

AODCCC Opinion Piece

Full Strength Beer at Optus Stadium

With the WA State Government announcement that Optus Stadium will be providing patrons full strength beer as of March 2026, we engaged our members inviting their opinions about this decision.

The analysis of the responses identifies key themes of concern, supported by direct sentiment expressed by the members.

Summary of key themes, directly from our members voices:

Escalation of antisocial behaviour

“People were still getting drunk and rowdy off mid strength so to have full strength beer would... create more antisocial atmosphere and behaviour... not really fair for those who don’t drink and young children.”

Negative health, social and community impacts

“Given the often-negative behaviours of people unable to control their alcohol intake... encouraging full strength alcohol usage at a supposedly family first location is irresponsible.”

“With the knowledge & outcomes from the damage of excessive use of alcohol... This is a backward step.”

Transport related risks

“To take the beer to full strength increases risks of more violence... risking driving a motor vehicle, being abusive on public transport.”

Challenges with RSA enforcement

“It makes it harder to responsibly serve alcohol as lots of people can just go to different vendors at the game.”

Perception of revenue-driven motives

“Australia has a high rate of Alcohol misuse/disorders. This is only about money and revenue. There is no care about an individual’s health and well-being.”

Ethical/political objections

“This is an extreme health issue, and it beggars the question as to how our Premier, previous Health Minister, can in all conscience allow such endorsement.”

While concerns dominated the members response, supportive views were also expressed. Their views centred on perceived fairness, autonomy and existing availability of full-strength beer in and around the stadium.

Fairness: Patrons in general admission should not be treated differently to those in corporate areas, referring to the current availability of full-strength beer in corporate boxes.

“Why should patrons in the stands be treated differently from those in corporate boxes”

Practical realism: People inclined to drink heavily would do so regardless of alcohol percentage, particularly with wine and spirits already available.

“People who want to get drunk will find a way... the impact of full-strength beer won't be huge.”

This community feedback highlights a clear and deeply felt concern about safety, wellbeing, and the risks that patrons, particularly families and those who have experienced alcohol-related harm, may face. Many respondents reported fears that full-strength availability would escalate antisocial, disruptive, or aggressive behaviour, particularly given that such behaviour already occurs with mid-strength options. These concerns speak directly to the lived and living experience of people who have witnessed or been harmed by intoxication-related incidents and who often bear the emotional and physical burden of unsafe alcohol environments.

Respondents also raised strong concerns about public health impacts, noting that increasing access to full-strength alcohol counters wider community efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm and may contribute to violence, injury, or long-term social consequences. For individuals with alcohol and other drug (AOD) related trauma or for those in recovery, such environments can be triggering, unsafe, or socially excluding. The sentiment reflects a broader fear that alcohol-heavy public settings can normalise excessive consumption and reinforce harmful patterns that many are working to escape.

Transport-related risks were another significant theme, particularly the potential for unsafe driving or aggressive behaviour on public transport following events. People with lived experience of alcohol harm repeatedly emphasise that risk does not end at the stadium gates - communities, transport workers, and vulnerable individuals often face the consequences long after the event has ended.

Challenges around enforcing Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) were also highlighted, with concerns about the difficulty of monitoring intoxication levels when multiple vendors enable patrons to avoid refusal of service. From a lived experience perspective, ineffective RSA systems create greater risk for those sensitive to intoxicated aggression or those who rely on safe public environments to participate in community life.

Finally, respondents expressed moral and political concerns, questioning whether the decision prioritises revenue over safety and wellbeing. Lived experience advocates frequently identify this tension. Policies that increase access to alcohol often disregard those disproportionately affected by harm, including families, young people, culturally diverse communities, and individuals managing or recovering from AOD challenges.

Community Informed Solutions - Harm Reduction Strategies proposed by those members consulted.

While concerns dominate the responses, harm reduction offers a practical pathway to reducing risks without dismissing the autonomy of patrons who choose to drink. Drawing from lived and living experience insights, the following measures are recommended to make the introduction of full-strength beer safer:

1. Strengthened RSA Systems

- Implement digital monitoring (e.g., wristband ID scanning) to prevent service after refusal, addressing concerns about multiple vendor access.
- Require continuous harm reduction training for vendors that includes trauma-informed approaches and de-escalation.
- Free water available for all patrons.

2. Alcohol-Safe Family and Low-Stimulation Zones

- Expand alcohol-free or low-alcohol sections to protect families and individuals sensitive to intoxication-related behaviours, responding directly to concerns about unsafe environments for children.

3. Enhanced Post-Event Transport Safety Measures

- Increase security, peer-based safety monitors, and transport staff capacity to manage possible aggressive behaviour on public transport.
- Promote designated driver, rideshare, and public transport incentives to reduce drink-driving risks.

4. Community-Led Harm-Reduction Messaging

- Use lived-experience voices in public messaging to highlight real impacts of alcohol misuse, reflecting concerns about health and long-term social costs.
- Frame communication not as prohibitionist, but as protective, inclusive, and wellbeing-focused.

5. Transparent Accountability Measures

- Require public reporting on incidents, intoxication-related removals, and RSA compliance so patrons can see that wellbeing is prioritised over revenue, addressing trust issues raised by respondents.

Conclusion

From the perspective of people with lived and living experience of alcohol and other drugs, the introduction of full-strength beer at Optus Stadium presents substantial safety, health, and community risks.

The concerns voiced by respondents reflect not only theoretical risk but lived memory of past harms, unsafe public spaces, and the personal cost of alcohol-fuelled environments. Although some patrons may perceive the change as fair or inconsequential, the dominant sentiment reveals deep unease and a strong desire for protective measures. Harm reduction approaches offer a practical middle ground: acknowledging the policy change while actively minimising risks.

By implementing stronger RSA systems, improving safety across the stadium and transport networks, amplifying lived-experience voices, and demonstrating transparent accountability, Optus Stadium and decision-makers can better protect the community, particularly those most vulnerable to alcohol-related harm.



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