Serious action on alcohol side-lined in Government’s response to Mental Health and Addiction
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Alcohol Healthwatch is alarmed that ‘further consideration’ is needed to reduce the impact of alcohol use on mental health and addiction. Of the 40 recommendations in the Mental Health and Addiction Inquiry report, the Government has ‘agreed’ or ‘agreed in principle’ to the majority – leaving the recommendations that relate to taking strong action on alcohol needing ‘further consideration’.

Executive Director Dr Nicki Jackson says, “We are perplexed with regards to the Government’s response to the Inquiry’s recommendations relating to alcohol. It is not aligned with the serious concerns communities expressed during the nation-wide consultation. The Inquiry’s recommendation was simple and well-considered – we absolutely need to take a stricter regulatory approach to the sale and supply of alcohol.

“Further consideration from Government on how best to reduce the harm from alcohol is superfluous – we needn’t unnecessarily replicate the comprehensive work done 5-10 years ago by the Law Commission, Ministry of Justice, and the Ministerial Forum on Alcohol Advertising and Sponsorship. Three high quality Government-commissioned reports recommended that we increase alcohol prices, reduce availability and restrict alcohol marketing and sponsorship. How many more New Zealanders must lose their lives or suffer harms from alcohol whilst we wait for further consideration?

“Alcohol is already the second strongest risk factor for suicide and plays a major role in family violence and homicide. We can turn down the tap of addiction in our country by addressing alcohol use in adolescence. This means having strong policies in place to protect New Zealanders.”

UMR polling this year showed that 80 percent of New Zealanders believe that we need to take action to reduce alcohol-related harm.

“We cannot continue to ignore them or the huge $7 billion costs associated with alcohol harm,” says Dr Jackson.

“We need to get started now to protect the well-being of our communities and put their interests ahead of those with vested interests. In Western Australia, the Government has taken action by replacing alcohol sports sponsorship in Australian football with positive mental health and well-being initiatives. In New Zealand, alcohol sponsorship of sport could be bought out by adding a few cents to the price of alcohol products.

“The sky didn’t fall in when tobacco sponsorship disappeared. Let’s get started now with replacing alcohol sponsorship to improve the well-being of this generation and the next. We can do this now, if we are indeed serious about mental health.”

ENDS

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