



Tuesday 11 February 2025

Reform of rules for home alcohol delivery needed, says coroner

The death of a 30-year-old Heidelberg woman has prompted Victorian Coroner Ingrid Giles to today recommend changes to the state's alcohol regulations, including restricting access to alcohol via popular home delivery services.

The recommendations follow the death of Kathleen Arnold, who died on 15 or 16 September 2023, from acute alcohol toxicity in the context of chronic alcohol consumption. In the lead-up to her death, Kathleen consumed at least one bottle of wine and half a bottle of vodka. She was found deceased in her bed by her mother on the morning of 16 September 2023, who at the time reported Kathleen had been sober for about four days. Post-mortem toxicological testing showed that Kathleen had up to 0.54g/100mL of alcohol in her blood, with further testing suggesting the level of alcohol may have been higher at her time of death.

Kathleen had a complex history of mental health issues and substance misuse since she was an early teen and as an adult she presented to Victorian hospitals approximately 50 times for treatment of conditions including alcohol and drug use, eating disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, complex post-traumatic stress disorder, fibromyalgia and liver cirrhosis. She was also engaged with multiple alcohol and drug services, and was able to reduce her drinking for periods of time, but could not maintain her sobriety.

On 25 August 2023, approximately 3 weeks prior to her death, Kathleen's mum found her unresponsive on the floor at home and took her to Austin Hospital Emergency Department. On arrival, Kathleen had a blood alcohol concentration of 0.474g/100mL. A drug and alcohol clinician met with Kathleen, who declined their services and indicated an intention to cease her alcohol consumption and attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

During the coronial investigation, Kathleen's mother indicated her daughter's efforts to maintain sobriety had been impacted by easy access to alcohol through food and alcohol delivery platforms. This issue had been initially raised in mid-2022, when Kathleen's mum contacted her local MP with concerns about how food delivery services provided alcohol to her daughter – often outside of legislated alcohol delivery hours (including as late as 2am–4am), in excess of legislated delivery limitations, without proper checking of her ID and at times while Kathleen was connected to medical equipment/seeking treatment.

Subsequently, in late 2023, an inspector from Liquor Control Victoria conducted investigations into Kathleen's access to alcohol via delivery services. They found:

- two restaurants supplied Kathleen with alcohol in volumes exceeding delivery restrictions, with one also supplying alcohol to her outside of its licensed hours.
- in the 6-months prior to her death, Kathleen made 213 food delivery orders across 182 days. Of these, 98 orders contained alcohol products, for a total of 319 alcohol-based products including wine, vodka and cider.

Noting how access to alcohol via delivery platforms undermined the tireless efforts of Kathleen's mother and the clinical team who supported her, Coroner Giles sought to further understand how food and alcohol delivery platforms may also be contributing to increased harmful alcohol use in the wider community.

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Citing research from the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research at La Trobe University and Alcohol Change Victoria, Her Honour highlighted numerous concerns that food delivery services, especially rapid and late-night alcohol delivery services, are driving changes and increases in alcohol consumption across the state.

“The circumstances in which Kathleen died, tragically illustrate the consequences of Victorians being able to have alcohol delivered to them swiftly, easily, and late at night,” said Her Honour. “I believe this is an area where relatively straightforward reform has the potential to significantly reduce the burden of harms associated with alcohol accessed via delivery provider platforms.”

Her Honour also noted how alcohol contributes to numerous deaths each year in Victoria across a variety of contexts:

- Each year more than 150 deaths involving the acute toxic effects of alcohol are reported to the Coroners Court of Victoria.
- At least another 100 deaths reported to the Court each year are caused by the chronic effects of alcohol use.
- However, these deaths represent only a proportion of all alcohol-related deaths, as most deaths resulting from chronic alcohol use are not reportable to the coroner as they are considered to be due to ‘natural causes.’
- Alcohol is a factor in a myriad of other deaths such as homicides, suicides, fatal motor vehicle collisions and drownings.

To identify further potential harm reduction opportunities, Her Honour reviewed various Victorian and Commonwealth government policies and inquiries addressing alcohol-related harms – with specific focus on the submissions to the current Australian Parliament Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Alcohol and Other Drugs in Australia.

Consistent themes across the submissions suggest that a range of areas must be targeted to reduce alcohol-related harms. These include pricing, regulation, advertising, healthcare, education and social attitudes towards alcohol.

In Victoria specifically, Her Honour observed that after the state’s Alcohol Action Plan 2008–2013 expired, there did not appear to be any follow-up action plan to build on what was trialled, implemented and achieved. “This was to my mind unfortunate, given that effecting change in such diverse domains as social attitudes, community education and regulation requires sustained effort,” said Her Honour.

While the Victorian Government announced in April 2024 that it would develop a new 10-year strategy to address alcohol and other drug harms, Her Honour noted that this work is still in the early stages.

To improve public health and safety and reduce further similar deaths, Coroner Giles recommends:

- That the Secretary of the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety consider amending the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 (Vic)*, along with any required regulations, as appropriate, to prohibit home delivery of alcohol between 10pm and 10am in Victoria.
- That the Secretary of the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety consider amending the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 (Vic)*, along with any required regulations, as appropriate, to require a minimum two-hour delay between order and dispatch of alcohol for home delivery in Victoria.

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- That the Victorian Government, led by the Victorian Department of Health, develop: (i) a new Alcohol Action Plan; or (ii) a program of work (including specific actions, timeframes, accountabilities, and public reporting on implementation and evaluation) to address alcohol-related harms in Victoria.

A copy of the finding can be accessed [here](#).

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