

The impact of restricted alcohol availability in Newcastle

Release Date: 2 December 2009, Embargo: 10.30am

Assaults after dark fell by 29 per cent (133 per year) in Newcastle following the impositions on trading restrictions on 14 licensed premises in the city.

The restrictions imposed on the 14 licensed premisesⁱ by New South Wales Liquor Administration Board (LAB) in March 2008 included:

1. Imposition of a lockout from 1am for all 14 hotels;
2. Bringing forward the closing time to 3am for the 11 premises that were previously licensed to trade until 5am and to 2:30am for the three premises that had previously been licensed to trade until 3am;
3. A requirement that licensees produce a Plan of Management within six weeks of the ruling;
4. A requirement that licensees arrange for independent audits to be carried out on a quarterly basis to ensure compliance with this Plan of Management;
5. A requirement that licensees employ a supervisor be on the premises from 11pm until closing with the sole purpose of monitoring responsible service of alcohol;
6. A prohibition on the sale of shots, mixed drinks with more than 30mls of alcohol, ready mixed drinks stronger than five per cent alcohol by volume after 10.00pm;
7. A prohibition on the sale of more than four drinks to any patron at one time and a requirement to provide free water stations on every bar;
8. A requirement that licensees ensure patrons not stockpile drinks;
9. A requirement that the sale of alcohol cease 30 minutes prior to closing time;
10. A requirement that licensees notify all staff members of these restrictions within 14 days;
11. A requirement that each of the licensees enter into an agreement to share a radio network to enable management and security of each hotel to communicate with one another.

To evaluate the effect the Bureau examined changes in the number of recorded assaults, the number of assaults linked to alcohol and the number of police call outs to licensed premises before and after imposition of the above-mentioned restrictions.

Trends in these measures of alcohol-related crime were also examined in an area close to Newcastle city where no trading restrictions were placed on licensed premises.

Recorded crime and linking data revealed a significant reduction in alcohol-related assaults in the intervention site but not the comparison site. These two data sources revealed no evidence of any geographic displacement of assaults to other licensed premises or neighbouring areas.

There was no evidence of any decrease in the total number of calls for service in either the intervention or comparison sites but this is most likely due to limitations inherent in the call-out data.

All three data sources revealed a significant decrease in the proportion of assaults occurring after 3am in the intervention site but not in the comparison sites. Collectively, the data provide strong evidence that the restricted availability of alcohol reduced the incidence of assault in the Newcastle CBD.