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Youth legal service warns a hike in fines for drunk behaviour in public places is not the answer

An increase in fines for drunk and disorderly behaviour will target the vulnerable and lead to greater hardship, according to Youthlaw, the young people's legal service in Victoria.

Under the new system, on-the-spot fines for behaving in a drunk or disorderly way in public have been increased to \$590 for a first offence and more than \$1,100 for any further offences.

"These fines are excessive and given that vulnerable community members including the homeless and financially disadvantaged young people most commonly use public space, rather than licensed venues, we expect they will be affected disproportionately by this increased fine.

Young people with no or low income and limited parental financial support have to pay the same amount for on-the-spot fines as adults with disposable incomes.

"It is unreasonable to expect young people to have the ability to pay such fines, particularly if they are homeless or disadvantaged," Tiffany Overall, Co-Director of Youthlaw said.

The fine ignores current policies that acknowledge the special position of children under 18 which prevent the Children's Court from giving children more than a \$600 fine.

Unpaid fines are the most common reason why young people end up in court, prompting calls from Youthlaw and other youth services for a means-tested system to be introduced.

"Increasing fines will not solve anything, it will only create more problems by bringing a greater number of young people – often experiencing financial hardship – into contact with the justice system.

"We call on the Government to review its approach to infringements and introduce a means-tested system that will take into account financial hardship caused by age, homelessness, and mental illness, amongst other things.

"Being realistic about fines from the outset will save a lot of court time and resources and allow young people to get on with their lives," Ms. Overall said.

Youthlaw is a specialist law centre for young people under 25 years.

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