

Targeting risky drinking culture in local communities

Six Victorian councils will deliver four new projects to tackle risky drinking cultures in their community thanks to VicHealth's \$1.3 million Alcohol Culture Change grants initiative for Local Councils.

The councils will work with research partners, community groups, workplaces and licenced businesses to develop ideas and deliver projects that target groups of risky drinkers in their local area.

The new projects will be delivered in City of Port Phillip, City of Stonnington, City of Melbourne, City of Wodonga, Horsham Rural City Council and City of Whittlesea.

VicHealth defines 'alcohol culture' as the way people drink including the formal rules, social norms, attitudes and beliefs around what is and what is not socially acceptable for a group of people before, during and after drinking.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said the new projects aimed to increase social support for low-risk drinking and reduce the impact of alcohol on the health and wellbeing of Victorians.

"Reducing the social acceptability of risky drinking is key to changing the drinking culture in Victoria," Ms Rechter said.

"We know that one-size doesn't fit all – Victoria is a diverse state with many drinking cultures. These new projects will target groups of people most likely to drink at risky levels, including young people in night-time entertainment precincts and middle-aged male blue collar workers.

"Peer pressure to drink among young people is rife. Our research shows 40 per cent of 18-to-24-year-olds feel obliged to drink alcohol when people around them are drinking. We need to help young people understand you don't have to drink to have a good time or fit in with friends."

Additionally a large proportion of blue collar workers drink at risky levels on a daily to weekly basis (42.5%). This is partly due to misconceptions around what constitutes 'safe' drinking levels and misunderstandings about the health benefits of drinking.

"The vast majority of Victorians want things to change – our research found more than two thirds of Victorian drinkers believe it's not OK to drink to get drunk," Ms Rechter said.

"This initiative is all about developing locally-driven solutions to tackle harmful drinking cultures. Councils will work with their local community to develop a range of strategies to tackle risky drinking in their area, such as social media campaigns, workplace-peer-support programs, storytelling, short films and events.

"These projects are an important step towards achieving VicHealth's 10-year goal of seeing 200,000 more Victorians drinking less alcohol by 2023."

VicHealth has a three-year Alcohol Strategy to prevent harm from alcohol:

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/alcoholstrategy

For more information, go to: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/alcohol-culture-change-initiative.

[Projects funded under](#) VicHealth's \$1.3 million Alcohol Culture Change Grants Initiative for Local Councils 2017:

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT	TARGET AUDIENCE	PROJECT
A partnership between City of Port Phillip, City of Melbourne and City of Stonnington (with research partner Turning Point)	Young adults (aged 18-24 years) who frequent late night entertainment precincts in each municipality	<i>What's your story?</i> This project involves collecting a large number of personal stories from young adults who successfully changed their risky drinking habits within night-time entertainment precincts, and promoting these with the local community, e.g. through social media and the arts.
City of Wodonga (with research partner Deakin University)	Male blue collar workers (aged 35-55 years) in Wodonga	<i>Who's it gonna hurt?</i> Includes a social marketing campaign providing tips and education around risky drinking, a short film featuring locals, community events, a workplace-based education program and incentives for venues to serve alcohol responsibly.
Horsham Rural City Council (with research partner Federation University)	Young people (aged 12-18 years) and their parents in the rural area of Horsham	<i>Rural youth action – Challenging Alcohol Norms (RyACAN)</i> Includes a parent education program using mediums of theatre, art and music, a parent support network, a community awareness campaign and a range of binge drinking deterrent activities.
City of Whittlesea (with research partner University of Melbourne)	Young people (aged 14-17) who are, or at risk of being, disengaged from school, training and employment	<i>Youth action on alcohol culture change</i> Includes a social marketing campaign, the establishment of spaces where young people can feel free to express creativity, and 'The Social Lab' - recruiting local young people and partner organisations to a co-design team to implement a series of initiatives tackling dependence on alcohol.