



# Sports Bar Project: The intersection of gambling and drinking culture in Victoria

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# Introduction

- The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (the Foundation) has partnered with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) to jointly execute a project exploring risky drinking and gambling behaviours and their intersection in Victorian sports bar venues, and the impacts on health and associated harms
- Both parties share a common interest in health and wellbeing, and taking a public health approach to preventing and reducing harm in Victorian communities
- This project is still in the data collection phase – findings presented here are preliminary and unpublished and are likely to evolve as the project develops

# Sport, alcohol and betting

- The cultural link between alcohol and sport spectatorship is well established in Australia: research has demonstrated that sports fans drink more and experience more alcohol-related problems than non-sports fans
- The cultural link between sport and betting is also well established in Australia and elsewhere: research has endorsed that sports betting has become embedded in many Australians' narratives about sports
- There has been less attention to the relationship between alcohol and sports betting, and particularly to the intersection of alcohol, sport betting and other factors such as the licensed venue environment
- In particular, the literature on sports bars is incredibly sparse, which is surprising given that anecdotally they appear to be increasing in popularity and we know that sports betting has increased over time in Victoria

# Project research questions

1. What is the definition of “sports bars” in the Victorian context?
2. What can we ascertain about the extent at which the sports bar segment of the liquor and gambling industries is growing?
3. What environmental, promotional and patron related characteristics make sports bars distinct from other licensed bar venues?
4. What are the characteristics of groups of patrons that attend sports bars? Do they differ to patrons in other licensed bar venues?
5. Are there observable signs that patrons are showing signs of risky gambling, alcohol use or other behaviours?
6. Is there a viable group of sports bar patrons that show merit for future research, prevention or intervention project/s to be tailored towards?

Project ethics approval obtained in May 2018 (HEC18103)

# Project methodology

1. Literature review of sport, alcohol and betting and their intersection
2. Sports bar scoping

Identifying the number of licensed venues in Victoria that promote televising sport on their websites

Analysis of historical licensing and wagering data to identify growth over time

Electronic scoping of websites to identify types of venues showing sport, services offered and location

Site visits to 50 sports bars to collect information about sports bar properties, design, promotional material, alcohol and betting features, and geographical features of note

Interviews with staff in sports bars to identify patron demographics, popularity of sport viewing and identification of any observations related to sport viewing, alcohol and betting

3. Covert observations in sports bars – six sessions during popular sporting matches to identify patron demographics and practices
4. 200 interviews with patrons at sports bars – to gather information about their drinking and gambling behaviours

# Literature review findings

- ~6% of Australians report previously betting on sport (seventh most popular form of gambling)
- Sports betting is the fastest growing gambling market in Australia (growth of 2.1% per annum)
- Young, educated, employed, males are most likely to report sports betting
- Most sports betting occurs on the internet (52%) but also at TAB terminals (45%)
- Four ethnographic studies of sports bars but no exploration of alcohol or betting
- Jenkinson et al. (2018): two thirds of sports bettors reported drinking while betting, with half spending more than they would otherwise while alcohol affected
- Deans et al. (2016, 2017, 2017): the intersection of alcohol, social influences and betting has become a central form of socialising for some young men
- Wilkinson et al. (2017): men drink more at sports bars than on typical occasions, drinking is an important feature of the environment, drunkenness and aggression are commonly observed

# Electronic scoping

- From 5000+ licensed venues we identified 658 that promote sport in some way
  - These include **10 dedicated 'sports bars'** (tend to be in metropolitan areas, close by 1am, have a single TAB terminal if any, mostly franchises)
  - **385 that report having a sports bar** within their venue or a TAB area with sports viewing (tend to be in outer metro or regional areas, have TAB and pokies, close late, in poorer areas, 25% owned by corporate business groups)
  - **263 that advertise televising sport** in the venue but don't have a sports bar section (only 20 of these advertised sport as a central focus of business, tend to be independent businesses, in inner metro or regional areas, close earlier)

**Research Question 1:** What is the definition of "sports bars" in the Victorian context?

A 'sports bar' is a licensed venue that screens televised sports and is primarily marketed as a place to watch televised sports; however, some venues that are primarily dining, drinking or gambling establishments screen televised sports as a secondary, but nonetheless, important, business activity.

# Growth over time

- Hard to know how much existing venues showed sport 10 years ago, making analysis difficult
- There have been 34 new TAB licenses since 2012
- Since 2008 only two sports bars have closed but approximately 40 venues that clearly promote sport have opened, including 6 Sporting Globes and 5 TGI Fridays

**Research Question 2:** What can we ascertain about the extent at which the sports bar segment of the liquor and gambling industries is growing?

It appears there has been an increase in the opening of dedicated sports bars (driven especially by franchises)



# Site visits (n=50)

**Research Question 3:** What environmental, promotional and patron related characteristics make sports bars distinct?

- **Sports bars** – tend to be medium in size (median 2 rooms), high prominence of sport entertainment (median 20 televisions), significant sport promotional material, moderate alcohol promotion, low gambling promotion, target demographic appears to be men and younger people, often surrounded by lots of shops but not in dense licensed venue areas
- **Venues that have a sports bar** – tend to be large (4 rooms), have a TAB and pokies, promote pokies higher than other features, have medium prominence of sport entertainment (17 televisions throughout a larger venue), high gambling and sport promotion, target demographic appears to be older people or general public, tend to be in more isolated areas
- **Venues that televise sport as a key feature of business** (but don't have a sports bar) – medium size (2 rooms), drinking/dining is the key identifiable feature, medium sports prominence (5 televisions), don't tend to have gambling, very little promotional material other than bistro deals, target general public and men, more likely to be in denser licensed venue areas

# Staff surveys (n=33)

- 30% indicated sport viewing had increased over time, 58% said stayed the same
- TABs have anecdotally become less popular over time
- Sports bar franchises are anecdotally increasing in popularity, following a US trend
- Friday/ Saturday nights busiest times but also major events: blockbuster AFL games, UFC fights, soccer World Cup, Spring Racing Carnival, NBA playoffs, NFL final
- Little cross-over identified between sports bettors and pokies patrons

**Research Question 4:** What are the characteristics of groups of patrons that attend sports bars?

- 30% suggested their target demographic of sports watchers was general public, 24% younger men, 21% men of all ages, 15% older men
- 48% had observed phone betting, most commonly among younger men
- Middle-aged men were identified as the most problematic group in reference to the combination of alcohol and sports betting

# Ongoing areas of focus

- Observations and patron interviews underway to explore:

**Research Question 5:** Are there observable signs that patrons are showing signs of risky gambling, alcohol use or other behaviours?

**Research Question 6:** Is there a viable group of sports bar patrons that show merit for future research, prevention or intervention project/s to be tailored towards?

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Thank you

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