



Panel Discussion Event Summary

Purpose:

Community violence is a serious community safety and public health concern which requires integrated actions from all levels of government and sectors of the community. To address this issue and to acknowledge International Safe Communities Day (October 1) and Community Safety Month, the Injury Control Council of Western Australia (ICCWA) has coordinated a panel discussion on community violence.

Aims of the Event were:

- o To promote community violence as a priority injury prevention and community safety issue across WA;
- o To open opportunities for community dialogue around the issue;
- o To educate the community and provide a forum to discuss and promote effective interventions;
- o To bring people together and begin building partnerships to plan and implement new approaches to preventing community violence; and
- o To emphasise the importance of a collaborative and cross-sectional approach to injury prevention/community safety promotion - this should include multiple levels of government, other non-government organisations, businesses and local community members, for effective and sustainable solutions.

Event Details:

Format: Panel Discussion

Date: Wednesday 1 October, 2008

Time: 10am to 12 noon; (registration and refreshments from 9:30am)

Location: Technology Park Function Centre Theatre, 2 Brodie Hall Drive, Bentley, WA 6102

This event was supported by the Office of Crime Prevention.

Event Participants:

Panel Chair Person: Michael Bourne, co-Vice Chair of Australian Safe Communities Foundation.

Panel members were invited from a range of organisations and community groups to represent different perspectives around the prevention of community violence.

Speakers included:



- Deborah Costello –CEO of Injury Control Council WA
- David Indermaur –Chair of WA Community Safety and Crime Prevention Council + UWA Crime Research Centre
- Inspector Kim Fergusson –WA Police, South-East metropolitan area
- Wendy Murray –Office of Crime Prevention
- Grant Ackesson –Drug and Alcohol Office
- Carole Macey-Victim Support Service
- Michael Wood –Town of Vincent
- Brad, 5th year university student with extensive experience in organising student events + representing most at risk group (young males) for exposure to community violence.

A representative from the crowd control industry was difficult to recruit and the person who was organised to attend gave last minute apologies.

Audience Attendees:

Over 60 people attended the event; various community groups, not-for-profit, non-government organisations, educational institutions, government departments and local government authorities were represented in the audience. For example, Office of Crime Prevention, Department of Health (WA), Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce, Taxi Council of WA, Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre, Child and Adolescent and Community Health Service, Drug and Alcohol Office, Salvation Army, University of Western Australia, Curtin University of Technology, Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor, Domestic Violence Agencies Network, WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies, Royal Automobile Club WA, Centrelink, Men's Advisory Network, Silver Chain, Women's Health Service, numerous LGAs and some university students too.

Video conference:

Community safety practitioners from the remote communities of Carnarvon, Bunbury and Hall's Creek were able to participate by video conference.

Summary of the key issues raised during the event:

- International Safe Communities Day, Safe Australia Day & Community Safety Month: celebration of safe communities and the activities undertaken to improve safety of our communities. Everyone (all levels of government, community groups and individuals) have a role to play and responsibility in the prevention of injury and promotion of community safety.
- The overall level of violent crime in WA has not changed much over time & is not very different to the levels experienced in other countries around the world.
- Violence is not evenly distributed across community groups. Members of indigenous communities and young males are the most at risk groups of experiencing exposure to community violence –this may include as a witness, victim, or perpetrator.

- Community violence is preventable: the resultant injuries & lost years of life due to disability can be avoided.
- 3 As: alcohol, attitude, architecture
 - **Alcohol:** to better manage the availability of and access to alcohol and to rethink drinking behaviours – not just how to better manage how alcohol is used in the community but to also increase people’s self awareness of the effects of misuse.
 - **Attitudes:** to work on our community culture of violence and the widespread view that violent behaviours are acceptable ways to resolve some conflicts, resulting in anger and aggression causing injuries.
 - **Architecture:** designing public and private spaces to reduce injury risks. This includes working on ways to redesign entertainment precincts to improve community safety and reduce the impact of alcohol.

- culture/behaviour relationship: A culture that does not actively discourage violence means it is difficult to change the behaviour of individuals.

- domestic, family & early childhood influences....importance of safe, stable & nurturing relationships between children and their parents/caregivers

- Office of Crime Prevention: Yes to prevention –focus on youth, entertainment & support for victims). Violence can be prevented –action at every level and early intervention. Violence Prevention Strategy: areas for action include: early intervention, entertainment venue strategies, promoting people’s rights and the services available to them, encouraging reporting of incidents, media campaigns –e.g. One Punch legislations. Continuum of prevention from childhood -issue of attitude is fundamental.

- Police: Violence advocacy & counseling; domestic violence court; education to provide alternative pathways other than alcohol, drugs & violence; changes in social values; multiple interventions and projects currently under implementation –include domestic violence programs, work with families, youth focus groups.

- DAO: Strong link between alcohol and crime + Alcohol and violence. Problem is not alcohol, but how alcohol is used. Projects underway target the establishment of safer drinking practices and alcohol management plans. Includes the Rethink Drink project - changing the drinking culture – encouraging communities not to tolerate alcohol related behaviour to reduce harm + in longer term, safe venues with low risk drinking.

