



MEDIA RELEASE
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Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says that hazardous drinking by university students is a very real and serious issue and one that requires a strategic national response.

Tertiary students are identified as high risk drinkers – they are shown to drink more harmfully than their non-student peers. While the drunken antics of students are often portrayed as harmless fun they too often result in far more serious consequences, and sometimes tragic death. As well as the failure to achieve academic expectations other risks include injury, poisoning, violence, unplanned pregnancies and unwanted sex. Other students, communities and universities pick-up a significant part of the tab as a result of the second-hand effects of student drinking, these include vandalism, disruption of study and loss of reputations.

Far from blaming students Williams says we must look to the unhealthy environment that supports and promotes harmful drinking practices. She says a key risk factor for students is early drinking. Most tertiary students who report harmful drinking behaviours have established these well before attending university. She also points to liquor promotions that are targeted at students by liquor companies and licensed premises. Student groups have told us that the only sponsorship they can attract is from banks and booze companies, she says. There are obvious strings attached.

Alcohol Healthwatch convenes the National Advisory Group on Tertiary Student Drinking. The group, which includes representatives from a number of universities, has identified that a strategic and co-ordinated nation-wide response is needed and they are currently preparing a framework for this. National policies that better control the price, promotion, sponsorship and availability of alcohol will need to underpin such a response. An investment in evidence-based national and local interventions and further research into the issue must also be part of reducing alcohol-related harm in tertiary settings and nearby neighbourhoods.

Williams says that there are numerous examples of effective and promising community, institutional and student-lead initiatives happening throughout the country in response to the issue. If these are to be effective in the long term they must be properly resourced and the underlying environmental issues must be addressed.

Media Contact:

Rebecca Williams

Director

Alcohol Healthwatch

Ph: (09) 520 7035

Mob: 021 862 250

Action on Liquor - See www.ahw.org.nz for policy briefing papers on key liquor issues: including Warning Labels, **Taxation, Sale of Liquor, Advertising**, Blood Alcohol Concentration for driving and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Also see Fact Sheet on Tertiary Student Drinking