

Date

The Select Committee
Alcohol Reform Bill
Private Bag 18888
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

[remember to send two copies of this submission]

Dear MPs

Alcohol Reform Bill

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the Select Committee, addressing the new alcohol law reform bill.

As well as this written submission, members of the Wellington branch of the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists (NZCCP) would also like to make an oral submission.

The NZCCP is, like many New Zealanders, becoming increasingly concerned about the harm caused by the excessive consumption of alcohol.

In our work as clinical psychologists, we are confronted with the numerous and devastating effects of addictions, be in conjunction with mental health problems or in our work supporting the survivors of the damage caused by alcohol to individuals and their family members. We are also constantly reminded of the impact of alcohol use by the large minority of non-dependent but heavy drinkers through the effects of intoxication (criminal offending and accidental injury) and the chronic impact of heavy consumption of mental and physical health..

After considering the proposed new Bill in the light of the available evidence, we are hoping that new legislation will be a chance to limit, in as much as legislation can influence human behaviour, the damage done by alcohol.

As it stands, we believe that there are few measures in the new Bill likely to make any substantial difference to the extent of heavy drinking in New Zealand. Of particular note there is no commitment to raising the price of alcohol, significantly reducing the ever-present accessibility and advertising of alcohol, or putting an end to legal drunk driving.

More than two-thirds of all alcohol in New Zealand is being consumed at harmful or hazardous levels (Marsden Jacob Associates 2009) by around 700,000 New Zealanders that are heavy drinkers (Wells et al 2006; MOH 2007), at acute risk of damaging their own health, causing distress to family and friends and putting at risk the lives of stranger when drink driving. About 120,000 of these New Zealanders are meeting criteria for alcohol dependency, already suffering significant detrimental effects and are in need of treatment.

There are five main areas that the NZCCP strongly wants to see added measures to the Government's response to the Law Commission's review. We would like the Select Committee to ensure that the proposed legislation incorporates the following changes:

Considering an End to:

1. Ultra cheap alcohol, beginning with a minimum price for a standard drink.

Easy accessibility due to low cost does increase alcohol consumption and with that increases the level of harm caused by alcohol. As for nicotine in the past, the present cost of alcohol to the consumer does not reflect the true cost to NZ society of the damage caused by alcohol, estimated in the billions of dollars (NZLC 2010).

2. Treating alcohol as a safe household item, by restoring supermarkets to being alcohol free. Again this will send a clear message to consumer that alcohol needs to be treated with care and it also limits accessibility.

3. All alcohol advertising and sponsorship, except objective printed product information. The College feels that by treating alcohol in a similar way to nicotine, the path to a change in NZ drinking culture is opened, keeping in mind that also advertising does work to increase the level of alcohol consumption, which we strongly feels needs to be addressed.

4. Legal drunk driving, by reducing the adult blood alcohol level to at most 0.05. Research has clearly shown that levels of intoxication over 0.05 have a significant impact on capacity to drive safely and the alcohol related road toll is of great concern to the NZCCP.

Plus:

5. Raising the purchase age to 20 years for on- and off-licence premises.

This would clarify the law (rather than different ages for different venues), send a clear public message about the risks of alcohol, as well as delay (or even avert) the onset of harmful drinking patterns in young people.

The NZCCP agrees that the changes to New Zealand's smoking culture have come about through significant increases in prices, reducing accessibility and reducing advertising and sponsorship. With the above mentioned changes to the Alcohol Reform Bill, we feel that the same can be done for New Zealand's drinking culture, thereby limiting the current immense damage caused by the widespread harmful and hazardous consumption of alcohol.

New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists