



Alcohol

New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine Policy Statement

Policy statement

The New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (NZCPHM) recognises that hazardous consumption of alcohol causes significant harm. NZCPHM supports the strengthening of measures aimed at changing New Zealand's drinking culture and reducing the hazardous consumption of alcohol.

Ideally, measures to change New Zealand's drinking culture should be evidence based and these measures should have priority. However, the problem in New Zealand is so large that the NZCPHM also supports measures based on expert opinion.

In particular the NZCPHM recommends that all of the measures proposed in the recent Law Commission Report be adopted¹. The NZCPHM notes that these measures are consistent with, and would give effect to, World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations within New Zealand².

Background

There is substantial New Zealand and international evidence in health, crime and other domains detailing the toxic effects and cost of hazardous alcohol consumption. Not only is the individual person consuming alcohol affected, but also their families, friends, communities and the economy. These issues are well summarised in the Law Commission's issue paper³ and have prompted national and international advocacy for changing the culture associated with alcohol consumption^{4,5}.

Consumption of any alcohol has potentially harmful effects, particularly for vulnerable populations such as young people and unborn children. Excessive consumption of alcohol has proven harmful effects through alcohol-related medical conditions, increased risk of intentional and unintentional injury, motor vehicle crashes, cancer, and mental health problems. Populations in New Zealand that experience disproportionate alcohol-related harm include children, young people, Māori, Pacific peoples, and pregnant women.

Strategies to change New Zealand's hazardous drinking culture require a range of actions addressing supply, demand, and risk minimisation. Such strategies are rarely 'stand alone' or work effectively if introduced piecemeal; a comprehensive set of strategies (such as those in both the Law Commission and WHO publications) will be required to change New Zealand's drinking culture. WHO recommended strategies are:

- Increasing the price of alcohol
- Implementing and enforcing legal drinking ages for the purchase and consumption of alcohol
- Setting maximum blood alcohol concentrations for drivers and enforcing them with random breath testing and roadside check points

- Reducing the availability and accessibility of alcohol through a range of measures including a reduction in the amount of marketing and advertising.

Links with other NZCPHM policies

Trans Pacific Policy Agreement

More detailed NZCPHM recommendations are in the NZCPHM's 2009 submission to the Law Commission⁶.

References

1. New Zealand Law Commission. Alcohol in our lives: curbing the harm. 27 April 2010; NZLC R114. (<http://www.lawcom.govt.nz/project/review-regulatory-framework-sale-and-supply-liquor>)
2. World Health Organization. Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2008. (http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/activities/gsrhua/en/index.html)
3. New Zealand Law Commission. Alcohol in our lives. 30 July 2009; NZLC IP15. (http://www.lawcom.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/2009/07/Publication_154_437_Alcohol%20in%20our%20lives%20-%20Issues%20Paper%2015.pdf)
4. New Zealand Medical Association. NZMA Alcohol Position Statement. Wellington: NZMA, 2010. (http://www.nzma.org.nz/sites/all/files/ps_alcohol2010.pdf)
5. British Medical Association. Memorandum of evidence from the BMA to the Health Select Committee inquiry on alcohol. London: BMA, 2009. At http://www.bma.org.uk/healthcare_policy/responses_consultations/alcoholevid.jsp; British Medical Association. What is the BMA working to achieve? London: BMA, 2012. (http://www.bma.org.uk/health_promotion_ethics/alcohol/alcoholbmaworking.jsp)
6. New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. Submission to Law Commission Review: Alcohol in our lives. Wellington: NZCPHM, 2009. (http://www.nzcpmh.org.nz/media/31330/2009_10_29_law_commission_liquor_review_final.pdf)

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