- ICCWA (non-government, not for profit organisation): Advocacy roles – funding, implementing evidence based programs, working with communities to assist them advocate, awareness raising, promotion of stakeholders working together (across local, state, national and international sectors and networks). ICCWA promotes the Safe Communities Model and applies these concepts of community engagement and active involvement to many individual injury prevention/community safety promotion issues. Projects related to community violence prevention include: Drink or Drunk (recognises the seriousness of serving to intoxication & alcohol's role in community violence) and Safer Bars project (pilot project to increase the capacity of bar staff to address issues of alcohol related violence).
- Victim Support Service: impact of victims of crime also spread to family and friends. Impacts on many levels – physically can't work, financially, emotionally & psychologically affecting the way we behave i.e. avoidance. Victims need support and information regarding what their options and choices are (i.e. misconceptions about giving evidence) + sensitivity & understanding. Aim to prevent cycle of revictimisation.
- Local Government Authority (Town of Vincent): how to tackle the multifaceted issue –getting on the same page with other agencies; stepping outside the box (initiative, innovation & intelligence) –use statistics and evidence; importance of relationships; recognising opportunities. Some of Town of Vincent's work includes Vincent Accord, including perceptions in the community, party bus restrictions, Noongar patrol, Backpack Safe Program and crime prevention through environmental design policy.
- Young male (5th year university student): Important considerations from young people when organizing university social events include –how will numbers be controlled at events, is there appropriate security, do those selling drinks have RSA training, are there safe & accessible transport options after the event? Binge drinking is a culture that exists and is popular amongst university students –what measures are you going to put in place to prevent community violence and assist in keeping them safe.

He discussed the necessity of security and agrees that alcohol is a contributing factor, but not the sole problem. The problem with alcohol is the issue of self awareness in different situations –many are often unaware of how others perceive them. Alcopops Tax causes students to purchase spirits by the bottle and not pre-mixed because cannot afford. This means they are less able to 'count' their drinks and are more likely to consume more/easier to drink to excess.

Perception of police – lack of respect towards those trying to minimize harm, may be seen less as a safety mechanism protecting the community and more as out to ‘spoil’ their outing/threat to their fun & independence. Opportunities to engage with police themselves on a personal/less formal level are encouraged –ie leavers & police playing cricket with them. Promotes opportunities to experience respect from police and therefore creates an attitude and willingness to demonstrate respect for authority and others in the community. Need to be seen as part of shared community and not an external disciplinary force.

Summary of questions from the audience:

- 1) Q: Question to the Town of Vincent in regards to buses for pub crawls. Is there something better than self-regulation that can be implemented to prevent loud noise and rowdy behaviour associated with these events/‘Party Busses’.

A: Do not want the ‘big stick’ approach, registered party busses will be more welcome at premises.

- 2) Q: Department of Housing –regarding homeless populations, housing estates, prevalence of violence etc.

A: Avenue for sharing of information for antisocial tenants, homelessness and drinking issues.

- 3) Q: What is the value of an entertainment precinct plan –is there more value in plans that cover more of a sub regional approach? Is it up to local governments to enforce these?

A: Yes. They must be local. Involve concerted actions and cooperation of different groups (i.e. police) but must be local level actions.

- 4) Q: Centrelink (Armadale) – There have been issues with Indigenous feuding, what strategies will be put in place to address this?

A: A current dispute resolution service is having some effect. Stronger Families can also assist.

- 5) Q: Acknowledgment of Victim Support Services and their work. Any comment on the statistic - 70% of victims of assault do not report this to police. What are the key issues for not reporting these crimes and how can we increase reporting?

A: Would like to see the rights of victims promoted. Fear of retributions may stop victims reporting. With sexual assault, can also feel on trial themselves. Sometimes violence is a positive culture –i.e. in young men.

Police response – there is a common template, strong inference with youth and alcohol that they are forming their reputation among peers.

Status enhancement attitude for male perpetrators.

Closing comment:

New government is a new opportunity to get ideas and issues raised. ICCWA can be used to advocate for injury prevention. Positive message that yes we can do something to prevent community violence.

Follow-up media attention:

On Friday 3 October, 2008, a pre recorded interview between Michael Bourne and Chris Isley was broadcast on 6PR's midnight to dawn radio program. The interview content included basic community violence statistics, an overview of the outcomes of the discussion panel and more in depth discussions of Australia's social culture, alcohol and how they relate to community violence.

An article has also been prepared and will be published in the Australian Safe Communities Foundation Members Update 2008, November Edition
<http://www.safecommunities.org.au/upload_docs/200811271644270.ASCF%20Update%20November%202008.pdf>.

Recommendations for further action:

- Distribute summary of the discussion to panel members and participants
- Make available DVD recording to participants upon request
- Utilise discussion outcomes for further advocacy at local, state and national levels
- Consider another opportunity for longer discussions around solutions
- Possibly a follow up panel event where a 'scenario' is presented