

## **ALCOHOL-HARM REDUCTION: THE PROCESS AND OUTCOME OF CAPACITY BUILDING WITHIN THE NSW POLICE**

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To start with I just want to acknowledge the project team. Also, funding that was received from Hunter Health, New South Wales Health and New South Wales Police, and also the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation who is funding the next stage of this project.

Basically, I just want to go through some brief outlines of alcohol related harm reduction and the process and outcome of capacity building within New South Wales Police – any of you that are familiar with this project might know it better as the ‘linking project.’

Just a little bit of background information about alcohol related harm - you will all be aware that alcohol creates excessive amounts of deaths and hospital episodes which are relatively preventable, but also that there is a large amount of crime that can be linked to alcohol related harm, particularly common offences such as assaults (those which are attended by police). It is estimated that between 50 and 77% of these incidents can be attributed to alcohol.

In terms of police awareness and response to alcohol related crime, I do not think there is any doubt that police are very much aware of the effect that alcohol has in relation to crime. However, there have been limitations in the systems, particularly in New South Wales, in being able to identify incidents that can be related to alcohol. It has been estimated that only 10-30% of incidents are actually currently recorded or flagged in the alcohol system, so that demonstrates a clear under-representation of alcohol involvement in crime.

In terms of strategies to address, or the police response to alcohol related crime, there are clearly a number of strategies that can be implemented. However, they tend to be very resource intensive and time consuming – so that is things like high visibility policing, ‘walk-throughs’ of premises, and even simply breaching the premises tends to be difficult in terms of being able to gain the data that is required to support the infringement notices. Therefore, a possible strategy that the research team, working in collaboration with the police, came up with was the idea of ‘problem-based alcohol policing’, and that is basically using intelligence to support the policing activity.

So the aim of this linking project was to increase police awareness of alcohol consumption as it relates to the occurrence of crime, and to increase police capacity to undertake alcohol related enforcement initiatives – basically to respond to problem premises. The idea really is to raise the profile of alcohol and its impact on crime, within the police. So we started with the dissemination trial in 2001, which continued until 2003. It included a very large area of New South Wales – the coloured areas are those that have been included (refers to screen), which basically takes into account 21 local area commands, including 2,500 police, and over 1,400 licensed premises. So the main areas that we focused on were Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and the Hunter Area – predominantly rural areas, but they do have some urban centres as well.

In terms of the staffing we also put in appointants, region programme co-ordinators, one of which was based in each of those three areas – so one in Dubbo, one in Wagga Wagga and one in Newcastle – and they were responsible for training the police.

The main focus of the project was change strategies, and the first focus was looking at organisational policy. So basically the aim was to gain support from all levels of police - right from the commissioner down to local area command support and duty officers. And this was done through a number of strategies, including media and general awareness within the local area commands.

Secondly we looked at environmental support, so systems that could support the change in focus to alcohol. The main focus that we used was the current incident database used by police, which is known as the COPS system within New South Wales Police. And we modified the COPS system to ask some additional questions, so every incident that the police attended they would ask about either perpetrator or victim alcohol consumption prior to the incident, and the last place of consumption so that we could get an idea about how much licensed premises were actually linked to the incidents.

So this is one of the COPS screens, which identifies that first question: “Did the person consume alcohol prior to the incident?” So for every incident that is recorded in the COPS database, the officers have to answer this question – so it is not just an alcohol flagging as it was before, but a mandatory field that they have to complete to be able to progress through the database. So for every incident, this question is answered – and the response is basically: ‘no’, ‘not known’, or ‘yes’. If the question was not asked, the officer would generally record ‘not known’, otherwise there would be a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.

The next screen identifies the additional questions that police are required to complete, which is looking at the level of intoxication of the perpetrator or victim. And that is an assessment by the attending police officer – so it is their perception of intoxication, and it ranges from ‘no signs of intoxication’, ‘slight levels of intoxication’ to ‘moderate to seriously intoxicated’. And the next question identifies the last place that alcohol was consumed, and they have a choice from ‘licensed premises’, ‘public place’, ‘home/ private residence’ and ‘other’. So there is a way to be able to gather more information about where this alcohol is being consumed as well, so it is not just focusing on licensed premises, but gives police some intelligence about where alcohol is being consumed that can be linked back to incidents of crime.

If alcohol was marked as being consumed on licensed premises, the officers then record the name and location of that licensed premises, so that feedback can then go back to that licensed premises detailing incidents that have occurred on their premises. So, in addition to the environmental supports, we also implemented training. So each of those regional project officers were responsible for training the police staff in the changes in COPS to help with the implementation. We also had some resources to support the changes, so some little mouse pads were produced to prompt the staff every time they were entering their COPS data on their computer. And also some folders and prompt cards for them as well – just to keep reminding them about the additional alcohol questions to be entered into COPS.

There was also a system of performance monitoring and quality improvement, so after the changes were implemented, monthly reports came back to each local area command, which basically gave them a way of tracking the recording of alcohol-related crime in their local area command over time. It also identified where the alcohol related crime was coming from, so whether that could be linked to licensed premises, or whether it might have been public places or private residence. And it was also a means of compliance measuring for the 'unknown' cases, so where in that first field they are completing 'unknown' it is basically because they are forgetting to ask the question (in most instances), so we can get a record of how many times this is occurring so that we can actually increase the recording rate of the police.

So, the outcomes: basically, the initial outcome is an increase in police participation in alcohol related crime initiatives, so 2,500 police across the 21 local area commands now routinely collect and record alcohol information for all persons involved in incidents – so as I said before, that is both victims and perpetrators. And the responsibility is therefore spread across the whole local area command, not just being the responsibility of the licensing sergeant. This also gives police a more realistic picture of alcohol's involvement in crime through increased recording of incidents.

So in terms of enforcement responses, up to 50% of premises received incident reports. So of those 1,400 premises up to 50% received an incident report. And in terms of why they would receive a report - basically if there was a trend or pattern of incidents that could be linked back to their premises, so over three months they had to have X number of incidents linked back to their premises and that would identify them as a high risk premises, and as a result they would receive a report about the incidents that had occurred on their premises.

Of those that were classified as highest risk, the police would then do audits of those premises. So, in total over this time period, 360 undercover inspections of premises were undertaken, and then 360 follow up meetings were held with the licensees and police; so basically the police would go in and do covert audits of the premises, then arrange a time to meet with the licensee and discuss the outcomes of that audit. So that led to the education feedback part to the licensee, so that they could actually identify areas for improvement, particularly in responsible service of alcohol and their management practices.

So in terms of additional outcomes, clearly it has raised the profile of alcohol related crime. At the state level, the commissioner has acknowledged the need to focus on alcohol and alcohol related crime, and the linking project is included in the internal performance reviews now. At a regional level, the linking project is included in the business plans, and at local area command, there have been a number of new licensing positions, and the additional alcohol questions have been included in the standard operating procedures for police. So, clearly the police have adopted systems in place to support this project and to sustain the linking project.

Finally, in terms of where to from here - the application of this has been accepted and is being expanded or rolled out to the remainder of New South Wales. In May we are starting with inner Sydney and in the long term, over a three year period, the whole of New South Wales will have adopted this linking system, so alcohol related crime can be targeted, intelligence gathered, and policing can then effectively operate from

there. This system has also been adopted by the New Zealand Police and we are working collaboratively with a group in New Zealand to implement a similar system for New Zealand – so it is not identical to this system, but it is something that can be adapted to their needs.

Thank you.