

Minimum Price off agenda

On the 24th April 2014 Justice Minister Judith Collins announced that the Government will not be introducing a minimum unit price for alcohol any time soon.

Her announcement was met with disappointment and anger by public health professionals.

Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says “The Minister claims there is no compelling evidence, and that moderate drinkers will be unfairly targeted when there is nothing further from the truth.”

Instead the Government has decided to take a wait and see approach while the new alcohol laws bed in.

For more on this see the opinion piece by Director Rebecca Williams later in this newsletter.

Another look at Advertising

Alcohol advertising and sponsorship is under the spotlight of a Ministerial Forum. Justice Minister Judith Collins announced the Forum on the 5 March 2014 and its membership as:

- Graham Lowe (Chair person)
- Sandra Alofivae
- Dr Farah Palmer
- Tuari Potiki
- Professor Max Abbott
- Hilary Souter

You might be asking - didn't the Law Commission review this issue? Well, yes they did, and thoroughly. However, rather than implement the Law Commission's

recommendations the Government announced that they would review this issue yet again.

The Ministry of Health called for submissions to the Forum shortly after the announcement saying it was looking for new evidence, information and expert advice that has emerged since 2010.

Submissions closed on the 28th April 2014 so we now await the Forum's response.

Alcohol Healthwatch created a submission guide and other tools to assist those making a submission.

If you wish to catch up more on this process please contact us or visit our website www.ahw.org.nz.

Drink Drive Update

Since February this year the Transport and Industrial Relations Committee has been considering submissions on The Land Transport Amendment Bill.

From what we have been able to pick up there has been wide support for the Bill which will lower the legal adult blood alcohol limit from 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood to 50mg (0.05), and the breath alcohol limit from 400mcg of alcohol per litre of breath to 250mcg.

It is certainly looking positive for the Bill to progress through the Parliamentary process given the good evidence, strong public support and now cross party support for the change.

What has been more broadly debated is the proposed enforcement approach to the lower limit.

Alcohol Healthwatch has supported the proposed infringement regime for those

caught drink-driving between new limit 0.05 and the existing limit 0.08.

An infringement approach allows penalties to be delivered in a cost effective way while still promoting the key message that drinking and driving don't mix. There is no evidence to support stronger penalties being more effective at reducing drink-driving.

Alcohol availability rises

The volume of alcohol available for consumption rose nearly two percent last year according to 2013 figures released by Statistics New Zealand in February this year.

The figures show that the growth in the Ready to Drinks (RTDs) market has eased. However, the volume available for consumption of all other beverage types increased including that of higher strength spirits (those over 23 percent alcohol).

The volume of pure alcohol available per person aged 15 years and over remains above 9 litres, the equivalent of 2.0 standards drinks per day per person. This is unchanged from 2012, and down from the peak of 9.6 litres per person (15yrs and over) in 2010.

Beverage choices have clearly changed since 1996. Back then beer accounted for 54% of the pure alcohol available for consumption. In 2013 this had dropped to 38%. During the same period wine increased from 30% - 33%, and spirits (including spirit-based drinks) increased from 16% to 29%.

New Law - Good & Bad News

While it's early days it seems that our new alcohol laws are delivering a mixed result.

The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 came fully into force on 18th December last year.

Figures released on the 23rd April by Police Minister Anne Tolley showed an encouraging 22 percent drop in serious assaults, public

violence and disorder offences. This was largely attributed to the reduced trading hours of licensed premises.

Restricting the availability of alcohol can reduce alcohol-related harm, these figures clearly bear this out.

The effect of the new trading hours varied across the country with central Wellington reporting a 31 percent drop in the measured offences. By comparison the effect in central Auckland was smaller, with an 11 percent reduction.

Further restrictions on the maximum default trading hours, and other measures to restrict availability of alcohol are needed in Auckland's draft Local Alcohol Policy which is due out for consultation soon.

In contrast to the good news a number of local councils have notified their provisional Local Alcohol Policies, and all have been appealed by alcohol industry interests.

Alcohol Healthwatch Director says that while it might be expected that new laws will be tested, the approach by vested interest groups is heartless, and dismissive of community needs and wishes. She says that as well as reducing accessibility and availability of alcohol, the Government made it clear that the intent of the new Act was also to improve community input into licensing decision-making. The alcohol industry are completely disregarding of this.

Ms Williams also says the positive effect of the new trading hours sends a clear message to local councils who are developing their Local Alcohol Policies.

While they might face opposition Williams urges them to stay strong, saying that local councils simply cannot justify relaxing alcohol trading hours. This is actually an opportunity to achieve greater gains through tightening them further and better protect the community they serve.

Minister Misguided on Price

By Rebecca Williams, Director Alcohol Healthwatch.

Back in 2010 the Law Commission recommended that the Government increase alcohol excise tax by 50% and “fully investigate” a minimum price regime, given its potential, in association with excise tax, to reduce the availability of cheap alcohol.

