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AlCrime Reduction Matters

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Policing in and around licensed premises

In light of the significant strain that alcohol intoxication places on law enforcement agencies in Australia, attention has been focused on the role of police in reducing the burden of alcohol-related problems. There is a growing interest in the capacity of police to prevent, and not just respond to, alcohol-related problems, and a significant body of evidence that identifies best practice in policing licensed premises. Doherty and Roche (2003) offer the following five point plan:

- establish a clear strategic direction for policing licensed premises and alcohol-related harms
- proactively police licensed venues, events and harms
- establish intelligence gathering and analysis practices and systems that identify problematic licensed premises and assist with the evaluation of police responses
- collaborate with key local stakeholders, including licensing authorities, local government, licensees and health agencies, to develop integrated responses to reduce alcohol-related incidents and harms
- enforce liquor laws and other legislation impacting on the management of licensed premises and behaviour of staff and patrons.

Recent research by Fleming (2008) indicates that the way police approach this issue continues to be developed. She identifies three noticeable trends in law enforcement approaches to antisocial behaviour in and around licensed venues. These developments have the capacity to improve the effectiveness of police responses to problematic licensed premises and include:

- a shift in the focus of traditional enforcement efforts from patrons to licensed venues, which makes for more efficient targeting of problem drinking and the situational risk factors for alcohol-related harms
- the increasingly centralised focus of regulation, which helps to consolidate knowledge and expertise within the organisation
- a greater emphasis on collaborative efforts through community partnerships.

In practice, policing strategies are often subject to certain barriers that can impact upon their effectiveness. Problems associated with determining responsibility for alcohol management among stakeholders and reaching agreement on the best management approach can hamper enforcement efforts. The widespread availability of alcohol and the short term, results-oriented tendencies of politically-driven initiatives may also hinder police activities. While they can be effective, partnership strategies must be carefully considered, well designed, appropriately resourced and have the support of senior management (Fleming 2008).

Despite research reporting on successful police-driven interventions, there still exists both the need and the scope for additional evaluation of police activity within this arena (Graham & Homel 2008). In particular, evaluation of the impact of policing strategies in different locations is required to further refine what is known to be good practice and to determine the influence of contextual factors. The AIC is currently undertaking research in this area and future publications will address this issue.

References

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