

Strengthen local alcohol policies, say public health experts

Current alcohol legislation has made “little to no progress” in reducing alcohol-related harm in our communities, says the New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (NZCPHM).

In its submission to the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Amendment Bill, the College says the Amendment Bill does not go far enough to remedy the Local Alcohol Policies (LAPs) process.

The LAPs need significant strengthening to achieve a meaningful reduction in alcohol-related harm, the College submitted.

College president, Dr Felicity Dumble, says LAPs were originally designed to enable communities to influence and control the availability of alcohol, through the location of licensed premises and their maximum trading hours.

“However, in the five years LAPs have been in place, no LAP has controlled the amount of alcohol people drink. In addition, maximum trading hours tend to reflect the status quo, rather than a tangible reduction in the availability of alcohol.

“Therefore, little to no progress has actually been made.”

The College’s submission also discussed research showing a reduction in off-licenses correlating with fewer assaults, fewer incidents of sexually transmitted infections and lower rates of child abuse in our communities.

However, this does not suggest that increasing the number of on-licenses is a good idea.

“An increase in on-licenses was associated with an increased risk of children being unsupervised, an increase of adolescents consuming alcohol and an increase in domestic violence against women.”

Therefore, NZCPHM opposes restricting the Bill to off-licenses, as amended by the Supplementary Order Paper 014 in February.

“This amendment would disable the effectiveness of an LAP in relation to existing on-licenses,” according to Dr Dumble.

The College strongly advocates that reducing the human and economic cost of harmful drinking will contribute to a better future for all New Zealanders.

“This benefit outweighs the cost of a reduction in the number of liquor licenses.”

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Media contact: **For more information contact Pam Watson (04) 472-9183**