



New Zealand Rugby not tackling alcohol issues head on

Alcohol Healthwatch media release, 8 September 2017

Alcohol Healthwatch says it is deeply disappointed with New Zealand Rugby's approach to tackling the drinking culture embedded in its sport and that the strategies included in its Respect and Responsibility Review will do little to curb alcohol-related harm.

"Alcohol was found to be a key factor in more than half of all cases of misconduct in New Zealand rugby, yet the approach taken to reducing alcohol harm is anything but serious," says Alcohol Healthwatch Executive Director, Dr Nicki Jackson.

"I am concerned that high quality research about the strong relationship between alcohol sponsorship and hazardous drinking amongst sports people and spectators was missing from the report. If New Zealand Rugby is serious about weakening that relationship it must take leadership by cutting ties with the alcohol industry."

University of Otago Associate Professor Louise Signal says she is concerned that New Zealand Rugby has chosen to take an educational approach to addressing its drinking culture.

"This educational approach flies in the face of all of the evidence showing it is simply ineffective in changing behaviour when we live in an environment saturated with alcohol marketing."

New Zealand Rugby's current alcohol sponsorship contract finishes in 2020. But, says Dr Jackson, rather than taking leadership to reduce reliance on sponsorship funds, the report says it will aim to 'use any alcohol sponsorship as a vehicle for promoting responsible drinking'.

"That's an absurd approach," she says.

"How can something which has been shown to be so harmful, be used to encourage a healthier approach to drinking?"

She says If New Zealand Rugby is not going to show leadership around alcohol sponsorship, then the Government needs to take serious action.

"In 2014, the Government established the Ministerial Forum on Alcohol Advertising and Sponsorship to consider whether further restrictions on alcohol sponsorship were required. Upon reviewing the scientific research, they recommended an initial ban of alcohol sponsorship within streamed and broadcast sport, with an eventual total ban of all alcohol sports sponsorship.

"Yet three years later, a response to the report from the Government remains absent. This is despite almost two-thirds of New Zealanders showing support for banning alcohol sponsorship at events where young people may attend."

Dr Jackson says action is urgently required.

"Hazardous drinking has increased every year since 2011, in every age group above 18 years. A huge proportion of adults are drinking more today than they were in 2006.

“Things are not getting better, if anything they are worse, especially for New Zealand women. We removed tobacco sponsorship and the sky didn’t fall in. Alcohol causes much more harm to society, so it is time for action and for New Zealand Rugby to cut its ties with the alcohol industry.”

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