



13 Feb 2016

Kalgoorlie Miner, Kalgoorlie WA

Author: Heather Chalmers • Section: General News • Article type : News Item
Classification : Regional • Audience : 6,088 • Page: 4 • Printed Size: 468.00cm²
Market: WA • Country: Australia • Words: 391 • Item ID: 542587244

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Researchers praise restricted grog sales

■ Heather Chalmers

A voluntary restriction on the sale of alcohol in Norseman has proven such measures can have a long-term impact on problem drinking, according to researchers.

The Norseman Voluntary Alcohol Agreement was implemented in 2008 after concerns from local Aboriginal elders that heavy drinking was the main cause of chronic health problems in the town.

In accordance with the community's only liquor outlet, the agreement restricted alcohol sales to between midday and 6pm.

There was also a cap on cask wine, with a daily maximum of one cask per person.

This was extended in 2009 to also include a limit of one 750ml bottle of fortified wine or full-strength beer a day.

Lead researcher Professor Richard Midford, of the Menzies School of Health Research and Charles Darwin University, said it provided an opportunity to examine the long-term impact of voluntary agreements.

Researchers, funded by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University, studied the effectiveness of the town's intervention.

They found significant decreases in Aboriginal rates of burglary, domestic violence and assaults and a slight decline in the rate of hospital emergency department admissions.

"There was almost universal agreement that the behaviour of

drinkers, the amount of alcohol consumed and alcohol-related harms has all changed for the better — with less public drinking and less obvious drunkenness," Professor Midford said.

They returned to Norseman on Thursday to present their findings over the past six years at an

inter-agency meeting attended by the Shire of Dundas, police, health workers and others in the community.

"The indigenous community was the driving force for introducing these restrictions in Norseman, and the agreement is still talked about with pride," Professor Midford said.

Norseman police Sergeant Laurie Casarsa yesterday said the agreement had worked without the need for enforcement, and had slowed down the supply of alcohol.

"Anything which is done to limit the harm in the community is an asset," he said.

Community development worker with the Shire of Dundas Pania Turner said the community as a whole had benefited from the agreement.

"There is a lot less street drinking but there are other underlying issues involving alcohol that go on in people's homes which need addressing," she said.



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Voluntary restrictions on the sale of alcohol in Norseman have been hailed a success. Picture: Jasmine Bamford