At the time the Government immediately rejected any increase in alcohol excise tax.

Then out of the blue, late on Thursday 24th April 2014 (the day before ANZAC day), Justice Minister Judith Collins announced that the Government will not be introducing minimum pricing.

The fact that yet another evidence-based policy intervention has been cast aside is disturbing enough. What is even more disturbing is the rhetoric that accompanied the Minister’s announcement.

In her press release Minister Collins claimed that the policy would “hit moderate drinkers in the pocket when there was no compelling evidence that increasing the price of alcohol is the correct approach”.

The Minister clearly hasn’t read the evidence or has chosen to dismiss it out of hand.

Not only is there excellent evidence that increasing the price of alcohol is an effective way to reduce the harm associated with its consumption, it is a fair and cost effective way to do it.

The New Zealand public agree. During the Law Commission review 2,015 out of 2939 submitters commented on questions about price and tax. Of those, 76% supported introducing a minimum price on alcohol and 77% supported increasing excise tax.

The Ministry of Justice’s report to the Minister on the matter includes the following key finding; *“Overall, any price increase will*

effectively reduce harmful alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm. A minimum price or excise increase would negatively impact on low risk drinkers, but the savings to society significantly outweigh the lost benefits to consumers”.

The Scottish Government has decided to adopt minimum pricing, and is currently defending their decision in the European courts after a legal challenge by members of the alcohol industry.

A study carried out in British Columbia, Canada and published in *Addiction* February 2013, found that a 10% increase in the average minimum price was associated with a 32% reduction in alcohol attributable deaths between 2002 and 2009. Yes that is a drop of nearly a third.

Dr John Holmes from Sheffield University in the UK, who with his colleagues have modelled minimum pricing effects on drinkers concludes, *“Overall, the impact of a minimum unit price policy on moderate drinkers would be very small, irrespective of income”.* His colleague Professor Petra Meier added, *“Our study finds no evidence to support concerns highlighted by Government and the alcohol industry that minimum unit pricing would penalise responsible drinkers on low incomes. Instead minimum unit pricing is a policy that is targeted at those who consume large quantities of cheap alcohol”.*

Rather than negatively impacting on so called moderate and responsible drinkers, pricing interventions actually provide a greater benefit for this group. Their communities and drinking environments are safer, their children and families are safer and less of their rates and taxes are going to mop up the alcohol damage in their communities.

Our alcohol laws are meant to reduce the risk of harm and protect the most vulnerable in our community. The repeated public calls for this are being fobbed off by Government, who seem intent on placing the needs of the alcohol industry ahead of the needs of the community.

Long Term Impact of Lowering the MPA

A New Zealand study recently published in the American Journal of Public Health demonstrates that young New Zealanders are at continued increased risk of harm as a result of the lowering of the Minimum Purchase Age (MPA) in 1999.

The study by Massey University researchers Dr Taisia Huckle and Karl Parker found the increased risk of 18 and 19 year-olds being harmed in an alcohol-related vehicle crash since the lowering of the MPA in 1999 has been maintained.

They concluded that lowering the purchase age for alcohol was associated with a long-term impact on alcohol-involved crashes among drivers aged 18 to 19 years. As the New Zealand Law Commission recommended in 2010, Huckle and Parker say raising the MPA for alcohol would be appropriate.

Action on Alcohol – Change is Coming

This year's Alcohol Action New Zealand conference - *Action on Alcohol: Change is coming* was held at Te Papa, Wellington on the 20 March 2014.

It featured presentations from three leading researchers from Australia, Professors Kypros Kypri and Mike Daube, and Associate Professor Peter Miller, as well as Professor Jenny Connor and Alcohol Healthwatch director Rebecca Williams from New Zealand.

A political panel was also part of the programme, with National being the only major party not being represented for the second year running.

Presentations can be found on www.alcoholaction.co.nz

Coming Events

Community Action Workshop: Auckland's Draft Local Alcohol Policy – Making it work for Communities

Tuesday 20th May 2014, Waipuna Conference Suites, Highbrook Auckland.

For more details and registration visit www.ahw.org.nz or email amy@ahw.org.nz

HPA Alcohol Workshop Series - Getting Communities in on the Act

Auckland – Tuesday 27th May

Rotorua – Wednesday 28th May

Palmerston North – Wednesday 4 June

Christchurch – Thursday 5 June

For more details contact Anne Jarosch a.jarosch@hpa.org.nz or phone 04 917 0748

Australian Winter School 2014

23 - 25 July 2014

Rydges South Bank, Brisbane Australia.

www.winterschool.info

NZ Population Health Congress

6 – 8 October 2014

Aotea Centre, Auckland

www.pophealthcongress.org.nz



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Disclaimer: The views in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of Alcohol Healthwatch Trust.

The production of this newsletter is funded by the Ministry of Health.