



Press Release

13 September 2011

The Alcohol Reform Bill is on the agenda for its second reading today in Parliament. National MP for Hamilton West Tim Macindoe will be tabling an amendment in relation to the legal purchase age for alcohol.

The current provisions in the Bill put forward a split age option for a conscience vote, meaning that while the age of purchase would remain at 18 years for on-licence purchases, it would return to 20 years for purchasing at off-licensed outlets. Mr Macindoe's amendment, if supported, would see the purchase age return to 20 years for all purchases.

Alcohol Healthwatch welcomes the amendment and commends the MP for listening to the views of his electorate and acting on their behalf. This is the kind of democracy we hoped would inform the alcohol law reform process, says Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams.

"Returning the purchase age to 20 years not only reflects public opinion, it also reflects the evidence for reducing alcohol-related harm," says Williams. Returning the purchase age to 20 years will help to reduce the number of young people drinking at early ages and the harms that they experience as a result.

Williams hopes that other MPs will step up and propose further amendments particularly in the areas of price and advertising. The easy access to cheap alcohol and exposure to aggressive alcohol marketing are two things the Alcohol Reform Bill ignores. Both of these factors are encouraging early drinking among the young, and heavier drinking. "We will not address our harmful drinking culture unless Government steps in to restrict these."

Frustrations are still being felt by communities across New Zealand about the weakness of the Bill and the delay in the alcohol law reform process. Williams says that even if the Bill passes its second reading it is unlikely to pass through its final stages to become law before the election. This means the effects of any law changes won't come into force until 2013.

"It's been a long arduous process to-date and there's still a long way to go. While we wait for effective law change families, police, hospitals, treatment centres and the justice system continue to pick up the pieces."

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