people at the Wellington International Sevens. The Council will work with events organisers and venue managers to ensure responsible consumption at events, including steps to reinforce the message that excessive pre-loading is unacceptable, such as investigating the confiscation of tickets of intoxicated people entering events.

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Work with the business and community sectors to build a full calendar of central city activities

Creating a better balance between alcohol and non-alcohol activities late at night in the central city was seen a good way of creating a more vibrant and safe late-night experience. The Council will work with the hospitality sector, companies with a youth focus, and community and arts groups to build a full calendar of central city activities. This calendar would be particularly active from September to May on Fridays and Saturdays, with late-night activities focused in places where entertainment venues cluster. These activities would also include family-friendly and youth-focused events without alcohol to complement events where alcohol is available.

Develop a sponsorship policy for events and facilities, which includes a position on alcohol sponsorship

Communities expressed concern about alcohol sponsorship of events, particularly youth-focused events, and in our recreation and community facilities and open spaces. The Council will develop a sponsorship policy that outlines when alcohol sponsorship is appropriate and the conditions for our own events and venues and events, and venues managed by organisations such as Positively Wellington Venues.

Working together to minimise harm

Minimising alcohol-related harm is a complex issue. Individuals hold the key. Licensees, the Council and central government, and community organisations can also play a role in promoting safe and responsible alcohol consumption in our city.

Initiatives

Increasing cross-sector collaboration

The following initiatives will increase cross-sector collaboration:

- co-locate licensing and enforcement staff from the Council, Regional Public Health and the Police to ensure robust and coordinated advice to District Licensing Committees
- support the Trauma Intelligence Group – a collaborative data-sharing initiative between agencies that supports accurate reporting on alcohol-related harm in Wellington City
- address the issue of alcohol and homelessness through Te Mahana (the strategy to end homelessness in Wellington)
- hold regular meetings between the Mayor and Police District Commander to keep the strategy top of mind
- report back regularly to stakeholders on the progress made in achieving the outcomes of the strategy
- work with Capital Hosts to promote initiatives for reducing alcohol-related harm, increasing personal responsibility and creating a vibrant central city

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- support the hospitality industry in developing best-practice training options, which are endorsed by the Council, and establishing a forum, possibly through Capital Hosts, to discuss industry issues such as door staffing
- explore new ways of working with councils in the region on shared alcohol-related harm issues.

Implementation Plan

The initiatives form an implementation plan, summarised below:

Proposed initiative	Strategy outcomes					Implementation
	Reduced harm	Increased vibrancy	Improved amenity	Greater personal responsibility	Greater collaboration	
Addressing pre-loading and side-loading						
Establish a 'Capital Hosts' group for off-licensees.	•		•	•	•	Prioritisation within the Council's city safety programme.
Explore establishing a trial for reduced off-licence hours	•				•	Prioritisation within the Council's city safety programme.
Advocate to the Government to further investigate minimum pricing and prohibiting price advertising.	•				•	Prioritisation within the Council's stakeholder relations programme.
Explore regulatory and education tools to support Wellington as a safe and vibrant entertainment destination.	•			•	•	Prioritisation within the Council's city safety programme and work with councils in the region.
Explore a regional approach to making being intoxicated in public an offence	•			•	•	Prioritisation within the Council's city safety programme and work with councils in the region.
Work with the Health Promotion Agency and industry organisations on social marketing campaigns.	•			•	•	Prioritisation within the city safety programme.
Widen and strengthen the Central City Liquor Ban.	•	•	•			Prioritisation within the Council's bylaws and city safety programmes.
Encourage better practices to identify intoxicated people entering major events.	•			•	•	Prioritisation within the Council's events programme and city safety programme.
Late-night activity in the central city						
Support initiatives to increase non-alcohol activities in evening and late-night entertainment.	•	•			•	Prioritisation within the Council's economic growth and city safety programmes. Annual Plan.
Develop urban design plan for places where entertainment venues cluster..	•	•				Prioritisation within the Council's urban design programme. Annual Plan.
Improve late-night transport options.	•			•	•	Prioritisation within Council's transportation and city safety programmes.
Improved street cleaning and rubbish collection in the Central City.	•	•	•			Prioritisation within the Council's street activities programme. Annual Plan

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Investigate ways of improving residential amenities in places where entertainment venues cluster.		•	•			Local Alcohol Policy. District Plan. Annual Plan.
Initiatives for alcohol availability, events and sector collaboration						
Communities having a greater say on the availability of alcohol.	•				•	Local Alcohol Policy. Prioritisation within the city safety programme.
Continuously improve alcohol management plans for large-scale events	•	•		•	•	Prioritised within the Council's events, regulatory and city safety teams.
Work with business and community sector to build a full calendar of central city activities	•	•			•	Prioritised the Council's events, regulatory and city safety teams.
Develop a sponsorship policy for events and facilities	•		•			Prioritised within the Council's policy programme..
Quarterly city stakeholder meetings.	•				•	Mayor's Office initiative.
Ongoing support for the Trauma Intelligence Group.	•				•	Prioritised in the city safety programme.
Co-locate Council, Regional Public Health and the Police licensing and enforcement staff.	•		•		•	Local Alcohol Policy. Prioritised in the Council's public health programme.
Work with Capital Hosts to promote initiatives.	•	•	•		•	Prioritised in the city safety programme.

Success Measures

We will know the strategy is successful when there is:

- an increase in late-night trading transactions with fewer alcohol sales
- an increase in the number of late-night traders
- a decrease in the overall number of alcohol-related offences
- a decrease in late-night alcohol-related offences
- a decrease in the overall number of alcohol-related presentations to Wellington Hospital's emergency department
- a decrease in late-night alcohol-related presentations to the hospital's emergency department
- a decrease in alcohol-related presentations to the hospital's emergency department from people living in over-represented census areas
- a decrease in presentations to the Courtenay Place triage centre
- a decrease in the number of noise and nuisance complaints from inner city residents
- a decrease in breaches of the central city liquor ban
- a decrease in vandalism and nuisance complaints along pedestrian routes into the central city
- an increase in the number of events and activities happening in the central city.

We will be monitoring the impact of national maximum trading hours when they come into effect on December 18. We will also regularly monitor the impact of the strategy and local alcohol policy to establish targets and deepen the information base for future reviews.